Starting Life Together

Your guide for building a nurturing, healthy relationship with your child
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Your guide for building a nurturing, healthy relationship with your child

Amy Dombro & Mary Haust
with Liz Isakson, MD

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CHAPTER ONE:

It’s All About You
This is your Guide, the story of the first five years of your parenting journey.

You are an important person in your child’s life. No one can ever take your place. Your relationship is like no other.

Whether you are the mother or father (through birth, adoption, or foster care), a grandparent, partner, family friend, aunt or uncle with parenting responsibilities, what you say and do in your role as a parent matters. The relationship that you build today can positively influence all areas of your child’s life-long development and learning.

What does it take to be a successful parent? There is no roadmap or simple answer. It’s up to you to find your own style and discover how best to relate to your unique child.

There are many ways to parent well. This Parent Guide can help you find your way.

In this Guide, we refer to any adult in the parenting role as “parent”. When talking about the child, she and he are both used in this Guide. You can use the ideas you read about with both girls and boys.

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DID YOU KNOW?
Your relationship with your child actually shapes connections in his or her developing brain. It also helps to determine how your child will do in school, his or her mental health, and ability to relate to others in later years. (NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD, 2004)
Behavior One: Nurturing Your Child

Nurturing means more than giving your child food, shelter and clothing. It is about building a healthy and strong emotional relationship (attachment) between you and your child. It means being the person your child can count on for comfort whether he is a fussy infant or a toddler having a temper tantrum. It means being your child’s safe base. The person he can turn to for love, safety and security as he begins to explore the big world around him.

Research shows that when you nurture your child, your child is more likely to be healthy, successful in school, able to get along with other children, and better able to handle stress.

As important as it is, nurturing is not always easy. For example, sometimes when your baby is crying, you don’t know why and nothing you do comforts him. Every parent has that experience, feeling helpless and uncertain at times. But hang in there. Try to stay calm. Tell your baby you love him and that together you will figure it out. Because you will—but it takes time.
Behavior Two: Protecting Your Child

This may seem obvious, of course every parent needs to protect their children from harm. Yet “harm” is not always easy to see—even when it is right in front of your eyes. Because children grow and change so quickly, the possibilities for harm change too. But safety rules never change:

- Protect your child from unsafe people and places
- Protect your child from disease with immunizations and good hygiene
- Protect your child from poisons like second-hand smoke and lead
- Protect your child from burns by checking the temperature of bath water
- Protect your home by having working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

Other ways to protect your child will change as she develops. For example, the rule of putting infants to sleep on their backs (“Back to Sleep”) doesn’t apply to toddlers who roll over and move around the crib in their sleep. The type of car seat you need and its position in the car also changes as your child grows.

In this Guide, you will read about ways you can protect your child during her first years of life. It doesn’t cover everything—no guide can. But it can help you make the connection between your child’s changing abilities and needs, new potential sources of harm, and how your words and actions must change to keep her safe.

Behavior Three: Guiding Your Child

Your child needs you to guide him—to help him learn what is acceptable behavior and what is not. When you set clear, consistent and reasonable limits in a loving and supportive way, you are teaching your child about how to control his own behavior. What you say and do helps him, over time, to set his own limits.

Your teaching begins at birth as you and your baby begin to create routines for eating, sleeping, playing and cuddling together. Daily routines give him a sense of order. When you (or someone you have carefully chosen to help care for your baby) are there to meet his needs, time after time, trust develops. He learns, for example: “If I cry, someone will come and make sure I’m ok.”

As a toddler, it is normal and necessary for his development that he begins to test the rules. He is not being bad, but curious as he tries to make sense of the world. Toddlerhood can also be a time of “melt downs” that can be frustrating and challenging for you as a parent. Adding some new ideas from this Guide to your toolkit will help you keep your cool and remind you that there are many positive ways to handle difficult situations.

As you guide your child in his first years, you are helping him develop the ability to eventually control his own behavior as a pre-schooler (self-regulation). For example, chances are good that your four-year-old will be able to get dressed, brush his teeth, and wash his hands and face with fewer reminders than he did when he was three.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Research shows that a child’s ability to self-regulate in the early years predicts school achievement in reading and mathematics better than his IQ score.

(Blair 2002; Blair & Razza 2007)
Behavior Four: Communicating with Your Child

Babies come into the world pre-wired to learn, communicate, and connect with you. You can see an infant communicating as you try to figure out what she needs based on her sounds (crying, grunting, cooing), expressions (surprise, smiling, grimacing), and body movements (thrashing, kicking with joy when she sees you).

Children, even infants and toddlers, need to be surrounded by language every day. How you communicate with your infant looks very different than how you talk with your two-year-old or four-year-old. In this Guide, you will find easy and practical ways to communicate with your child beginning before birth and continuing all the way through the preschool years.

DID YOU KNOW?

Research shows that the home learning environment, and in particular the communication environment for babies and toddlers, influences their language attainment and their performance when they start school. This, in turn, is associated with their later educational success. (Hamer, C 2012)

Behavior Five: Supporting Your Child’s Curiosity and Learning

You are your child’s first and most important teacher. What you say and do matters! Your baby was born curious and ready to learn through all his senses—touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight. Right from the start, he begins to learn by watching and listening to you. Everyday moments you share—mealtime, bathtime, getting dressed, picking up the living room, or putting away the laundry—are learning opportunities. They are familiar enough that children begin to learn what comes next, yet different enough that they are interesting and engage children.

You don’t need expensive toys. Cardboard boxes to climb in and out of and safe household objects like a set of plastic measuring cups, or plastic mixing bowls and wooden spoons are usually a child’s favorite things. It is more important that you be loving, present, encouraging, and supportive of your curious learner.

Throughout this Guide you will find easy ideas for encouraging your child’s learning and curiosity. Have fun, and enjoy this time of discovery as your child begins to make sense of the world.

DID YOU KNOW?

Infants and toddlers who receive responsive care and encouragement early in life are more apt to develop self-confidence as early learners and a joy for learning. Eventually, preschool and kindergarten teachers have an easier time engaging them in learning activities than less-confident or less-interested children. (Ounce of Prevention, 2007)
Putting the Five Behaviors to Work

In the next six chapters, you will follow the growth of your child, while learning how to make a positive difference in his life. Starting before your child is born and continuing to age five, these chapters (2-7) cover:

- Typical child development at each age.
- Suggestions for putting each key parenting behavior into action.
- A chance to think, jot down ideas, memories, and questions about how you make your family strong.
- Connections to resources throughout and at the end of the Guide (Chapter 8) that you or someone you know may use. Look for these symbols to identify:
  - Support in your community
  - Contact by phone
  - A website
  - Helpful tips and interesting research findings

Throughout this Guide, there are references to many programs and resources that can be helpful to parents of children prenatal to age five. Chapter 8 describes what they are, how to find them, and how to get the information or services you might be interested in (or want to share with a friend or family member caring for a young child).

Getting Personal: How to use this Guide

Think of this Guide as a journal, not a book. Keep a pen handy to write down questions, milestones or funny stories. Chances are you will likely want to focus on the chapter that has information about your child’s present age. You may also want to look back to earlier chapters to see and celebrate how much you have both grown, or look ahead to begin thinking about the changes to come as your child develops.

You can use this Guide on your own or share it with others: family, friends, health care providers (yours or your child’s) and/or child care providers.

As your child grows, you will also develop new skills and strengths. Remember, you are on a journey like no other, building one of life’s most meaningful relationships and giving a child a strong start in life.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

What makes a strong family?

Research has found that there are five features called protective factors that help make a strong and healthy family (CENTER FOR STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY):

- **Parental Resilience** or “Being Strong and Flexible.”
  - Resilience is about your ability to manage and bounce back from challenges that happen in everyday life from the small stuff to a big crisis. It’s how you find your inner strength.

- **Social Connections** or your “Circle of Support.”
  - It is easier to support your family if you have a network of support for yourself, whether it’s friends, family, neighbors and/or community whom you can count on and trust.

- **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development** or “Being a Parent is Part Natural and Part Learned.”
  - It’s true, children are not born with instructions. All parents, including you, will need to learn what to expect from your child. Knowing what to expect from your child and how to respond will help your family build stronger relationships too.

- **Concrete Support in Times of Need** or “Every Parent Needs Help Sometimes.”
  - Parenting while dealing with everyday life (chores, bills, jobs) can be stressful. Everyone needs help sometimes. When you are comfortable asking for help and know who to ask you strengthen your family.

- **Social and Emotional Competence of Children** or “Having Happy, Well-Supported Children.”
  - Children need to feel like they belong—that they are loved and have support from the people they depend on. Your job as a parent is to help your child feel safe and secure.
Building a Protective Factor: Social Connections—Finding Your Circle of Support

Let’s explore our first Protective Factor: Social Connections—Finding Your Circle of Support

Research finds that when mothers have emotional support, they are less likely to experience stress and more likely to demonstrate confidence, to be well adjusted and to employ effective discipline strategies. (Bandy, T. et. al., 2012)

Take some time now to think about and write down your thoughts about who are the supports you have in your life that you will draw on during your journey as a parent.

• Who can you go to for good advice?
• Who can you call just to talk?
• Who can share the parenting responsibilities with you so that you have some time for yourself?
• Where else might you find “someone” you can count on?
• Who counts on you as a source of support?
• How does being there for another feel to you?
• How does having a circle of support help you guide your child?

REFERENCES:


CHAPTER TWO:
A Baby on the Way?
Parenting Begins
Baby on the Way?

Parenting Begins

A baby will soon join your family. Maybe through pregnancy, adoption, or foster care. Maybe you will be parenting a family member’s child. Or perhaps you are a relative or close family friend who will be part of a baby’s family.

You may have been waiting for years. Or perhaps you weren’t planning to be caring for a new baby now. You may already have a child.

No matter what your personal situation is, what you decide to say and do matters. It is never too early to begin building the strong and trusting relationship that your baby needs to thrive. This chapter will help you start your parenting journey with a new and unique human being—today.

This is a time of change, feelings, questions, hopes and dreams. How do you feel? Tired? Moody? Energized? Excited? Scared?

What are you wondering about? Worrying about? “Will my baby be healthy?” “How will this baby change my life?” “Will I be a good mother? (Father? Grandparent?)” “Will I be able to finish school or get back to work?” “Am I too young?” “Am I too old?”

What are you looking forward to? Holding your baby? Showing your baby to family and friends? Sharing your favorite places with your baby? Seeing your baby first smile at you?

All of these feelings, worries and dreams are normal. They show you already love this baby—even before you get to meet him or her.

As you begin this amazing, challenging journey never be afraid to ask for support. Remember the people you listed in Chapter One? They are your personal support network. (We’ll talk more about building your support network at the end of this chapter.)
What happens before your baby arrives?

Check it out: Take a look at how your baby and you grow as your parenting journey begins. We invite you to jot down thoughts to remember and share with family members, friends, your baby’s health care provider—and one day, your baby.

Here are some amazing facts about baby development:

By the second month of the pregnancy, your baby’s heart is beating. You may be able to even hear the beat at the 3-month visit when mom’s health care provider moves an instrument called a Doppler across mom’s growing belly.

Starting around 23 weeks of pregnancy, babies startle when they hear a sudden or loud noise. But if the noise is repeated often, they get used to it and stop responding. It’s a sign their brain is developing normally. (Eliot, 2000)

During month 6 all tucked in the uterus, babies develop a pattern for sleeping and waking and can even open and close their eyes. (Note: This doesn’t mean your baby will sleep on a regular schedule after they are born—at least for a while.)

During the 8th month of pregnancy, there is very rapid brain activity and development. Your baby’s brain—like yours—will continue to develop through life.

What else do you notice about how you are growing as a parent?

Over these months, you will likely:

Imagine what your new tiny family member will look and be like.

Wonder, worry, revisit your own childhood memories and dreams.

Talk with other people—family, friends, your health care provider—about what to expect.

Make important decisions. Cloth or disposable diapers? Who will be my baby’s health care provider? Where will my baby sleep? Who will help me take care of my baby?

Discover new resources in your community for new parents and their babies. (Remember the Circle of Support from Chapter 1—this support will help you and your baby be healthy and happy.)

Use these spaces to record your memories, thoughts and ideas.
The Prenatal Months:
The Five Parenting Behaviors in Action

These five behaviors will help you build a strong and positive relationship with your baby: nurturing, protecting, guiding, communicating, and supporting your baby’s curiosity and learning. Starting today, there is no better way to get ready to build a strong and lasting relationship with your newest family member.

To Nurture Your Baby:

Nurturing is about the loving, caring, trusting relationship (attachment) between you and your baby. It is a relationship that will exist your whole lives, wherever you both may be. This special connection begins to develop as you:

- **Take a walk down memory lane.** Think back to your childhood and the people who raised you. Are there things you want to do the same? If so, what are they? Are there things you want to avoid or do very differently? What are they? What do you want to do instead?
- **Picture special moments you hope to share together.** Baby’s first smile, steps and words. Snuggling and reading a book together. Baby’s first birthday. We invite you to jot down some thoughts below to share with your baby one day.
- **Invite family and friends to help prepare for your baby’s arrival.** Their relationship with your baby will grow as they go with you to an appointment, help set up your baby’s crib or add a book to your baby’s library.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Early experience is not fate. The most important factor when it comes to the relationship you have with your child is how well you’ve made sense of your experiences with your own parents. Remember you can change the pattern and be the loving, sensitive parent you want to be. (SIEGEL AND HARTZELL, 2003)

To Protect Your Baby:

The decisions you make today can help you keep your new baby safe and healthy. You too. Your baby will want to be like you—her most important adult. The best way to teach your baby how to be safe and healthy is to live a safe and healthy life yourself. If you are pregnant, check with your doctor before changing your diet, exercise routine, or your prescribed medications.

- **Eat healthy.** Eating healthy is especially important—right from the start, so get into practice to model healthy eating. Trade deep fried for steamed, baked and stir-fried. Go light on the mayo, butter, salad dressings and sauces. Cut down on soda and juice with sugar. Or better yet, drink water instead.
- **Exercise regularly and often.** Being active is an important part of keeping yourself healthy, for you and your baby. If you are active, your baby is more likely to be more active and healthy too. Walking is a good way to start your exercise.
- **Stop smoking before your baby arrives—at home and in the car.** Smoking is harmful for a baby, even before she is born. Smoking while pregnant or even smoking around someone else who is pregnant exposes an unborn baby to toxic chemicals and reduces the amount of oxygen to the baby. Quitting is hard, but there is support out there.

**Food & Nutrition Helplines**

For information and referrals for other programs related to food and nutrition, such as food stamps or WIC call the Growing Up Healthy Helpline:

1-800-522-5006
1-800-655-1789 (TTY ACCESS)

**New York State Smokers Quitline**

Free tobacco replacement products and information on quitting smoking.

1-866-NY-QUITS
1-866-697-8487
www.nysmokefree.com

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Exposure to second-hand smoke increases the risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, can cause asthma and increases chances of pneumonia, bronchitis and middle ear infections in infants and young children. (UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY).
To Guide Your Baby:

Because you are so important to him, your baby will pay attention to and imitate or copy things you say and do. You can start guiding his behavior—even before you meet—by setting a good example as you make thoughtful decisions and get information and help from others.

