Promoting Developmentally Appropriate Behavior

Children go through many changes as they develop from birth to 5 years of age, and no two children develop at the same pace. One child may reach a milestone early, another later. Children born prematurely tend to reach milestones a little later. And it is not unusual for a child to regress in one skill or another from time to time. What matters is that the child progresses from one stage to another at a fairly steady pace.

Promoting developmentally appropriate behavior in young children

The following are some suggestions for promoting developmentally appropriate behaviors in children whose ages range from birth to 5 years.

Birth –12 months

- Hold, rock, and move with your infant.
- Respond quickly when your infant is crying. This lets him or her know you will be there when needed. It also may lessen the time your baby cries.
- Gentle massage helps to calm some infants and may promote attachment.
- This is especially good for babies who were born prematurely.
- Communicate with your infant by talking, making faces, singing, and reading.
- Make eye contact with your infant during feedings, diaper changes, and baths.
Establish a routine and stick to it as much as possible. But don’t get upset if the routine is disrupted a few times.
Expose your infant to things that are stimulating. For example, books, plush toys, and mobiles are visually stimulating.
Learn your infant’s cues and act on them. Too much stimulation, for example, can overwhelm a baby