- **Think about any changes you want to make in how you act and talk.** Start making them now. Someone sweet and dear will soon be watching, listening and copying you.

- **Go to class.** Look for a class with information you need. There are classes about childbirth, being a foster or adoptive parent, the basics of baby care (changing diapers, feeding, bathing, clipping tiny nails…) and keeping babies safe and healthy. It’s also a chance to meet other parents and have questions answered.

- **Find and use healthcare** for yourself and your family. There are many different health plans out there. Health insurance options too. To find one that works for you, ask questions to be sure your family needs are met. Does someone listen? Seem to respect you? Explain things in a way you understand? Is there an interpreter available?

- **Avoid alcohol and drugs (unless recommended or prescribed by your doctor).** Even if you are a father or grandparent preparing for a baby, she will be depending on you to be on your toes to keep her safe and healthy. She needs you to be alert and at your best. If you are pregnant, talk to your doctor about ways to quit smoking and drinking alcohol. When you drink, smoke and/or use drugs, so does your baby.

- **Get a rear-facing car seat** and learn to install and use it in the right way. For more information visit safeny.ny.gov/events.htm or call 1-888-327-4236.

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- **New York State HOPEline**
  
  Anonymous and confidential help 24-hours a day, 365 days a year for alcoholism, drug abuse and problem gambling.

  1-877-8-HOPENY (1-877-846-7369)

  www.oasas.ny.gov
  
  To locate local mental health services by agency, address and contact numbers, go to:

  www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

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• Begin thinking about child care, even before your baby is born. Will you stay home with your baby? For how long? If you are going back to school or work, then what? Who will take care of your new bundle of joy? What are the options and which are affordable? Grandparents? A friend? Nanny? A family child care provider in your neighborhood who cares for children in her home? A center with spaces for an infant? Finding the right child care can take time. Start by talking to a trusted friend, relative or colleague who has a child care provider they trust. Contact the nearest Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Center to learn about choices including financial help with paying for child care.

• Start to prepare siblings for the family’s new addition. If you already have other children, invite them to help get ready, for example, draw the baby a welcome sign or practice reading the baby’s books.

Finding Child Care
To find your local Child Care Resource and Referral Center call the NYS Office of Children and Family Services at:

1-800-345-KIDS
1-800-345-5437
ocfs.ny.gov/main/childcare

To Communicate with Your Baby:

Even before your baby is born he wants to hear your voice. When you sing and talk to him, you are building your relationship with him and supporting his future language skills.

• Spend some time with babies to see how they communicate without a single word. Visit friends with babies or notice babies while waiting in the grocery store or bank line. Listen to the sounds babies make. Watch a baby’s face and how he moves. This will help you get ready to understand what your baby will be telling you, as soon as his first day.

• Start singing—if you don’t already. Sing in the shower and out. Sing songs from your childhood and/or some of your favorite songs now. It doesn’t matter if you can’t carry a tune. The sound of your singing will soothe your baby and let her know you are nearby.

• Revisit stories and books you enjoyed as a child. And/or think about new ones to share with this baby. Start a baby’s library with a few photos of you getting ready for her. She will love to hear “her” story and it will show her the pleasure of language and sharing ideas and feelings.
To Support Your Baby’s Curiosity and Learning:

Think of someone who helped you explore and learn—in or out of school. What did that person say and do to spark your curiosity? Make it possible for you to discover new things and ideas as a child? Your child will need you to support his learning. One way to begin is to explore and learn about services and organizations in your community that will support you and your family today and in your child’s early years.

• **Thumb through this Guide—and check out the other resources in your community.** Were you aware there are so many resources out there for parents and families? Learn more, follow up. Check out websites like nysparentguide.org. Make a call. Or an appointment to go and visit a person or place with helpful information or services.

• **Take a look in the mirror.** That person you are looking at is your baby’s most important teacher. Your voice, eyes, the expressions on your face are more interesting and valuable than the most expensive toy in the world.

• **Start to make your home a safe place for your baby to explore.** Lie, then crawl on the floor. Your baby is going to be spending lots of time there—you too. Why not start going through a safety checklist to keep your little explorer safe and sound?

• **Think of people you would like to include in your baby’s life over time.** People of different ages. Women and men. Who do you want besides yourself to influence and guide your child?

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A Protective Factor for Building a Strong Family: Concrete Support

Every parent needs support and help. Parenting can be challenging. It is rewarding yes, but also tiring and demanding. Meeting the needs of your baby while dealing with everyday basics like cooking, cleaning, going to school, working, and balancing a budget can be overwhelming. You will need help, and knowing where to find help and advice can help you keep you and your family from getting too stressed out.

In Chapter One you thought about your informal circle of support including friends, family, neighbors and child care provider. Now it is time to expand that circle to include people and organizations you can turn to for concrete, specific information, supports or services that you or a friend may need.

How can you learn about support available in your community?
Is there an organization or person you trust who can link you to others?

What can you do if you hit a “road block” as you look for information or services?

In what ways could knowing about and being comfortable asking for concrete resources and services help you better guide your baby?

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One mom’s advice, “If someone can’t help me, I ask them who can. I keep calling anyone and everyone until I hook up with someone who can help me find what my family and I might need. I keep a list of the names and numbers of everyone I talk with. Who knows when I might need to call them again?”
While You’re Pregnant:
Important Additional Information Specific to Pregnancy

Here are some other tips and facts about how you can protect your baby and communicate with her starting today. Make sure you check with your doctor before making any changes in your diet, prescribed medications, or exercise routine.

To Protect Your Baby:

• Eat a well-balanced diet, including a vitamin supplement that contains vitamins you need for a healthy pregnancy, such as calcium, iron and folic acid. Folic acid has been shown to promote healthy development of the brain and spinal cord (neural tube).

• Exercise regularly with your doctor’s permission. Stop if you feel faint, overheated or in pain. Drink plenty of water. Walking, yoga and/or swimming are some of the most popular ways to safely exercise.

• Do not drink alcohol, smoke or take drugs (unless recommended or prescribed by your doctor) and limit caffeine. When you drink, smoke and/or use drugs, so does your baby. No amount of alcohol while pregnant is safe! And even second-hand smoke is dangerous for both mom and baby. If you are taking prescriptions, talk to your doctor before starting or stopping any prescribed medications. Pregnant women should not stop or start taking any type of medication that they need without first talking with a doctor.

• Avoid x-rays, hot tubs, and saunas. Warm baths are OK if the water is at body temperature. If any of your health care providers recommend an x-ray, be sure they know you are pregnant (including at the dentist’s office).

• Manage your stress. Everyone worries. But continued stress that is hard for you to manage (chronic stress) is not good for the baby—or you. Even without words, your baby can sense if you are angry, fearful or anxious. It may help to talk with family, friends and other moms. If that doesn’t help, talk with your health care provider. Lowering stress increases the chances of a healthy pregnancy and baby.

• Adjust your seatbelt shoulder strap so it crosses above your belly. The lap belt should be below your belly.

• Get enough sleep. Shut-eye is easier said than done when your baby decides to stretch and kick. Or your bladder is full—again. It might help to read before bed, listen to white noise or relaxing music. ‘Take ‘breaks’ during the day. Sleep on your left side as your baby—and you—grow bigger.

• Be aware how your changing body might affect your balance. Be especially careful in the shower and bath, on icy sidewalks and wet floors.

• Stay away from pesticides, lead and strong household cleaning supplies.

• Keep your hands clean. Have a cat? Leave cleaning the litter box to someone else. Be cautious handling foods, especially raw meats, fish and eggs. Wash your fruits and vegetables thoroughly.

• Plan to breastfeed if at all possible. Breast milk provides what babies need to grow and thrive. It helps protect babies from illness and lowers the chances of colds, allergies, ear infections, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, diabetes and cavities. It is cheaper than formula and always ready to serve.

DID YOU KNOW?
A pregnant woman needs about 300 extra calories a day. A 300 calorie snack is one cup of low-fat milk with a banana and egg. For more snack ideas, go to: text4baby.org. Ask your medical provider for more information about healthy nutrition and food choices.
To Communicate With Your Baby:

- Talk, sing and read to your baby—about anything and everything. Babies begin to hear by the 23rd week of pregnancy and your voice is the most often and best heard sound. At birth, your baby will know your voice.
- Gently massage your belly or rock back and forth gently to calm and soothe the baby.
- When she moves or kicks, touch your belly and talk to your baby. "Well, hello to you too! I was wondering when you wanted to play!"

**DID YOU KNOW?**
Communication begins before birth. A baby in the womb can see light, hear sounds and respond to noises, tastes, smells, mom’s movements. A child’s journey to language begins before birth, as babies in the womb hear clearly enough in the last few months of pregnancy to distinguish their mother’s voice. (Hamer C., 2012)

**REFERENCES:**

- Health Effects of Exposure to Secondhand Smoke. The Environmental Protection Agency, downloaded January 2013 www.epa.gov
CHAPTER THREE:

Your First Year With Your Baby
BABY'S FIRST YEAR
DID YOU KNOW?
Many new moms experience “baby blues” after giving birth. They are moody, teary and feel overwhelmed. It is common. These baby blues might fade away. BUT if they don’t and you feel worse, it may be postpartum depression. If you are experiencing these feelings and have lots of worries or troubling thoughts, it is time to talk with your doctor. Together, you can make a plan to help you feel better. The sooner you do, the sooner you will feel like yourself again, and will be able to enjoy your baby. There are safe and reliable treatment options for post-partum depression that work and are affordable.

Birth to Six Months:
Getting to Know Each Other

Your baby is one-of-a-kind. There is no one quite like him. He has his own personality and he will develop in his own way, in his own time. Day by day, as you get to know each other, you develop a special relationship with him.

It may seem at first like all you do is change diapers, feed your baby, hold him, try to get him to sleep, and carry him around. But you are doing so much more. **Everything you say and do is giving your baby his first messages about who he is, what the world is like, and what to expect from you and other people.**

Slowly but surely, you’ll get the basics down: holding your baby, diapering, feeding, bathing and going on a walk. It won’t always be easy. While some days will be tougher and longer than others, his beautiful smile just for you will help make it all worth it.

How do you feel? Perhaps you feel great energy or absolute exhaustion, excitement or sadness, confidence or nervousness, or all these feelings jumbled together. All parents, especially first time parents, experience a wide range of feelings. This is normal. Never be afraid to ask for help when you need it. Remember the list of people you made in Chapter One (page 14)? They are the people you can turn to now.

**Confidential support and referrals to emotional health services for pregnant or postpartum women.**

1-800-522-5006
ENGLISH AND SPANISH

1-800-655-1789
TTY ACCESS
Changing and Growing: The First Six Months

During these first six months, take time to think about how much both you and your baby will grow and change. There is space below for you to jot down thoughts to remember and share with family members, friends, your baby’s child care or health care provider.

Sometime, during the first six months, it is likely you will see your baby:

- Sleep and eat on a more regular schedule (though growth spurts may change her patterns)
- Calm herself by sucking (her thumb, fingers or a pacifier)
- Try to imitate (copy) faces you make
- Reach for an object and grasp it, often bringing it to her mouth
- Turn from stomach to back and then back to stomach
- Move around a little, maybe in a circle, backward or forward
- Turn her head in the direction of sounds
- Develop control of her head
- Make lots of sounds
- Play with her toes
- Enjoy games with you, such as “peek-a-boo”
- Recognize familiar faces
- Sit without support (near six months)

Over these same six months, you may see yourself be able to:

- Sleep and eat on a more regular schedule
- Feel more like your “normal” self
- Take a shower/bath in less than three minutes
- Recognize your baby’s changing patterns of sleeping, feeding, pooping, and being awake
- Get a diaper off and on quickly
- Hold your baby with one arm while getting things done with the other
- Leave your baby with someone you trust to go to work or school, or just for a little “you” time
- Find it easier to take your baby out for walks and outings
- Tell your friends, family members, and your baby’s doctor about some of the new things your baby is doing
- Feel a growing confidence in your role as a parent

What else do you notice about how you and your baby are growing?

Remember every child grows at his own pace. If you have any questions or concerns about your baby, you can call NYS Growing Up Healthy Helpline (1-800-522-5006; 1-800-655-1789 for TTY Access) or your local Early Interventionist.
Birth to Six Months:
The Five Parenting Behaviors in Action

Let’s look at some of the ways you can nurture, protect, guide, communicate and support your baby’s curiosity and learning. As you read these ideas, make them your own and begin to think of new ones that will fit you and your baby.

To Nurture Your Baby:

Trust builds when you respond to your baby with repeated, loving actions. This makes her feel special. The way she responds to you tells you how special you are to her. This is a “getting to know each other” time for both of you.

- **Comfort your baby when she cries.** You may have to try a number of ways to comfort her. Swaddle your newborn in a soft blanket, gently rock her in a rocking chair, talk in a calm and soft voice, dim the lights and noise, or offer a pacifier. She is learning that she can count on you to help when she is upset. (Bell, S.M. & Ainsworth, M.D.S., 1972)

- **Feed her when she is hungry.** For now, her menu is breast milk or formula. (Your baby’s doctor will tell you when she can have cow’s milk and water—and when and how to introduce other foods to her.)

- **Have as much face-to-face time as you can.** Hold her, sing to her, talk to her, play with her and smile. It’s you that she wants to see and play with, not the TV. When you pay attention to her, it helps her focus and feel settled inside.

- **Leave her with someone you trust, who will care for her in the same ways you do.** Going out with friends? Back to school or work? Let whoever is caring for your baby know about her daily routine and how you want her cared for. No one knows your baby like you do. You can use the information and your notes in this Guide to share information.

- **Keep her needs in mind during everyday activities of family life.** How do your baby’s needs and routine “fit in” with family routines? How does family life have to change to meet her needs? These are questions to keep asking yourself, as the answers are likely to change as she grows and changes.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**Tips to help calm a crying baby**

- Check to see if your baby is hungry, too hot or too cold, or needs a diaper change.
- Play a CD or turn on the radio. Soft music can calm your baby.
- Gently rock your baby.
- Take your baby for a ride in the stroller.
- Sing, hum, or talk to your baby.
- Run a vacuum cleaner, hairdryer, or make some other humming or droning noise.
- Lay your baby on his back and gently rub your baby’s stomach. This may help your baby feel better.
- Check to see if your baby is sick or has a fever.

**Find Local Child Care**

Your local child care resource and referral agency can help you find child care.

1-800-345-KIDS
ocfs.ny.gov/main/childcare

**NYS Growing Up Healthy Helpline**

If you are struggling to pay for food or formula, call to find your local WIC program.

1-800-522-5006 (English and Spanish)

1-800-655-1789 (TTY access)

**breastfeedingpartners.org**

Free information about breastfeeding
To Protect Your Baby:

When you keep your baby safe, you show him you will protect him. This builds his trust in you, in himself and in the world around him.

- **Practice safe sleep habits.** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends putting your baby to sleep alone, on his back, in a safe crib with a firm mattress without pillows, blankets or toys. A baby sleeping sack will keep him cozy and warm.
- **Use a safe car seat.** Always use a rear-facing infant car seat that is properly installed in the middle back seat of your car. There are places in your community, like the police department, where you can have a car seat installed and checked for you.
- **Keep your eyes and a hand on your baby at all times when he is on the changing table, your bed or any other high surface.** He can roll over when you least expect it.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
A paper towel tube roll test can help you reduce the chance of your child choking. If you can pass a toy or object through the tube, a baby can choke on it. So put it out of reach and keep it out of your baby’s hands.

- **Baby Proof.** Look around your home for things that might be harmful to your baby. Remove small, sharp, or other dangerous objects from reach, and use baby-proofing tools, like gates and locks, to keep your baby away from doors, stairways, toilets, and other spaces where your baby could fall or pinch fingers.

- **NEVER allow anyone to shake, roughly handle or hit your baby.** Not at any time, for any reason. As a parent, chances are you aren’t getting enough sleep, and you may not be as patient as usual. Keep track of your own stress level and that of anyone else who might be caring for your baby. If you feel you might hurt your baby at any time, put the baby in the crib and call the New York State Parent Connection Helpline at 800-CHILDREN.

To Guide Your Baby:

When you guide her, you tell her: “I am helping you to begin to make sense of your world.”

- **Start early to build daily routines around eating, sleeping, dressing and bathing.** They help your baby begin to know what comes next.
- **Hold her often.** The sound of your breathing and heartbeat are calming.
- **Pay attention to what she is telling you with her behavior as you play.** Is your baby looking at you, kicking her feet, or making sounds? She may be telling you she is ready to play. Is she looking away and fussing? It is her way of telling you: “Playtime is over for now.”

**Confidential Support Helpline**
New York State Parent Connection Helpline provides free, confidential support for parents and caregivers experiencing stress.

**1-800-CHEEREN**

**www.dontshake.org**

Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) is a serious and sometimes fatal injury that can happen when a baby or young child is violently shaken. Babies’ brains are fragile and their necks are not very strong. When a baby is shaken, his brain slams against the inside of his skull and it can be damaged forever. For more information see National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome.
To Communicate with Your Baby:

Talking, reading, and singing together builds your relationship and helps your baby learn to communicate and think. He won’t understand it yet, but you are setting the stage for school and life success.

- Talk to him about what you see him doing, what you are doing, and what you are doing together: “I see you smiling.” “Oh, you just picked up the rattle!” “We are at the store! I’m putting three of these red apples in the bag. They look delicious.”
- Read to him. It is never too early to begin. The more you read together, the more words he will hear. He will learn to enjoy books because he will enjoy your time together. He will be a book “looker” and “chewer” and an “opener and closer.” It’s all part of becoming a reader.
- Do a little something unexpected! By about three months, you will see the hints of a growing sense of humor. Make a funny face or sound and watch him smile and laugh!

To Support Your Child’s Curiosity and Learning:

What better way to start your baby on a lifetime of learning than to be her learning partner?

- Give her lots of time to touch, squeeze, shake, grasp, chew and throw safe objects and objects with different textures. Different textures help her learn. Putting things in her mouth is her way of exploring and learning about them. It’s up to you to be sure there are only safe and clean items within her reach.
- Help your baby learn that she can make things happen. If she drops an object on the floor, pick it up and give it back. She is learning: “I can cause this to happen!” Get ready because chances are she will drop it again—and again.
- Enjoy games together. Patty-cake teaches your baby about imitating and her name. Gently counting and kissing her tiny fingers and toes not only teaches your baby about the parts of her body, it sends the message that together you have fun!
- Share your baby’s delight in any new discovery. Talk about what she is doing. Smile. Tell her: “You seem to like the way that teddy bear feels.”
- Give your baby safe floor time. At first, lay her down on a soft blanket on her tummy for just a few moments. Stay right there and pick her up when she starts to fuss. Try it two or three times a day. As she gets stronger your baby will begin to lift her head and roll over.

DID YOU KNOW?

- You don’t need to really read at this age; just turn pages and point out something in the pictures. The story isn’t important; the time together is!

- Kitchen items such as a soft spatula, plastic measuring cups and containers to nest are some of the best toys for a baby, once she can hold things purposely with her hands.
Six to 12 Months:
On the Move!

Your baby is on the move—and that means so are you. During these next six months, you will likely see her crawling at top speed, pulling herself up to stand and sidestepping or “cruising” by holding on to the furniture. She may even take her first steps all by herself! Hang on. It is going to be an amazing ride for both of you.

She depends on you to keep her safe—so now is the time to look around the house and take steps to make sure your home is a safe place for your new “little explorer.”

Communicating with your baby at this age is also very important. The more you talk with your baby and the more you imitate her sounds, the more you encourage her to communicate. During this period (generally after nine months of age) she may start to babble “ba-ba” and “da-da” (“ma-ma” is a little harder to say… keep listening). You may feel funny babbling back to her, but the more sounds and words you give to her, the better. So babble away, sing, and talk about things you see and do together. By her first birthday, she may give you the gift of her first word.

Did You Know?
Babble is increasingly being understood as an essential step to speech, and as a key predictor of both cognitive and social-emotional development. (KLASS, P., 2010)

There are two confusing baby behaviors that usually show up at about this time. Your baby may get upset or cry when you leave her with someone—even someone she knows well (separation anxiety). She may also cry when a “new” person approaches, for example a family member she hasn’t seen for awhile (stranger anxiety). She now knows you are her special person. She can count on you and she wants you to stick close by. It’s a sign that she is growing and learning, and it will pass. Until it does, try to understand her point of view. You will find some ideas in the Nurturing and Guiding sections ahead.

Also, you may not be getting as much support as you were when your baby first came home and she may be sleeping less. That can mean more time caring for her and less time for you to take a breath and manage other parts of your life. If you need an extra hand, ask a family member or friend for support. (Remember that list from Chapter One?) Even an hour or two “off-duty” can give you the time you need to recharge which is good for you and for your baby.
Changing and Growing: Six to Twelve Months

It is likely you will see your baby:

- Smile in delight and giggle when you play peek-a-boo
- Imitate you drinking from a cup, banging a pot or putting a hat on your head
- Cling, cry or try to follow when you say “bye bye” or open the door to leave
- Be comforted by her “lovey” (an object that helps her feel safe such as a blanket or stuffed animal) at naptime and nighttime
- Respond to her name and simple commands, like “come here”
- Point, look, move, babble to tell you what she wants
- Make language sounds that seem like words
- Recognize and maybe say a few words like “dada” or “ba”
- Begin to eat infant cereal, soft fruits and veggies (after your baby’s health care provider says it is OK to introduce foods)
- Push, pull, bang, taste, fill up, dump out, turn, and drop objects to learn about them
- Look for dropped or hidden objects; show curiosity about almost everything
- Sit without support
- Crawl
- Pull to standing, maybe start to cruise holding on to furniture or take steps on her own
- Wave bye-bye
- Pick up bits of food with her fingers and eat it
- Go around, over, and under things to reach desired objects
- Repeat actions over and over again
- Explore objects, often by putting them into her mouth

Keep in mind that no two children are exactly alike. Every child grows and learns at his own pace. Your child may be ahead in some areas and behind in others; in general, this is normal.

But sometimes children and families face special challenges and need extra help. Early help does make a difference! If you have questions about your child’s development check with your child’s health care provider or call NYS Growing Up Healthy to find your local Early Intervention Program. 1-800-522-5006 for English, Spanish and Other Languages; or Call 1-800-655-1789 for TTY Access

Just like your child, you are changing, too.

You will likely find yourself able to:

- Find new ways to play with your baby
- Make observations about your baby’s growth, activities, and personality
- Feel more confident about parenting
- Get a diaper off and on with your baby on the run
- Let your baby play and explore with toys briefly while keeping a close eye on her as you do other chores like cooking
- Spend time with other parents and their babies for fun and support
- Get better at anticipating your baby’s needs
- Feel more back to normal physically and emotionally

What else do you see about yourself as a parent?

What else do you notice about you and your baby?
Six to 12 Months:  
The Five Parenting Behaviors in Action

To Nurture Your Baby:

When you show your baby that you care, he feels special. When you include him in daily routines he begins to learn what it means to be part of a family. The trust between you will shape your relationship and help build his relationships with other people.

- **Comfort your baby when he cries or is upset.** Your baby is learning that he can count on you to respond when he is upset. You’ll start to notice that your baby likes to keep close to you, looks to you for comfort and encouragement and is happy to be near you throughout the day.

- **Play with your baby as much as you can.** For example: look in a mirror with your baby and gently touch his ears, nose and lips while naming them. Move to music. Crinkle and tear a paper bag. Sing songs. Drop a tennis ball into a plastic bowl and see what your baby does.

- **When you cannot be with your baby, leave him with someone you trust to care for him in the same ways you do.** Explain how you want him to be cared for and leave contact information so you can be reached. Try to arrange to spend a little time with your baby and this person. Then say “goodbye” and remind your baby that you’ll come back like you always do. The routine is comforting and lets your baby know he can trust that you won’t just disappear.

- **Include him in everyday activities of family life.** Talk to your baby about all the foods and colors you see as you go grocery shopping together. Give him a spoon and plastic container to play with while you are making dinner. Pull his highchair over to the table so he can “talk” and eat with you.

- **DID YOU KNOW?** Early, secure attachments contribute to the growth of a broad range of abilities, including a love of learning, a comfortable sense of oneself, positive social skills, multiple successful relationships at later ages, and a sophisticated understanding of emotions, commitment, morality, and other aspects of human relationships. **(NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD, 2004)**

To Protect Your Baby:

Now that your baby is on the move, protecting her takes on a whole new meaning.

- **Use a safe car seat.** Always use a rear-facing infant car seat that is properly installed. Even on the shortest trip, and even when she protests being buckled in—and she will.

- **Baby proof.** Make your home a safe place for your baby to move and explore. Block off dangerous areas like stairs and electrical outlets. Move dangerous items such as household cleaners, medicines and sharp tools like knives and scissors out of reach. Look at the world from your baby’s view and understand that at this age, your baby will get into everything and anything. He is naturally curious and learns as he explores. It is your job to make sure she is safe.

- **Keep your eye on your baby.** She’s speedy and it only takes seconds for her to be in danger. If you have to step into another room for a minute or two, take her with you or put her in her crib or stroller with a safe toy. Never take your eyes off your baby during bath time (or any place where there is standing water) even though she might sit well in the tub. NEVER allow anyone to shake or hit your baby or toss her in the air during play. Because your baby is so happy and fun at this age, it can be easy to forget how fragile she is.

- **NEVER allow anyone to shake or hit your baby or toss her in the air during play.** Because your baby is so happy and fun at this age, it can be easy to forget how fragile she is.

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**Baby Proofing Your Home**  
Find lots of information on baby proofing your home.  
[www.kidshealth.org/parent](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent)  
Look for the “First Aid & Safety” button.
To Guide Your Baby:

It will take your baby years to be able to control his behavior. But gently setting clear limits today will help him to make his own choices about right versus wrong and how to keep himself safe as he gets older.

- **Be gentle and consistent as you guide your baby’s behavior.** Turn “don’ts” into “do’s.” For example, say, “Here’s a duckie for you to play with; Mommy’s purse has to go up on the shelf” rather than, “No, you can’t get in my purse.” Or, “Here’s a cracker for you to eat” instead of “Don’t grab your sister’s food.”

- **Support your baby through separation anxiety.** Between six and eight months most babies will become upset at the idea or reality of being separated from their parent. You can help your baby work through this by practicing “hellos” and “goodbyes” with games of peek-a-boo. When you do go away, tell him you are leaving and remind him you will come back like always. That way, he will learn to trust that you will return.

- **Support your baby through stranger anxiety.** He may act shy or afraid of unfamiliar people and be upset when you leave him with someone else. Let him sit on your lap as he checks out a new adult—even a relative he hasn’t seen for a while. Encourage the adult to offer him a toy to make a connection. Let your baby show he is comfortable with the person before letting another person hold him.

- **Share his delight and wonder as he explores, discovers and learns.** Your attention tells your baby that what he is doing is important and fun, and it encourages him to continue learning.

- **Let your baby use his “lovey” to help comfort himself.** He may hold on to a special blanket or teddy bear, or suck his thumb or pacifier when needing a little extra comfort. He is learning how to cope and to soothe himself. This is the beginning of how he learns to control his emotions (something not well-developed until later preschool age).

To Communicate with Your Baby:

Enjoying your sounds, words and laughter builds your relationship and helps your baby learn to communicate and think.

- **Talk to her about what you see her doing and what you are doing together:** "Oh, you just put the big hat on your head." "Do you feel the wind blowing on your face? Look how it is blowing the leaves in the trees."

- **Sing and read to your baby.** What your baby hears in song and from books sounds different than what she hears in everyday talking. The difference is important and will improve her listening skills.

- **Repeat yourself.** Read the same books over again, as long as your baby shows interest. Use the same words to describe something, like, “It’s sleepy time.” The more your baby hears language and watches your face as you talk, the easier it is for her to begin to understand what you are saying. She will learn the meaning of words before she is able to speak.

- **Pay attention to your baby’s face and her gestures to help you understand what she is communicating.** Is she pointing at her bottle, or frowning when the music is too loud? When you say, “Do you want your bottle?” or “I think this music is hurting your ears. I’m turning it down,” you show you understand. This invites her to communicate with you even more.

- **Do a little something unexpected!** This little person is growing a sense of humor. Make a funny face, movement, sound or word. Watch her giggle and laugh!

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

A growing body of scientific evidence tells us that emotional development begins early in life and that it is a critical aspect of the development of overall brain architecture, and that it has enormous consequences over the course of a lifetime. (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004)

**DID YOU KNOW?**

There is simply nothing better for learning language than the spoken and imitated words of caregivers, and every word counts. (Christakis, D. A., 2009)
To Support Your Baby’s Curiosity and Learning:

Your baby is gathering information all the time, putting it together to form his first pictures of himself, other people, and the world. As you encourage him to explore and learn, you help him gain more information and make sense of it.

• **Play with him.** Pay attention to whatever your baby finds interesting, as long as it’s safe. By doing this you encourage his curiosity and learning by being there and sharing, and building on what is important to your baby. This is called joint attention, an important parenting skill that encourages baby’s learning.

• **Share your baby’s delight in new discoveries.** Encourage what he is doing and talk about it as he does it. “You found the block in the cup!”

• **“Read” with your baby.** He might want to help you turn pages and will enjoy pointing at animals and objects in the pictures. Say the animals’ names and begin to introduce animal sounds. Remember, at this age, the story isn’t important—the time together is!

• **Play hide-and-seek with objects.** He is learning that objects exist even when he can’t see them. Sit on the floor together. Give him a toy, then hide it under a blanket or pillow while he is watching. Ask, “Can you find it?” If he can’t, help the toy peek out so he can see part of it. Over time he will look for it himself—and find it.

• **Give him lots of opportunities to move and explore.** His new abilities to crawl, creep and cruise coupled with intense curiosity takes his learning to a new level. Roll a ball back and forth, then take a “crawling tour” of the living room as you look for the ball. Talk about what you see. Always keep in mind that your baby is very curious and can get into everything so make sure the space is safe for him!

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

Around eight months of age, your baby will be able to have a mental image (a picture in his mind) of a favorite toy (or even of you) for at least a few minutes after it’s not in view. That short term memory is exciting because it suggests that there is some development in the prefrontal cortex of the brain, the area that supports thinking and problem-solving! Playing those hide and seek simple games helps to stimulate that area. Simple fun play helps to build your baby’s brain! (ELIOT, L., 1999)

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**YOU**

Protective Factor for Building a Strong Family: Being Strong and Flexible (Parental Resilience)

Every parent experiences bumps and roadblocks in the parenting journey—even especially the first year. It is quite an adjustment as you welcome a new person into the world, then care for that person 24/7. No doubt about it, parenting can be very stressful at times, and it takes an effort to remain positive and protect your baby from your feelings of stress.

We invite you to look back over your first year as a parent and jot down your thoughts for yourself and to share with others. Someday, you may even want to share them with your child.

What was your favorite part of parenting this year?

What do you see as your greatest strength as a parent right now?

What was the most stressful part of parenting this year?

How did you manage the stressful times?

How did you protect your baby from feeling your stress?

What happy memories do you want to remember so you can share them with your child or others later?

In what ways does being resilient as a parent help to protect your child from too much stress?
Happy Birthday, Baby!

It is time to celebrate your baby’s first birthday and all you did to make it a great year. You have made it through the sleepless nights, the ups and downs, the struggles and joys of the first year. Congratulations!

Make a wish on your baby’s first birthday:

What can you do to make your wish come true?

Tape or paste a favorite picture of your baby here!

Record your memories of your first year with baby.

REFERENCES:


CHAPTER FOUR:
You and Your Wonderful One-Year-Old
12 to 24 Months:
You and Your Wonderful One-Year-Old

Have you ever wanted two very different things at the same time? A piece of chocolate cake and to lose a few pounds? To take a nap and to join friends for a walk on a beautiful day? How does it feel? Frustrating? Unsettling?

Your toddler often feels this kind of push and pull. He wants to be close to you and gets upset when he is apart from you. At the same time, he wants to do things on his own in his own way. So he snuggles close one moment, then cries and protests, "My do!" when you start to zip up his coat the next. No wonder you both feel upset and confused at times.

This is a time of life when you need to take a deep breath. See your toddler as someone who is trying to figure out who he is and what he can do. When he “tests limits” he is really testing himself—his abilities and how far he can go.

When you set clear and consistent limits in a positive way you teach him—and at the same time, you are letting him know he is a good and capable person. It may be a challenging time, but one day you’ll tell him funny stories about how he “tried and tested” you.
Changing and Growing: The Next 12 Months

During the coming year, take a look at how much both of you will grow and change. This is space for you to jot down thoughts to remember and share with family, friends, and your toddler’s child care or health care provider.

Sometime, during this year, it is likely you will see your toddler:

- Learn to walk and be on the move, refusing to sit still for long periods
- Climb steps one at a time
- Throw and retrieve objects
- Follow simple directions
- Name some familiar objects and combine two word phrases
- Ask questions
- Imitate speech and behaviors
- Continue to act concerned, afraid or curious when around someone unfamiliar and look to you for comfort (stranger anxiety)
- Test limits and use the word "No!" often, even when he doesn’t mean it
- Show a limited ability to express frustrations which may result in negative behaviors (biting or tantrums)
- Work on using a fork or spoon and drinking from a cup
- Finger feed easily
- Begin to want to do things independently (feeding, dressing)

No two children are exactly alike. Every child grows and learns at his own pace. Your child may be ahead in some areas and behind in others; in general, this is normal.

But sometimes children and families face special challenges and need extra help. Early help does make a difference! If you have questions about your child’s development check with your child’s health care provider or call NYS Growing Up Healthy to find your local Early Intervention Program. 1-800-522-5006 for English, Spanish and Other Languages; or Call 1-800-655-1789 for TTY Access.

Over the same year, you may see yourself:

- Point to eyes, mouth, hands, feet, and hair when asked
- Point out familiar objects in pictures
- Try to figure things out: puzzle pieces, stacking toys, taking something apart and putting it back together, opening and closing, pouring
- Kick a large ball forward
- Climb… and figure out how to move through and around obstacles
- What else do you see?
- Sing songs, read books, and play the simple games your toddler loves over and over again
- Feel a growing confidence about what it takes to be a parent in terms of routine, rhythm and patience
- Feel a lack of confidence about how to handle this growing, independent toddler
- Feel a growing comfort that you don’t have to be a perfect parent—because no one is—but still worry about parenting the best you can
- Laugh more about things that don’t go quite the way you planned—that’s part of parent flexibility
- What else do you notice about how you are growing as a parent?
12 to 24 Months: The Five Parenting Behaviors in Action

Let’s look at some of the ways you can nurture, protect, guide, communicate, and support your toddler’s curiosity and learning. As you read these ideas, make them your own and begin to think of new ones that will fit you and your wonderful one-year-old.

• Leave her with someone you trust to care for her in the same ways you do. Maybe you’re away for an hour or two. Or maybe you are back at school or work and she is in child care with a family member, friend, neighbor or child care provider. We’ve said it before, but it is important enough to repeat: Let whoever is caring for your toddler know about her daily routine and how you want her cared for. No one knows your toddler like you do. Share information, ideas and your notes in this Guide. And pop in for a surprise visit every now and then to assure yourself everything is going well.

• Invite your toddler to join in simple chores and family activities. She will feel proud to help out with “real” work and will love to do the same things you do. Plus, daily routines are some of the greatest learning opportunities. Just think about it: matching socks or counting potatoes you are scrubbing for dinner teaches math. Getting dressed is a time to talk about parts of the body and colors of clothes. Giving her a dust cloth to help as you dust makes her feel like she can do something valuable.

• Think about your toddler’s use of pacifiers and bottles—if you haven’t already. Bottles and pacifiers give comfort to your toddler so it can be hard to know when is the “right time” to stop offering them (weaning). Once you decide to take them away, provide lots of snuggles and support.

To Nurture Your Toddler:

You are your toddler’s home base. She trusts that you will be there for her no matter what. That is why you get her frequent “No!” and tantrums. No matter how she behaves let her know you are there for her. She counts on you and needs you.

• Breastfeeding? Are you both enjoying it? Keep it up. This is the advice of the American Academy of Pediatrics. By nursing, you strengthen her immune system and overall health and provide your little explorer security and comfort.

• Develop a bedtime routine for both nap and nighttime—if you haven’t already. A routine is comforting. It can be anything that says to your toddler: “It’s time to be quiet now and get ready to go to bed.” Read a book or two together. Sing a lullaby. Tuck your child in, give her a kiss, then say “sweet dreams” to her and her stuffed animal (or other lovey). It will help your toddler get enough sleep each night to handle the time she is awake.

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To Protect Your Toddler:

When you keep your toddler safe, you show him you will do what is needed to protect him. This builds his trust in you, in himself and in the world around him.

• Childproof. Again. Now that your toddler is moving more, crawling, walking and climbing, take another look. Install window guards. Cover outlets. Put childproof locks on cabinets, drawers and toilets. Be sure bookshelves, dressers, and TV’s are secure so he can’t pull them down onto himself. Now, he can get into places he never could before: your purse, drawers and tool boxes! He is interested in stairs but doesn’t yet understand the danger of a fall. So, use a secure gate at the top and bottom.

• Be aware of your toddler around animals—your pets or animals on the street. While he just wants to touch and play, an animal may feel nervous or threatened. So pay attention to make sure he is safe.

• Begin to teach him about danger even though it will take him a long time to “get it.” Explain, “The stove is hot. It is not safe to touch. You can bang on these pots, instead.” A safe home means less “no’s” and more smiles.

• Keep his vaccines up to date. Talk with your child’s doctor about why, when and what to look for. Share any questions or concerns! Remember to keep a record of all vaccines that your child has received.

• Keep those germs away...as best you can! Begin to teach hand washing: before eating, after using the bathroom or a diaper change, playing with other children and being outside. As you wash his hands, you are teaching him how to do it himself.

• Take good care of those beautiful teeth. Let him practice brushing his teeth after you do—twice a day. He will need lots of help because he cannot move his wrists well enough to do it yet. Let him “try” and then you “try.” Limit juices to 100% fruit juice in a cup with a meal. To prevent tooth decay, do not put your baby to bed with a bottle.

• Stay by the tub every second of bath time. Talk, sing, splash, see what sinks and what floats together. If you forgot something, take him with you to get it. Or ask someone to bring it to you. It only takes a second for a child to slip under the water and drown.

• Use a safe car seat. Always use a rear-facing infant car seat that is properly installed in the middle back seat of your car. There are a number of places where you can have a car seat installed for you and checked for you, including the local police department in many towns/cities.
To Guide Your Toddler:

As you help your toddler make sense of the world around her and learn to manage herself too, be there to step in and guide her as needed. But also give her some space and time to explore her abilities.

• Be realistic about what you can expect from your child. Is she a mover and shaker who finds it hard to sit still longer than 3 minutes? Knowing this will help you decide not to try to read a whole book to her but to look at a few pages and then follow her lead. You will both be happier.

• Set clear and consistent limits in a caring and respectful way. Sometimes she’ll be able to listen and stop herself from climbing on the coffee table or digging in the flowerpot. Other times she depends on you to help her stop. When she knows she can count on you to set clear limits, it frees her to explore and discover and makes it easier for her to behave.

• Encourage and model sharing but do not force sharing or taking turns. Children this age are not ready for sharing; you are just introducing the idea. So model sharing by breaking your banana in half and offering her a piece. Point out when sharing happens: “Jorge shared his truck with you.” Over time, she’ll get the idea.

• Give your child realistic feedback about her efforts and actions. Tell her what you see. Give her specifics. When you say, “I see you are trying again to pull up the zipper on your coat. That is how you learn.” You let her know that “trying again” is behavior you respect.

• Expect challenging behaviors. No doubt about it, “No” will be one of your toddler’s favorite words for a time. It is a sign she is becoming an independent person. So is acting out and having a temper tantrum. (Every parent experiences at least one of these in some public spot. So get ready to join the club!) You can support her by staying calm, being clear about limits and letting her know you love her—even when you don’t like her behavior.

• Use the word “no” in fun ways. Make up silly sentences that make your child’s use of the word “no” fun and at the same time helps her think and learn: Ask: “Does a pig MOO?” or point to your foot and ask: “Is this my head?”

• Be the kind of person you want your child to be. This is the “age of imitation.” She looks up to you and wants to be like you. And she is always watching, whether you know it or not. So show her how to behave by being a good role model.

DID YOU KNOW?
A National Study on Parenting Infants and Toddlers conducted by ZERO TO THREE shows that most children are capable of feeling good or bad about themselves between ages one and two but only 43% of parents think a child is capable of such feelings by age two. To learn more, go to www.zerotothree.org.

DID YOU KNOW?
In a recent study, it was found that parents’ praise of children’s efforts at 14-38 months predicted what children believed about themselves at 7-8 years of age. What was really important was the way parents praised their children’s efforts in trying (you are doing a good job at…; you are really learning how that puzzle goes together) as opposed to praising the child or outcome (you are so smart; nice picture). (GUNDERSON, E., GRIPSHOVER, S., GOLDEN MEADOW, S., LEVINE, S. CHILD DEVELOPMENT, IN PRESS)
To Communicate with Your Toddler:

In these months your toddler will be paying attention to words—in the languages he hears most: apple, bubbles, rice cooker. He’ll listen, begin to understand, then start to talk. At first you may not understand the sounds he makes, but listen—and you’ll hear his first word. It’s an exciting time.

• **Talk with your toddler—about everything and anything.** The more language a toddler hears the better. So talk about what you are doing: “Daddy is bringing your yellow hat in case it is cold outside.” Talk about what you see, eat, play and read together. “There’s Kayda, she’s wagging her tail.” “These cooked carrots are sweet. Do you want some more?” “Get ready. Here comes the blue bouncing ball.” “What does the lion say?” Talk about your day at school or work. Talk about weekend plans. Keep talking.

• **Listen for the sounds and words your child is attempting.** Your toddler will make repeated sounds for objects and likely point at what he is trying to say. When he says, “Duh!” and points to a dog walking by, respond by saying, “Yes, I see that dog… he is a small dog!” That way he hears the word “dog” said and used in a sentence, all in less than a minute and without being corrected.

• **Make a running list of sounds and words your child is saying!** It is fun to jot down your child’s sounds and first words. You can share the list with anyone else who takes care of him and you will have a running record of how his language develops.

• **Stretch his attempts at spoken language.** At first he will say single words, and then he will begin to link two words together. “Play!” and then “mommy play!” You can add to that by saying, “Yes, mommy is playing with you and we are making this shiny green truck go.” This introduces him to new words and invites him to take turns talking back and forth with you.

• **Repeat the words your child is trying to say.** Criticizing and correcting can discourage a new “talker”. Learning language is not easy. It takes lots of time, practice and repetition.

• **Read a story. Then read it again. And again if he asks.** You are helping him develop vocabulary and understand new words. Point occasionally to the words on the page as well as the pictures. You are showing him that these marks on paper stand for letters and words.

• **Rhyme away.** Read rhymes. Say rhymes. Sing rhymes.

• **Know when to be quiet.** A break gives your child the time he needs to process what he is hearing and saying. Look for clues when your child has had enough. For example, is he looking down, looking away, turning to play quietly? He is telling you he needs a little time off from talking.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
The greater the number of words children heard from their parents or caregivers before they were three, the higher their IQ and the better they do in school.

Listening to language on the TV doesn’t help your toddler build his own language and it may actually limit his language.

(HART & RISLEY, 1995)
To Support Your Toddler’s Curiosity and Learning:

Your little one is learning about the world. When you are there, by her side, interested, it helps her stay focused and think about what she is seeing, doing and learning. Encourage her to explore without taking over. Let her try to figure things out (problem solve) but be ready to step in to assist if she appears to be in any kind of danger or getting too frustrated.

- **Give your toddler time to explore and experiment—every day.** Be her partner as she stacks plastic measuring cups, pours and dumps water in the tub, digs in sand and climbs in and out of a cardboard box.

- **Use the outdoors as a learning lab.** Look for ants. Smell a flower. Walk in a puddle. Listen to the chirping of birds.

- **Let her move and be active.** Hold her hand as needed when she climbs up and down steps. Let her straddle simple riding toys she can move by using her feet. Blow bubbles that she can chase and pop. Raining so hard you can’t go out? Make an obstacle course with pillows and pots to walk over and furniture to crawl over. Make a tent by covering a table with a sheet. Dance away.

- **Take her to the supermarket.** Name fruits and vegetables. Point out different colors, sizes and shapes of items on the shelves. Talk about what you are buying for dinner. (Your local bookstore, library, park, and pet store are also great learning places.)

- **Turn off the TV.** Interacting with you is better than any children’s show, when it comes to learning.

- **Enjoy using your fingers to act out songs and actions.** Bringing “The Wheels on the Bus” and “Itsy Bitsy Spider” to life using your fingers will help your child learn to use her fingers and hands—a skill she needs to write. The songs also give you the chance to teach your child new vocabulary words and to enjoy playing and singing together.

- **Encourage her to feed her favorite stuffed animal or doll with a spoon.** It is the beginning of pretend play that will let her explore aspects of everyday life and at the same time stretch her imagination about what other people might do and feel.

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**DID YOU KNOW?**
Research has shown that one-, two-, and three-year-olds’ play and attention spans are shorter in length in the presence of background television and parent-child interactions are also less frequent. To learn more, go to www.pbs.org.
Thinking about your toddler, what have you learned about child development that helped you as a parent?

Thinking about your own parenting, what are the things you do very well as you parent your toddler?

What might you want to work on to make it easier for you and better for your child?

How does your understanding of your toddler’s development help you to provide the right kind of guidance for your toddler?

Just a word of encouragement: This is a challenging phase of development, but it will not last forever. Remember, your job is to patiently, consistently and lovingly help your toddler grow through it!

REFERENCES:


NYS Dental Association, www.nysdental.org

PBS Website, Children and Media, TV and Kids Under 3 www.pbs.org


Tape or paste a favorite picture of your toddler here. Or, draw one!
CHAPTER FIVE:
You and Your Terrific Two-Year-Old
24 to 36 Months:
You and Your Terrific Two-Year-Old

Can you believe that in just 24 months your baby has grown to be a walking, talking, thinking toddler? One minute she touches your heart with her smile and big hug. The next she drives you crazy as she says “No!” Again.

She is figuring out who she is, what she can do and who is in charge. She wants to be “little” and “grown up” at the same time. Life is not always easy for your terrific two-year-old.

One minute she may cling to you. The next she may insist “My do” and refuse your helping hand. She is gaining new skills at the same time she is learning rules that she is expected to follow. Sometimes she may appear so grown up you may expect her to behave in ways she’s not yet able to.

Like your toddler, you may find yourself swinging between feeling competent and “in control” to wanting someone to give you a hug and tell you what to do.

But hang in there. Enjoy her new discoveries, her growing skills and blossoming language and personality. And when you can’t, remember: what she wants and needs most is your love, attention and patience. Your terrific two-year-old needs you to be on her team—and to nurture, protect, guide, communicate, and support her curiosity and learning as she tries to figure out how she will fit into this world.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
A toddler is a walking contradiction. A toddler needs play—and order. A toddler needs chaos—and discipline. A toddler needs loudness, vitality, exuberance—and quiet.

(MICHAEL GURIAN, 2007)
Changing and Growing: The Next 12 Months

This space is for you to jot down thoughts to remember and share with family members, friends, your toddler’s child care or health care provider.

Sometime, during the next twelve months, here are some of the new things you will likely see your two-year-old do:

Follow simple one or two part directions:
“Will you please bring the book over here and climb up on the sofa so we can read?”

Have a vocabulary of 100 words or more (by 36 months)

Hold a “conversation” with back and forth exchanges

Listen to a familiar story and even catch a mistake!

Ask lots of questions (why? where? what?)

Imitate behaviors and actions

Make connections between something that is happening now, and something that happened in the past. His memory is becoming stronger

Enjoy make-believe play

“Draw” (scribble on paper), copy simple shapes and lines drawn by others

Focus on an activity for a longer period of time

Notice differences in size, shape and color

Know how to seek help from trusted adults (you, a babysitter, grandma, his child care provider)

Understand and follow simple rules—but with reminders and guidance

Play for short periods “side by side” with another child

“Take a turn” with another child—usually with your help

Recognize himself in a mirror and photos

Dress and undress himself with assistance

Show interest in or maybe complete toilet learning

What else do you see?

As a parent of a two-year-old, you may:

Wonder “where has my baby gone?”

Be amazed at how much your little one has grown and changed

Wonder if you are expecting too much or too little of your toddler

Feel your patience being tested—way too often

Ask yourself more than once “Why is my child acting like this?” “Am I doing something wrong?”

Find yourself laughing at something your toddler says or does

What else do you notice about how you are growing as a parent?

Keep in mind that no two children are exactly alike. Every child grows and learns at his own pace. Your child may be ahead in some areas and behind in others; in general, this is normal.

But sometimes children and families face special challenges and need extra help. Early help does make a difference! If you have questions about your child’s health care provider or call NYS Growing Up Healthy to find your local Early Intervention Program. 1-800-522-5006 for English, Spanish and Other Languages; or Call 1-800-655-1789 for TTY Access.
24 to 36 Months:
The Five Parenting Behaviors in Action

Let's look at some of the ways you can nurture, protect, guide, communicate, and support your toddler's curiosity and learning. As you read these ideas, make them your own and begin to think of new ones that will fit you, your toddler and your family.

To Nurture Your Toddler:

By age two, your toddler is able to rely not only on you but on other trusted adults in her life. Sometimes, she may even seem to prefer someone other than you. Don’t be offended: that’s normal development. She is busy figuring out where she fits in this world and what relationships are all about. You remain her constant, trusted and well-loved parent.

- **Comfort her.** Toddlers’ feelings can be very intense—even when they are happy and excited. And losing control can be frightening to a toddler. Your toddler needs your loving reassurance both in touch and words so she knows she is still loved and lovable.

- **Continue to observe and learn so that you can respond to her unique needs and strengths.** For example, by observing what triggers frustration and “meltdowns” (e.g., lack of sleep, change in routine, eating candy) you can learn how to avoid or deal with those triggers. Knowing what she is currently interested in (sweeping with a toy broom, throwing a ball, reading stories about animals) allows you to focus on her interests. That tells her that you value her and what is important to her at that moment.

- **Help her learn about feelings.** Give names to feelings: “I know it makes you sad to have to stop playing but we have to go to the store right now.” Separate her feelings from her behavior. “I know you feel sad (feeling) but you must not throw (behavior) your toy at me.” Talk about the feelings of the characters in books and as you play together. (“Your doll looks sad.” “Mr. Moose is smiling.”) Look in a mirror together and take turns making faces (sad, happy, scared).

- **Be a model.** Behave the way you want her to behave. She listens to you and watches you carefully. She will copy what she sees and hears. So as you interact with her and other people remember, she is watching.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

In order to develop normally, a child requires progressively more complex interaction with one or more adults who have an emotional relationship with the child. “Somebody’s got to be crazy about that kid. That’s number one. First, last, and always.” (URIE BROFFENBRENNER, NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD, 2004.)

Questions about your child’s development?

If you have questions about your child’s development, talk to his doctor or child care provider. You can also call NYS Growing Up Healthy to find your local Early Intervention Program. The Early Intervention Program is a statewide program which helps parents know if their child needs extra support and makes sure families get the help they need.

NYS Growing Up Healthy

1-800-522-5006 ENGLISH

1-800-655-1789 SPANISH
To Protect Your Toddler:

- **Toddlers are active and curious learners.** They need to explore, touch, climb, throw, open, pour, examine and act. They don’t yet understand limits or safety rules and have very little self-control. So they need you to guide them, protect them and keep them safe.

- **Protect your toddler from the house and the house from him.** It is better to put dangerous or breakable things out of reach than always saying “no”. That only invites conflict as he tries to be independent.

- **Protect him outside too.** Toddlers do not understand the possible dangers in playgrounds, streets and yards. Watch and think ahead about what he might get into. And remember, no matter how “grown up” he may seem, he is depending on you to keep him safe.

- **Limit how much TV he watches and what he watches.** Your toddler can’t yet tell the difference between what is real and what is pretend. Scary or violent images can be upsetting—even if he is playing in the same room where a TV is on. This can lead to behavior problems, nightmares, and trouble sleeping.

- **Protect your child—and other people.** He needs you to step in and take over if he may hurt himself or another person. Acknowledge his feelings as you prevent harmful behavior: “I know it is fun to ride your tractor, but you can’t ride it into the road. A car might hit you.” Or, “I see you are angry but you can’t throw sand at your sister; it can hurt her.”

- **Never leave your toddler near or around water without someone watching him.** Fence off backyard pools. Dump out small wading pools after each use. Toddlers love to play in and with water but do not understand the potential danger.

- **Keep your toddler healthy.** Continue with all well-child care-appointments and doctor recommendations. Encourage your child to practice self-care skills like washing hands, eating healthy foods and brushing teeth. This can be tricky because he wants to do all these by himself even though he needs your help. So try to be patient, give him a chance to do what he can and lend a hand when needed.

- **To Guide Your Toddler:**

  Now is the time for you to have patience for two... you and your toddler. Toddlers are easily frustrated. (You would be too if you were caught between being a baby and a “grown-up” preschooler.) They don’t know how to be patient—yet. But your toddler is learning this important skill—by living with and watching you. How you respond when she is frustrated or upset teaches her how to handle challenges. Here are a few ideas to help you teach your child to manage when things don’t go her way:

  - **Use what you know and observe about your toddler to avoid or help her manage frustration.** Try to identify situations, people, activities and transitions (typical changes in everyday routines) that frustrate her. Think about what else is going on in her life that makes frustration hard to handle. Is she tired? Not feeling well? Have there been big changes at home such as the...
birth of a new sibling or a change in child care provider? This information can lead to decisions that can make life easier and better for both of you. For example: Don’t go to the supermarket when she hasn’t had a nap. Give her some extra one-on-one time to help her adjust to her new brother.

- **Make and use clear simple rules and limits.** Keep rules very simple and be prepared to say the rule many times over. It takes repetition, calm reminders, practice and time for a toddler to learn a rule.

- **Be consistent with rules and limits you set.** Even if she protests. Ultimately, you want your toddler to make good choices. This means following rules even when you are not there to guide and prompt her. If your rule is “sit, sofas are for sitting not for climbing” and you repeat and reinforce it, she will learn to accept it. Being consistent helps her feel safe and secure. It also gives her the chance to practice self-control.

- **Explain and show acceptable ways to behave.** How will she know what she is supposed to do if you don’t tell or show her? So if you see your toddler pouring a pan of water over her cars on your favorite living room chair, explain: “The chair isn’t a good place. But you can have a ‘car wash’ in the bathtub or outside.” It is important to substitute an acceptable action with one that is not. It helps develop self-regulation (making right choices on her own).

- **Give your toddler realistic, manageable choices.** Ask, “Do you want to wear your red or yellow socks?” It tells your toddler that you value her opinion and what she has to say. The trick is to offer only two choices, both of which you can happily deliver. More than two choices can be overwhelming. And offering a choice you can’t allow undermines her sense of pride and competence.

- **Prepare your toddler for “transitions.”** Toddlers do well when they are prepared for a change in activity. One way to help them is to give cues that change is coming. “We are having so much fun building blocks but in a few minutes we are going to stop for lunch.” You can also make the change easier by giving her a way to be involved in the new activity: “It’s lunch time. Do you want to come help me build a sandwich?”

- **Celebrate the positive.** Let your toddler know when they do something right rather than focusing on negative behaviors.

- **Check in on your own parenting feelings!** How are you doing? Do you feel stressed about parenting your toddler? Do you find that sometimes your toddler’s behavior triggers frustration or anger in you? Be aware of your limits. Ask others for help if you feel stressed or just need a break to relax.

- **Know that this is a challenging but expected phase for every parent and toddler.** If you have questions or concerns, talk to your child’s health care provider or child care provider. Explain what is going on and make a plan to get the information and support you need.
To Communicate with Your Toddler:

This is a year of language explosion. Your toddler understands many more words than he can say. The number of words he knows and uses is directly linked to what he hears.

- **Talk with your toddler**—about anything and everything. Talking back and forth with you gives him the opportunity to hear language, think about the meaning of the words and practice expressing (saying) words in response to what he hears.

- **Expand on what your toddler says.** At first he may say one word (“car”) or link two together (“race car”) as he pretends to race his car. You support his language learning when you add to what he says: “Yes, that is a race car…a shiny, blue race car and I bet it goes really fast!”

- **Give your toddler simple one-step directions.** For example: “Will you please get me the truck book?” Once you see that your toddler can usually follow one-step directions, begin to try two-step directions: “Will you please put the truck book back and bring over your red truck?”

- **Ask lots of ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘why’ questions.** “What are you doing?” “Where are you going?” “Why do you think the little girl in the picture is sad?” are great conversation starters. Keep your questions simple. And give your toddler time to think. It’s not his answer that matters, but the back-and-forth of the conversation with you.

- **Teach the meaning of words through actions.** Continue to talk about what you see your toddler doing as he is doing it. Sing songs that require actions, such as “The Wheels on the Bus” or “If You’re Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands!” Use actions to describe words such as “twirl” and “stretch.”

- **Expect lots of mistakes in how words are said.** Toddlers and even preschoolers make many mistakes in language expression and some are quite cute. Most of those mistakes will correct themselves with practice. For example, most older toddlers might say “I good to bed”…rather than “I went to bed.” It is best not to correct your child. Instead, model the right words: “That’s right, you went to bed.”

- **Read, read, read and explore books with your toddler!** Read short and simple books. Read his favorites again and again. While it might be boring for you, he feels proud and competent because he knows what is coming next. Ask simple questions about the book and listen for his answer. Connect the pictures in the book to objects in the room and people and places he knows.

- **Last, but not least: keep tabs on what you say.** Are you always saying “no” and telling him what he can’t do? Or are you showing him how much he knows and can do? Try, “You are figuring it out” or “Try again.” Only you can decide if your language is opening doors for him or shutting them—and if some changes are needed in how you respond.
To Support Your Toddler’s Curiosity and Learning:

Toddlers love to play and explore. The more a toddler plays, the more he develops knowledge, memory, creativity, physical coordination, balance and strength. Your role is to support that exploration and learning while meeting your toddler’s changing needs. It can be exhausting and confusing. But stay the course. The rewards are great—for both of you.

- **Support your child’s play.** Does he like to build with blocks or stacking toys? Does he like certain books? Does he seem to prefer to play and explore outside or inside? Does he do well with other children playing in his space? How does he handle noisy environments? Does he like messy play? Does he ever sit still? There is no right or wrong. It is all about using what you know to make play fun and engaging.

- **Take advantage of your toddler’s need to be moving.** That constant energy and movement is helping develop balance, muscle control and coordination. Every skill that he develops will lead to more complex skills in the future. For example, how he throws a ball as a toddler will influence how he can throw the ball overhand later on. So give him lots of opportunity to ‘practice’ these emerging physical skills in everyday play while making sure that he is safe and supervised.

- **Be creative about toys.** Toddlers like to push and pull; pour and fill; build and knock down; imitate adult behaviors in play such as “cleaning;” caring for a “pet” or “baby”; putting things together and taking them apart; throwing and catching; and “drawing.” Most of these can be done with everyday objects: plastic measuring cups, plastic nesting bowls, cardboard boxes, a sock rolled into a ball. It’s all about finding what interests your toddler and having fun.

- **Join up with other toddlers.** Libraries and bookstores often provide free story times. Look for playgrounds designed for toddlers where your child can play and explore. There are also toddler playgroups and family resource centers in many communities.

- **Take care of yourself!** Playing with your toddler takes a lot of your time, energy and creativity. When you need a break, ask a trusted family member or friend to help out for a couple hours. This will help to “recharge” your batteries. If you find that your patience is running thin or you are feeling anxious or bored and you just can’t recharge, talk with someone you trust.
Protective Factor: Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

It doesn’t take long to figure out that your parenting changes as your child grows. When you think about what you did as a parent of a newborn, think about how different it was from what you did with your one-year-old, and what you are doing today with your toddler.

When you understand your child’s developmental stage and provide the right kinds of support and nurturing, you are building a stronger family—and child. There are many sources of information about child development and parenting—check with your local librarian!

| DID YOU KNOW? |
| Understanding your child’s development and how that changes what you are doing as a parent is called developmental parenting: “the kind of parenting that values a child’s development, supports a child’s development, and changes along with a child’s development. It is warm, responsive, encouraging, and communicative.” |


REFERENCES:

- American Academy of Pediatrics Website, Meals and Children, May 12, 2012 at www.aap.org
- Oregon State University (2/12/12) News Release: Over-Reactive Parenting Linked To Problem Behavior In Toddlers at oregonstate.edu
CHAPTER SIX:

You and Your Thriving Three-Year-Old
36 to 48 Months: 
You and Your Thriving Three-Year-Old

Welcome to the “preschool years,” the time between age three and when your little one enters school. That may seem like a long way off but time will fly. And much will change, one discovery at a time.

Your preschooler’s brain is very active. You can see it as he asks questions, explores and tries to make sense out of all he has learned so far. He can think in new ways about people, objects, events and ideas (called mental images) and can remember for longer periods of time.

His abilities are growing. But as you will see in this chapter and the one that follows, he still needs your support and help. Sometimes, when he is getting frustrated, this may mean stepping in and giving him a hand. Or, you may need to give him a little time to figure things out on his own. Either way, he always needs you to help keep him safe and to guide his behavior.

In the pages that follow, you will find lots of ways to support your preschooler. By helping him today, you are also preparing him for tomorrow, to be successful in school.
Changing and Growing: The Next 12 Months

This space is for you to jot down thoughts to remember and share with family members, friends, your preschooler’s child care or health care provider.

Play for short periods with another child or children and begin to develop friendships.

Begin to identify as a boy or girl and may show preference for gender related play... (i.e., trucks or dolls)

Become interested in simple, structured games like board games but often want to make up and change the “rules” to his liking.

Spend much of his time in pretend activity and may even have an imaginary friend or two.

Show you he wants to please you some of the time

Seem, at least at times, to be less dependent on you

Resist your requests—and resort back to temper tantrums if he is not getting what he wants

Follow two to three step directions

Use many new words in everyday experiences... an “exploding” vocabulary

Use four or more words in a sentence

Use plurals correctly; use descriptive words; ask many questions; continue to make language mistakes but with practice those mistakes self-correct

Has a conversation of two or more exchanges with another person

Listen to books and stories and become more “engaged” in the content

“Read” a favorite book to you by looking at and “reading” pictures

Join in singing or saying short familiar rhymes

Show interest in scribbling, copying simple shapes, painting, molding dough or clay, “building” and taking things apart

Experiment and explore continuously... with people, objects, ideas and actions

Use “self-talk” while exploring (i.e., “What happens...if I pour this bag of sugar into the dump truck”)

Has a new persistence in asking “why, where and what ” questions for understanding

Focuses for longer periods of time on activities of interest

Show intense interest in specific kinds of play to the exclusion of other play (only wants to play trains for a month straight, no matter what else is offered or available)

Sometimes, during the next twelve months, here are some of the new things you will likely see your three-year-old do:

If you have a concern about your child’s development, your local school district has a Committee on Preschool Special Education which can support your child through preschool special education. Visit www.p12.nysed.gov for more information.
cont’d…

Match and sort like things, like colors, cars, shapes

Complete a 6-8 piece puzzle

Understand and follow simple rules and safety practices but still need adult giving cues

“Take turns” more easily, showing some ability to wait and to share

Show concern if another child is upset, hurt or angry

Separate from parent without becoming upset

Become attached to significant adults, in addition to parents

Begin to recognize and express feelings and emotions (i.e., I’m sad)

Climb, jump, run, throw and catch with increasing skill

Dress and undress himself, only needing help with zippers, buttons and tying

Like physical activity. Is on the move!

Complete toilet learning

Use objects for purposes not intended (i.e., banana becomes a phone)

Show awareness of daily routine (i.e., after bath, goes to brush teeth without being told)

Show interest in and awareness of his environment, noticing signs, buildings, streets, stores, etc

What else do you see?

As a parent of a three-year-old, you may:

Struggle at times with being consistent but it’s still very important

Find your three-year-old quite funny at times and enjoy her sense of humor

Feel embarrassed when she imitates your words or tone of voice that you would not want anyone to hear

Have moments when you just cannot be enthusiastic about playing the same thing for the fifth time in a day

Experience a little sadness when your three-year-old becomes attached to someone outside the family—while also being proud of her growing independence

Notice that your child may have some better skills and some less developed skills when looking at other three-year-olds

Wonder if you are expecting too much or too little of your three-year-old

Feel a bit silly playing imaginary games with your child

Find it challenging to let your child “lead” the learning in play and activities

Better understand the value of your child’s constant desire to play as an important way to learn

Learn with practice how to best guide your three-year-old child’s learning

Wonder about your child’s readiness for preschool and/or school and what you need to do to get her ready
What else do you notice about how you are growing as a parent?

To Nurture Your Three-Year-Old:

He is beginning to develop relationships with people outside your family: a favorite teacher, a neighbor or a friend. You may even wonder, at times, if he is "breaking away" from you. Not to worry. It is the powerful attachment between you that allows all his other relationships to grow.

- **Be There!** He knows he can turn to you when he is unsure or upset. As he begins to form new relationships, stay present and available. He needs your trusting relationship in order to form others.

- **Create some "special time" for you and your little one.** Whether it be breakfast, bedtime, bathtime or everyday travel time, make that time special for you and your little one where the underlying message is that your child is loved.

36 to 48 Months: The Five Parenting Behaviors in Action

Let’s look at some of the ways you can nurture, protect, guide, communicate, and support your preschooler’s curiosity and learning. As you read these ideas, make them your own and begin to think of new ones that will fit you, your three-year-old and your family.
Help him become a “nurturer!” He is beginning to recognize and respond to other people’s feelings and needs. Share how important this is as you encourage and model respectful, caring behavior towards others.

Some ways to encourage awareness of others:

- **Name the feelings your child might be experiencing:**
  “I know you are angry that your little brother took your car.”

- **Explore with your child how another may be feeling:**
  “How do you think your little brother felt when you grabbed that out of his hands?”

- **Explore with your child a better way to express his feelings:**
  “What would have been a better way to ask for that back?” …and let him try the better way.

- **Recognize his attempts to have positive interactions with others, especially when he thinks of the other’s needs first:**
  “That was good thinking and caring to ask for the car, rather than grab it!”

- **Talk about the feelings of characters in stories and books.**
  “Do you think he is happy or sad?” or “Why do you think he is crying?” “What do you think might make her happy?”

- **Encourage his growing sense of humor.** Have you noticed that your little one is laughing more at funny actions, words and sights? He will also try to make you laugh. Share the joy and laughter of this age together.

- **Invite him to contribute to the family by doing simple tasks.**
  He is beginning to see himself as part of a family and is figuring out his role. Invite him to do “real” tasks: “Will you put these napkins on the table? …Will you please throw that banana peel in the garbage? …Can you put your truck away on the shelf so no one trips on it?” These simple requests will help your child to experience success and feel valued as a family member.

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To Protect Your Three-Year-Old:

Three-year-olds are beginning to understand boundaries and safety rules, but still need plenty of guidance and reminders. Here are some ways to think about protecting your three-year-old:

- **Keep her safe at home.**
  Now that she can open containers and doors, climb and jump, take another look around to be sure your home is as safe as possible. Keep reminding her of rules and stay consistent as you hold her to them.

- **Protect her from potential outdoor dangers.**
  When outside and “in action,” remind her of outdoor safety rules and make sure they are followed. For example: hold hands when crossing streets; stay on the sidewalk; always wear a helmet on riding toys.

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**Child Safety Tips**

For information on how to keep your preschooler safe and healthy, visit:

www.cdc.gov/parents

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

By age 3, many children are watching TV shows on various devices. Your pediatrician’s advice is to limit screen time to 1-2 hours per day of programs made for children (see PBS Broadcasting) and not before bedtime. A better alternative is to spend quiet time together. Research 2013
• Avoid scary messages and pictures on TV or in books. She does not yet know what is real and pretend. And her imagination is in high gear. No matter how silly a cartoon figure may seem to you, it may scare her. And her feelings are real.

• Keep her healthy. Continue her well-care appointments and recommended immunizations. Guide her to wash her hands often during the day. Help her learn to brush her teeth. Serve her healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk or yogurt. Though she most likely has learned to use the toilet, accidents happen. Help her change into dry clothes in a matter-of-fact way and move on with your day.

DID YOU KNOW?
Children, ages two to six, placed in child restraints (car seats with harness) were 28% less likely to be killed in a crash than those who were restrained in seat belts alone. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, 2006*

DID YOU KNOW?
It is recommended that preschoolers eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily. *www.kidshealth.org*

• Use an approved forward facing car seat with a harness—as long as possible. You will find height and weight limits on the seat or the maker’s website. When she outgrows the seat, it will be time for her to use a booster seat. It should always be in the back seat. Make it a rule: that she can only undo her belt when the car is stopped and you have turned off the motor.

To Guide Your Three-Year-Old:

These years are a “golden opportunity” to help your little one learn your rules for living with others—in your family and community:

• Encourage him. Even as you notice his growing sense of independence (“I can do this myself”), he still needs you to support and guide him when needed.

• Expect occasional periods of “regression.” A change in child care providers, a new baby in the family, or moving to a new place are all changes that can overwhelm a young child. (Adults too!) Sometimes, children respond by acting in ways they did when they were younger (regress). For example, he might have a temper tantrum, a toileting accident, trouble sleeping, or cling to you. These are signs he needs extra support during a stressful time.

• Set a few simple, clear rules that he can understand and count on. He is beginning to show you that he can remember the rules (sometimes) and can use them (sometimes) without always being told. When you are clear about what is expected, it helps him remember and respond.

• Catch your child being good! Or even if he tries to do things right. Use clear and simple words to describe exactly what was good. Saying “Thank you for picking up your toys without me asking” helps your child understand what specific behavior you are complimenting so he can do it again.
• Let him know about positive ways to behave. For example, explain that instead of hitting his big sister when she takes his toy, he can tell her “It’s mine” or ask you for help. Or show him how to hit or yell at a pillow when he is angry or frustrated.

• Give him the chance to make real, manageable decisions. Talk about his choices. “Oh, you want to play with the race cars instead of build with blocks? That sounds fun! What can we do with them?”

• Pick and choose your battles! Three-year-olds have a built-in desire to try new things and will push the boundaries in order to do that. The good news: they also want to please you (most of the time). Set rules and limits but only where necessary. If you keep your child boxed in by an overly strict set of rules or have too many rules, you risk crushing his creativity, confidence, persistence and curiosity, while denying his chances to practice self-control.

To Communicate with Your Three-Year-Old:

Your preschooler’s early reading and writing (literacy) skills are growing. She now can understand and use hundreds of words. She is more aware of print. She might point to words in her favorite book (not having a clue what they say) or pretend to write on paper.

She’s also becoming better at reading body language and what it says about how someone else is feeling. These are all early literacy skills.

• Ask lots of “what”, “where” and “why” questions. “What else do you think we should put in the salad?” “Where do you want to play in the park?” “Why do you think the little cat was so happy to see her mommy in the story?” Remember to give her time to think and respond.

• Create fun ways to practice listening. Ask simple 1 and 2 step directions: “Will you please put the truck away, then put on your shoes so we can go out.” Play “Can You Do What I Do?” games with directions such as “Can you touch your nose? Point to your elbow?” Most important of all: listen to her.

• Expand on what she says. Add to her vocabulary by introducing her to new or unusual words throughout the day. “Yes, that’s a bird! It’s a red cardinal… see the red color?” “Would you like to help me snap off the bottom of the asparagus stem?”

DID YOU KNOW?

Children whose parents reported providing more support for early literacy had stronger vocabulary scores in fourth grade. Also the complexity of their language at age three was associated with fourth-grade vocabulary. (DICKINSON & PORSCHE, 2011)
• **Create stories together.** By this time, she can probably tell many kinds of stories: pretend ones, personal experiences, and retelling stories she has heard. This is a powerful way of organizing her thinking and feelings. You help by sharing stories such as the day she was born.

• **Keep the conversation going!** The back and forth, give and take of a conversation supports your child’s development in all areas. And it can be fun as you learn more about how your child thinks.

• **Spend time playing word games!** Children this age love to play word games with an adult. Start with words (real or made up) that rhyme: “mat, pat, cat, fat, sat” and words that start with the same sound: “bat, big, bug.” You can just sit in a room and say, “What can we find that starts with an ‘ss’ sound?” Use favorite nursery rhymes and familiar children’s songs to point out words that rhyme.

• **Read, read, read!** Read her favorite stories again and again. Ask questions about the story or information found in the book. “What do you think is going to happen?” Point out words on some of the pages. Eventually, she will begin to understand that you are reading words not reading “pictures.”

• **Use different “voices” when reading.** Make your voice sound happy, sad, tired, excited… whatever the story calls for. This not only helps your child learn language but also learn about feelings—her own and others. It can take a little pretending on your part.

• **Give your child the opportunity to explore with writing tools.** Sure, there is a potential mess but with your guidance and presence whatever she is using (crayon, marker, pen, pencil) can easily stay on paper and not the walls. Praise those writing/drawing efforts, which will be simple scribbles at first. With experience however, they will turn into letters.

• **Sing and dance.** Singing the alphabet song, moving to the music and being active adds fun to the experience of learning new sounds and words.
To Encourage Your Three-Year-Old to Explore and Learn:

Your child is learning as he runs, jumps, turns blocks into buildings or empty boxes into trains. As he plays in the sand, collects stones or pinecones, and kicks a ball. And as he pretends to be a lion, a baby or a firefighter.

Many experts believe there are five types of play: exploratory play, which is discovering what something is (even infants do this); constructive play, where children put things together and take them apart (toddlers can do this to some degree); dramatic play, which is taking on pretend roles and situations; and later on, play that has rules (rules can be created by the child or from an outside source); and rough and tumble play.

What are ways to support these types of play and learning?

• **Head outdoors.** It’s the perfect place to climb, run, throw a ball or bean bag, ride a tricycle or visit a park. There are also amazing things to discover, explore and enjoy together: clouds, worms, butterflies, snow, and dump trucks at a construction site.

• **Encourage “construction” and “collection.”** Three-year-olds love to build anything and everything, put things together and take them apart, and create as they make collages, mold clay or playdough, build with blocks or make a sculpture with pipe cleaners. As he creates, your child learns about size, shapes, balance, weight, color and how things connect to each other.

• **Make believe together.** Pretend play supports language, cognitive, social-emotional and motor learning! When your child invites you to be the mommy, baby, firefighter or tiger, join in—even though it can feel weird. Follow your child’s lead and watch his creativity and confidence grow.

• **Introduce simple board games.** Be prepared: your child will make up the rules for now. Don’t worry about winning or even completing the game. No matter who wins or how long you play, your child will be learning about taking turns, counting, numbers and letters.

• **Encourage “connections” between play and real life:** “I see you are playing with your garbage truck. Our garbage is outside right now waiting for the city garbage truck. Let’s see if it’s coming.” And between the familiar and new: “Can you help me find a lemon? Lemons remind me of the oranges you like to eat, but they are smaller and yellow.”

• **Spend time with other kids.** Three-year-olds begin to play with as opposed to next to other children. With practice and your support, playing and getting along with others gets easier for your child. The chance to talk with other parents and to see other three-year-olds in action can make playtime fun for you, too.

• **Explore programs for your three-year-old to attend.** Are you thinking about preschool? State funded prekindergarten? Head Start? A nursery school? This year or next? Just like picking a quality child care program, you want to know a lot about a high quality preschool program and what is expected of you, as a parent.

**Find information on early learning opportunities for your preschooler**

Request a copy of As You Think About Child Care for Your Three- to Five-Year-Old from New York State Parents’ Connection.

1-800-345-KIDS

www.ocfs.state.ny.us

PBS online

Check out Public Service Broadcasting (PBS) online information on choosing a preschool or child care center.

www.pbs.org/parents/education/going-to-school

Find a Head Start Program in your community

Find a Head Start Program in your community

www.eclkc.ohs

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Research shows that children who engage in complex forms of socio-dramatic play have greater language skills than non-players, better social skills, more empathy, more imagination, and more of the subtle capacity to know what others mean. They are less aggressive and show more self-control and higher levels of thinking. (THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD, 2009)
A Protective Factor for Building a Strong Family: Helping Your Child Develop Social and Emotional Competence

You know your child better than anyone in very personal ways. You know her favorite foods, stories, and games. You know what makes her laugh and what makes her angry and sad. You know how to comfort her and to encourage her.

Your relationship with her is the model for relationships she will make for the rest of her life. Every day you are teaching her what to expect from another person. You are also teaching her about who she is and how other people see her.

You know when things are going well for her. And when you have a question about how she is doing. If and when things just don’t seem right, talk with her health care provider. It is one of the many ways you help your child be all she can be as she moves out into the world.

How do you think your child feels about herself? About other people?

Is your child comfortable spending time with other adults? Other children?

What are some of her favorite activities with other adults in her life? Other children?

How do you think the ways that you usually communicate with your child affects both the way your child feels about herself and feels about others?
CHAPTER SEVEN:
You and Your Fabulous Four-Year-Old
48 to 60 Months:
You and Your Fabulous Four-Year-Old

“Energetic,” “imaginative,” “social” and sometimes “impatient” describes a four-year-old. Typically, four-year-olds feel good about what they can do and want to explore new ideas. Sometimes they try things that they can’t yet do. Your job is to encourage your child’s desire for exploring and learning within safe, secure and reasonable boundaries.

To help her get ready for school, you may choose to have her attend a preschool for four-year-olds, such as free programs like your local pre-kindergarten or Head Start. Remember, while there will be other teachers in her life, you remain her first, most important and forever teacher. To find out about what preschool opportunities are in your community will take some time and you should feel very comfortable to ask to observe any program you are interested in.

Find a Head Start Program in your community
For eligible three- and four-year-olds, there are Head Start programs throughout the state. Find one in your community:

www.eclkc.ohs

NYS funded Prekindergarten
Call your local school district or visit their website to learn more.

Private Preschool
Find listings in your local phone directory under nursery school or preschool.
What might you see happening over the next 12 months as your child enters the second half of the preschool years?

Use the space below to jot down thoughts to remember and share with family members, friends, child’s child care or health care provider.

Sometime, during the next twelve months, here are some of the new things you will likely see your four-year-old do:

- Show interest in letters and words, especially letters in her own name and familiar signs (like a stop sign on the street) …and begin to identify some words and letters
- Be able to write some letters and maybe even her first name with help
- Have a vocabulary of over 1500 words
- Carry on a conversation for at least seven turns on the same topic
- Ask and answer lots of questions, even those you wish she didn’t ask!
- Tell you her own name, address, and phone number, if taught
- Use five to seven words in a sentence
- Retell a simple story, event or activity from the past day
- Count at least five objects correctly, count to twenty from memory, recognize some of the first numerals (1,2,3…)
- Understand spatial and size concepts like “biggest, smallest, more, in, under, above and behind”
- Understand the order of daily routines (Is it time for breakfast or lunch? What do you do before going to bed?)
- Explain what causes things to happen such as “the snowman melted because it was warm and sunny outside today”
- Plan and complete simple tasks
- Focus on an activity of interest for at least 10 minutes
- Name colors and shapes; sometimes name both together (e.g., red circle, blue square)
- Copy simple shapes and/or lines on paper
- Feed self, brush teeth, comb hair, wash hands and face, dress and use toilet with little assistance
- Run, jump, hop, stand on one foot, gallop and maybe skip with increasing skill
- Catch, kick, bounce and throw a ball with increasing ease
- Stack 10 or more blocks, building both high and wide
- Put together an 8-10 piece puzzle
- Form shapes and objects out of clay or playdough, use child-safe scissors to cut, draw a simple person with 4 body parts (e.g., head, trunk, leg, arm, nose, eye, mouth)
- Thread small beads/macaroni on a string
Take turns and share (most of the time)
Understand and follow simple directions and rules (most of the time)
Begin to understand danger but still need reminders
Have difficulty separating make-believe from reality, including an imaginary playmate
Enjoy pretend play and role playing
Identify a range of feelings (happy, mad, sad, tired, silly, scared, etc)
Express anger verbally rather than physically (most of the time) but still have a tantrum on occasion
Have “friends” and ask to play with them
Express affection for and seek help from trusted adults both in and out of home
Negotiate both with adults and friends to solve problems
Show empathy for another’s pain and feelings; try to comfort another person
Show awareness of gender and cultural traits of self and others
Show pride when feeling an accomplishment

What else have you seen?

As a parent of a four-year-old, you may:

Feel some deserved pride and amazement at what your four-year-old has become!

Experience a little sadness or discomfort when your four-year-old becomes attached to someone else and even expresses preference to be with that person

Wonder about your child’s readiness for school and what you need to do to help him prepare

Wonder about your own readiness to have your child enter school and how that may change both your lives

Find your conversations with your four-year-old quite entertaining and informative

Be surprised (both good and bad) at some of your four-year-old’s thinking!

Find it difficult to not always “step in and referee” when your child gets into conflict with another peer or sibling

Feel uncertain about your role as “first teacher” if your child is attending a preschool program. Remember, you are still the most important influence on your child

If you have a concern about your child’s development, your local school district has a Committee on Preschool Special Education who can answer questions and coordinate services for your child through preschool special education. Go to: www.p12.nysed.gov
What else do you notice about how you are growing as a parent?

Use these spaces to record your memories, thoughts and ideas

48 to 60 Months:
The Five Parenting Behaviors in Action

Let’s look at some of the ways you can nurture, protect, guide, communicate, and encourage your four-year-old’s curiosity and learning. As you read these ideas, personalize them and begin to think of new ones that will fit you, your preschooler and your family:

To Nurture Your Preschooler:

Your child is starting to see himself as a person who is part of a family, culture, neighborhood and wider community. That is called having a “sense of self.” You are his main model and support as he figures out his place in the world.

- **Be There!** Let him know you will be there when he needs help. Stay available and show true interest in new relationships he forms. Take time each day to talk through his adventures and challenges and his feelings about them!

- **Help him recognize and deal with feelings.** For example, you might say: “You seem to be scared or worried about something. Can you tell me about it?” Then talk about the cause of the feeling and how your child might handle it. “Oh, you don’t want to have a shot today at the doctor’s office? That can be scary, but we have shots to keep us healthy. Let’s figure out a way to make it less scary for you…how about holding my hand and squeezing it and together we will say ‘wheezzy, squeezy, toasted cheesy?’”

- **Talk about the feelings of characters in books you read together.** Connect what is happening in the story to your child’s feelings. Talk about how your child might feel in a similar situation and what he might do.

*DID YOU KNOW?*

Loving and responsive parenting helps children to see the world in a positive way and to expect that relationships with others will be rewarding. Children who display high levels of social competence typically enjoy parent-child relationships characterized by positive and agreeable interactions and acceptance. (COHN, PATTerson, & CHristoPoulouS, 1991)
• **Use creativity to teach about feelings.** Use drawing and painting, pretend play, and dancing and moving to express and talk about feelings while having fun together.

• **Talk about what others might be feeling (empathy).** Helping your child to understand another person’s perspective will help him build strong caring relationships throughout his life.

• **Check yourself!** Your little one needs to feel supported, loved and safe in dealing with both positive and negative feelings and behaviors. Model the behaviors you want your preschooler to use. If you generally manage your emotions and behaviors in a positive way, your little one will more likely do the same.

• **Show and teach** the values you want your child to have. Model and talk about values: “Thank you for picking up the trucks without my even asking, that’s being responsible.” “Your teacher told me that you were a great helper and listener today, that’s good cooperation and respect.”

## To Protect Your Four-Year-Old:

Four-year-olds have a growing sense of their abilities and understanding about what dangerous behaviors might lead to (“If I touch the candle, I may get hurt”). But they still need your support and direction to learn how to protect themselves and to avoid danger.

• **Establish outdoor safety rules.** Remind her often of outdoor safety rules such as: hold hands when crossing streets; stay on the sidewalk; and always use a helmet on bikes, scooters and skateboards (and any other moving toys). Keep an eye on her to be sure she follows these rules. When she makes a mistake (or ignores a rule on purpose) use it as a teaching opportunity: “You forgot to put your helmet on; remember you need that to ride your bike.”

• **Be aware on the playground.** Check the equipment, look for loose parts and sharp or rusty edges. Keep a close hand on your child as she tries out equipment until you are certain she can do it alone. Dress her safely: ties on hoods can strangle and flip flops are not a good choice for running and riding toys. Keep your eye on her.

• **Never leave your preschooler alone by any water—indoors or out.** It only takes seconds to drown and drowning is a leading cause of death of young children.

• **Child-proof, yet again!** Your child can run, jump, and climb into all sorts of places and spaces she couldn’t just a year ago. That means you always want to be thinking about what she might do or get into that could be dangerous and make sure that you have removed that potential danger.

• **Protect your child from “stranger danger”.** A rule you may want to consider: your child should never, ever go anywhere with a stranger or, for that matter, a relative or friend unless you (or another trusted caregiver) say it is okay.

• **Protect your child from unnecessary fears.** A four-year-old’s imagination is so active that when she becomes fearful of something, that fear is often magnified. Violence seen on TV is a typical source of fear in children. Turn these shows off.

• **Keep your preschooler healthy.** Continue all well-care appointments, scheduled immunizations, and health care provider recommendations. Encourage and supervise hand washing throughout the day. Serve healthy foods and be sure she gets enough sleep.

• **Use an approved forward facing car seat.** As your child grows, remember to check the car seat measurements—usually printed on a sticker located on the side of the car seat. It may be time for a booster, in the backseat! Make it a rule: that she can only undo her belt when the car is stopped and you have turned off the motor.

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**Child Safety Tips**

For information on how to keep your preschooler safe and healthy, visit:

[www.cdc.gov/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/parents)

For information on car safety, visit:

[www.safecar.gov/parents](http://www.safecar.gov/parents)
A four-year-old is filled with energy, imagination, drive, stubbornness, persistence, curiosity, creativity and confidence. This transition time between the very early years (birth to three) and entry into school is a “golden opportunity.” Use it to help your four-year-old learn and practice how you expect him to act within the family and community (self-regulation or self-control) and how to have positive interactions with peers and adults.

Help your child develop self-regulation. Self-regulation, sometimes called self-control, refers to your child’s ability to handle strong emotions, control his body’s movement and function and to focus and pay attention. For example, at times he can follow his bedtime routine happily even though you know he wanted to keep playing. Think about a classroom and you can see why your child’s ability to behave in these ways is so important.

DID YOU KNOW?

Tips to promote your preschooler’s self-regulation

Throughout this Guide, there have been many suggestions about ways to support the development of self-regulation. Here are some other ways that are great for four-year-olds:

- Play games that encourage body-control: Simon Says; Red Light-Green Light; Freeze Tag
- Play board games that require taking turns. (Don’t worry about the rules... your child will change them anyway!)
- Play games that require planning: Build a block wall. See who can match the most pairs of socks. Talk about what your child is thinking.
- Play: “What would you do if... you were a lion? It started to rain? You lost your shoe?” It promotes conversation, imagination and problem solving.
- Toss, roll, and kick a ball back and forth: This helps your child learn to wait and take turns.
- Talk about his feelings, show empathy: Encourage him to talk about ways to cope with his feelings.
- Encourage your child to use words and not physical actions when upset.
- Use natural and logical consequences to teach your child that his actions can affect him and others. Take the time to talk through what happened and how it could have been avoided.

A “natural consequence” is what happens as the result of your child’s action when you don’t interfere. For example, you ask your son to pick up his book. He doesn’t and an hour later finds that the dog has chewed it.

A “logical consequence” is one you create when it would be unsafe for your child to experience the results of his own actions. For example, you find your child riding his bike without his helmet, even though you reminded him to do so. You can’t let him continue to ride because that could be dangerous. A logical consequence would be: no bike riding for a day.

Give him the chance to make realistic choices. This gives your child practice making decisions and lets him know you value his thinking and choices.
To Communicate with Your Four-Year-Old:

By four years of age, a preschooler will understand the meaning of and be able to use at least 1000 words correctly. Experts think that, on average, a four-year-old learns four to five new words each day.

Your four-year-old will use more complex sentences and share more complex thinking. With practice, she will make fewer pronunciation and grammatical errors. She recognizes the sounds of letters more easily and will begin to identify words that begin with the same sounds (door, dog, doll) and end with the same sound (play, day, may).

She is likely to be interested in “reading” her name, words, signs, and simple words in favorite books. She will “read” you her favorite books, holding the book correctly, looking at and turning the pages correctly. She loves to listen to, tell, and participate in the story.

“Writing” is big. Whether scribbling, drawing shapes, copying letters in her name, or drawing lines and circles that resemble letters and numbers, she “knows” what she is writing and will happily read it to you.

- **Expand her vocabulary!** Introduce new and unusual words in your conversations, play and reading. Help her understand the meaning and how to use the words you introduce.

- **Play games that require listening and thinking!** Games like “I Spy” (“I spy something that has wings, and flies in the air and is resting on the window ledge right now!”) or “Who or What Am I?” (“I come by your house everyday of the week, I pick up children at the corner, I take them to school and I am yellow. What am I?”).

- **Talk together.** Try not to interrupt her when she is talking (which can go on and on) and remember to give her time to process what you are saying. You will learn a lot about your child’s thinking and feelings.

- **Ask lots of simple “what”, “where” and “why” questions.** They are great conversation starters. Give your preschooler time to listen so she can understand what is being asked and to use the right words to give a meaningful answer.

- **Read, read, and read.** Read her favorite books again and again. Ask questions: “What do you think is going to happen?” Invite her to look at the pictures for cues. Point out print on some of the pages. Eventually, she will begin to understand that you are reading words. At the end of the story, talk about what happened to get a sense of what she understood. For example, ask questions like: “What happened to the old lady who swallowed the fly?” Or “Why did Mama call the doctor and what did the doctor say?”

- **Have fun with stories.** Make up stories. Tell stories about when you were a child. Invite your child to tell a story and write it down so you can read it again and share it with others. Take turns adding a sentence to the story until you reach the end.

- **Plan a time each day to read with your child.** Bedtime is often when many families read together. However, she may be less attentive if she is getting sleepy. Keep your time together sharing books fun—not forced! Try to find another time (in addition to bedtime) when your child is able to fully participate with you.

- **Choose books on topics that interest your child.** Try to vary the books to include some wordless, predictable, rhyming and informational books about the topic.

- **Make your own stories and books.** Use photos or simple drawings for illustrations. Invite your preschooler to help by drawing pictures of the story you tell.

- **Talk about how books work and the parts of a book.** Point out the title, the author and the illustrator. Explain each. Have her locate the front of the book and turn to the first page. You are teaching “book mechanics.” It is an important part of learning to read.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Conversation that engages children in extended discussions around a topic offers many opportunities for children to hear new words and to then be able to make connections with what they already know. For example, that a sofa or chesterfield is more often called a couch. (Dickenson and Tabor, 2001)

**Libraries are a wonderful source of books for preschoolers.** To find your nearest library, visit: [www.nysl.nysed.gov](http://www.nysl.nysed.gov)
• **Point out letters and words in the environment.** Look for words and letters in the grocery store, on the bus or subway, streets, vehicles, buildings and in your own home. When she starts to point to print, encourage and praise her efforts: “How did you know that brown truck was UPS?”

• **Lend your child a hand in learning about letters.** Typically, children this age love to see their name in print…especially the first letter of their name. Let her copy and write her favorite letters. On paper, using chalk on the side walk, masking tape on the rug or Cool Whip on a cookie tray.

• **Make writing part of your preschooler’s everyday experience.** Make paper, notebooks, paints, pencils, crayons, markers, and chalk easily accessible. Invite her to help you “write” grocery lists, postcards, thank you notes and recipes of foods you make together. By this age, your preschooler should be able to follow rules about where and what she can write on so that she doesn’t make a mess with markers or paint.

• **Model how you want your child to communicate!** Show how you listen, talk, read and write. Share her pleasure in her growing ability to communicate through speaking, listening, reading and writing… and always keep it fun.

• **Give your preschooler simple directions.** By this time, she can usually respond to three step directions given in sequence. “Can you put the red truck away, bring your favorite book here and climb up beside me?”

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To Encourage Your Four-Year-Old to Explore and Learn:

Over the last four years, you have been helping your child get ready for school. Remember giving him little bits of food to pick up with his thumb and tiny pointer finger (pincer grasp) when he was a baby? That was the start of skills he now uses to pick up and hold a crayon to write. Who would have thought that the pincer grasp in infancy was an early writing skill? Now it is time to refine and expand those skills. Here are some ways to encourage your child’s learning:

• **Be a partner in pretend play—sometimes.** If your child invites you to play a role either with other children or when alone, by all means join in. Take the role assigned to you and follow your child’s lead. It’s alright to suggest ideas to add to the play—just be sure he gets the last word.

• **Offer interesting props.** Are there things around the house that might make his play more interesting? For example, if your child and a friend are searching for dinosaurs, make a cave by putting a sheet over a table, offer them a book about dinosaurs, or cut a paper towel tube in half and tape the halves together to make a pair of binoculars.

• **Build on your child’s natural interest in science.** Your little scientist is thinking about how things work and wants to try out his ideas. To motivate your child’s thinking, ask questions like: “I wonder why…? What do you think might happen if…? How does that happen…?” Encourage scientific thinking as you talk about cookie dough turning into a cookie, popcorn popping, toys floating and sinking in the bathtub, insects, worms, growing seeds and clouds.

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

Children who demonstrated higher level skills when entering kindergarten were, on the whole, those who experienced interesting talk, with lots of new words, and literacy activities such as frequent and varied book reading with different people. (Dickinson, D., & Tabor, P., 2001)
Moving On and Moving Up!

As parents look back over the early years of their child’s life, they often find that some memories are clear while others are blurred. This is because so much development happens in a very short time and it’s hard to remember it all. Now, you and your child are entering a new phase, ending preschool and beginning the new journey into school age years.

Generally, in Kindergarten, there are more children in the classroom than in preschool. Children are typically expected to be attentive for longer periods of time, to be able to play cooperatively with many other children and to follow the “rules and rhythm” of the classroom. With larger numbers of children, teachers are not able to give the same level of attention that preschoolers are used to in smaller classrooms. These expectations can be stressful to a child, whether or not they have been in preschool. Your encouragement and support are very important to your child during this transition period.

• Surround your child with math. Teaching children to count from 1-10 is a great skill (rote learning) but it is also important to help them learn the meaning of the numbers. Help your child learn math concepts by encouraging hands-on learning as you ask questions like: “Can you get mommy three spoons?” or “How many blocks did you stack?” Give him opportunities to match and sort things: “Can you find two socks that match?” Provide lots of opportunities for your child to compare two objects and talk about what is bigger, the same, smaller, faster, slower, heavier and lighter.

• Give your child lots of opportunities to move his body! A four-year-old continues to refine existing skills and add new skills in both small (fine) and large (gross) motor development. At this age, children are not designed to sit still for long. Activities that help support gross motor skills include catching and throwing with others and at targets, hopping, skipping, jumping, running, walking backwards, bike riding, and balancing on one foot to name a few. Fine motor activities include painting, scribbling, drawing, writing, cutting with scissors, using playdough, puzzles, stringing objects and building/stacking objects.

• Look for opportunities for him to be with other children. Take some time to learn what activities are available outside the home for your preschooler to attend. Is your child now in a preschool, prekindergarten, Head Start or nursery school program? (Remember that NYS funded prekindergarten and Head Start are both free preschool programs.) Are there community activities or play groups that you could take your child to? Check out libraries in preschool age programs, and even the school where your child will be enrolled for Kindergarten.
It will be a change for you too. You may find you have mixed feelings: excitement that he’s going to school, sadness that he’s no longer a baby, pride about what he has learned and can already do, concern about his readiness to “separate” from you (and you from him) and uncertainty about your role as a parent of a school age child. Know that you continue to be your child’s most influential and important teacher! No one can take your place! While everything your child learns in school is important, what he learns from you has deeper and more lasting value. Your child will follow your lead; if you are positive and encouraging, you will make the transition to school easier for your child.

Throughout this Guide, there were places to think about ways that you could promote a safe, secure and responsive home for your child and family. As you did this and practiced the five parenting behavior skills, you were preparing your child for success in school and life. Remember these skills are:

- **Nurturing**: building a relationship with your child to help her grow and learn
- **Protecting**: keeping your child safe; coping with everyday challenges
- **Guiding**: teaching your child how to manage his behavior
- **Communicating**: interacting with your child to develop her language skills
- **Supporting your child’s learning**: encouraging his curiosity of the world

Use and grow these five skills as you continue your parenting journey. Most importantly, remember and celebrate that you are and always will be your child’s most important teacher and life-long influence.

**REFERENCES:**


CHAPTER EIGHT:

Where to Find More Information:
A guide to resources
Where to Find More Information: A guide to resources

Throughout this Guide, there are many resources listed, providing more information or guidance on a topic. New York State offers many services, and the list below is just a sample of what is available to help you and your family. Many of these resources are agencies that can also refer you to the right services in your area. The web can also provide more information and contacts. We hope the list below is a good starting point for finding the information, resources and support you need for your baby, toddler or preschooler.

Breastfeeding

NYS Growing Up Healthy Helpline
Find your local WIC office:
1-800-522-5006 SPANISH, ENGLISH
1-800-655-1789 TTY ACCESS

There are breastfeeding counselors available at most WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Offices for women and children who qualify for WIC, based on low-income status.

Breastfeeding Partners
www.breastfeedingpartners.org

An updated website on breastfeeding and many of the challenges associated with breastfeeding such as going back to school and/or work.

La Leche League
1-877-452-5324
www.llli.org

The mission of La Leche League is to help mothers to breastfeed through mother-to-mother support, encouragement, information, and education, and to promote a better understanding of breastfeeding as an important element in the healthy development of the baby and mother.
Car Seat Safety

SafeNY
1-888-327-4236
www.safeny.ny.gov

Find requirements regarding infant car seats and booster seats for children up to age 8, as well as free car seat inspections in your community.

National Highway Traffic Administration
www.safecar.gov

Click the “Parent Central” tab for tips on children’s safety when they are on the move, i.e., in cars, on bicycles.

Child Care

Child Care Resource and Referral Center
1-800-345-KIDS (1-800-345-5437)
www.ocfs.ny.gov/main

Click on “Child Care” to find a directory of child care resource and referral centers supported by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services, to help parents find quality child care at affordable prices.

QUALITYstarsNY
www.qualitystarsny.org

This site includes a helpful checklist to use when choosing child care; explains New York’s quality rating system for both home and center-based child care sites. Click the “Parents & Families” tab.

Developmental Concerns

Birth to Age Three

Center for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov

Search “Learn the Signs Act Early” and “Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive.”

NYS Growing Up Healthy Helpline
1-800-522-5006 SPANISH, ENGLISH
1-800-655-1789 TTY ACCESS

Find your local Early Intervention Program, part of a statewide initiative for any child between infancy and age three who qualifies for extra support and/or therapies.

New York State Department of Health
www.health.ny.gov


Age Three to Five

Committee on Preschool Special Education
www.p12.nysed.gov

Every local school district offers this committee, which will evaluate and coordinate services for your child (ages 3-5) through preschool special education.

Dental Care for Infants and Toddlers

American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry
www.mychildrensteeth.org

Provides the latest information and data on children’s dental and oral healthcare and tips on the care of children’s teeth from infancy. Answers to specific issues are also available.

New York State Dental Association
www.nysdental.org

Search for a pediatric dentist in your area by typing in your zip code; how many miles you can travel, choose “pediatric” under specialty and hit the submit button. It does not provide insurance information, so you need to call to verify before your appointment.

Food, Nutrition, Food Stamps, WIC Assistance

NYS Growing Up Healthy Helpline
1-800-522-5006 SPANISH, ENGLISH
1-800-655-1789 TTY ACCESS

Find your local WIC office, WIC services and information on nutrition, access to nutritional foods.

Immunization Schedules

Center for Disease Control and Prevention
www2a.cdc.gov

Create a schedule of immunizations for your child based on his/her birth date. The schedule can be printed, so you can track immunizations from birth through age 12. American Academy of Pediatrics reviews and updates the schedules annually. Be sure to check the site for the latest immunization schedule.

Health Insurance

New York State of Health
www2ny.ny.gov

This is New York’s official health plan marketplace.

Mental Health and Wellness

New York State Prevention and Parent Helpline
1-800-CHILDREN (1-800-246-3776)

Helpline is open from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day and provides confidential support for anyone coping with the stress of parenting.

Find Treatment
www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

This search engine is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Locate mental health services by agency, address and contact number in your area. Click the “show” button on the left side of list to find available services and accepted insurance plans.

New York State HOPEline
1-800-245-3736

Anonymous and confidential help 24-hours a day, 365 days a year for alcoholism, drug abuse and problem gambling.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Locator
www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

This search engine is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Locate mental health services by agency, address and contact number in your area. Click the “show” button on the left side of list to find available services and accepted insurance plans.

New York State Growing Up Healthy Helpline
1-800-522-5006 SPANISH, ENGLISH
1-800-655-1789 TTY ACCESS

Confidential support and referrals for emotional health services for pregnant or postpartum women.

New York State HOPEline
1-877-8-HOPENY (1-877-846-7669)

www.oasas.ny.gov

Anonymous and confidential help 24-hours a day, 365 days a year for alcoholism, drug abuse and problem gambling.
Pregnancy and Baby’s First Year

Text4baby
www.text4baby.org

Sign up for this free text messaging service for pregnant women and newborns. Sent three times a week, texts include information on having a healthy pregnancy and baby and are timed to a woman’s due date or the baby’s date of birth. Subjects include: prenatal care, labor and delivery, breastfeeding, car seat safety, nutrition, safe sleep, and help to stop smoking. Texts include 1-800 numbers and other resources for more information.

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS):
www.pbs.org/parents

Your local PBS station offers excellent television programs and a website to help your preschooler get ready for school. You can also find information on child development and parenting tips.

Universal Pre-K
www.nysed.gov

Search for “UPK Directory” to find a list, by town and city, of New York State’s free Universal Prekindergarten programs. The Office of Early Learning hosts a parent resources page.

Head Start and Early Head Start
www.eclkc.ohs

Find your local Head Start and Early Head Start—a free early childhood program for eligible families.

Public Libraries

Libraries in New York State
www.nypl.nysed.gov

Find your local library with this directory of public libraries across New York State.

Reading and download one-page information sheets on topics including brain development, parent stress, etc.

New York State Office of Children & Family Services
1-800-345-KIDS (1-800-345-5437)
www.oeks.ny.gov

Go to “Child Care” tab, search “Info for Parents” and “Resources for Families.”

Get your free copy of Ask You Think About Child Care for Your Three to Five Year Old, a free checklist to help in choosing child care and preschool services. Click on “Child Care” for other parent resources.

Public Libraries

Libraries in New York State
www.nypl.nysed.gov

Find your local library with this directory of public libraries across New York State.

Safety

Center for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov

An excellent list of safety concerns, both in and out of the home, visit the website and look for “Safety in the Home and Community” sections by age group.

National Safety Council
www.nsc.org/news

Key safety tips can be found at the “At Home & In the Community” page.

Kids Health
www.kidshealth.org

Find information on baby proofing your home and other safety tips. Look for the “First Aid & Safety” section.

National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome
www.dontshake.org

Offers awareness programs to prevent infant abuse such as the Period of PURPLE Crying by helping parents understand the frustrating features of crying in normal infants.

New York State Office of Children & Family Services
1-800-345-KIDS (1-800-345-5437)
www.oeks.ny.gov

Go to “Prevention” tab and click on “Keeping Children Safe” including coping tips and information about shaken baby syndrome.

New York State Department of Health–Bureau of Injury Prevention
1-518-473-1143
www.nyhealth.gov

Search for “Child Injury Prevention” to find safety fact sheets for children from birth to 19 years and toolkits on several topics including shaken baby syndrome.

Sleep

Infant

Baby Safe Sleep
www.babysafesleep.org

Find out ways to keep your baby safe when sleeping and making good choices about sleep environments for infants and toddlers.

American Academy of Pediatrics
www.healthychildren.org

Look for “Vomiting” and “End of Crying” pages.

Find your local PBS station offers excellent television programs and a website to help your preschooler get ready for school. You can also find information on child development and parenting tips.

More Information
nysparentguide.org

Smoking Cessation

Your OB/GYN or Primary Health Care Provider

Your OB/GYN or primary health care provider offers patients valuable resources to stop smoking.

New York State Smokers’ Quitline
1-866-NY-QUITS (1-866-697-8487)
www.nyquits.org

Find free tobacco replacement products and information on quitting smoking.

New York City Smokers’ Quitline
311
nyc.gov/nycquits

NYC residents can find free tobacco replacement products and information on quitting smoking.

Find free tobacco replacement products and information on quitting smoking.

Find additional resources and begin e-journal to track your baby’s progress.
New York State Parenting Education Partnership is convened by the Council on Children and Families, NYS Office of Children and Family Services, NYS Office of Mental Health and Prevent Child Abuse New York. nyspep.org

In partnership with the New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council. nysecac.org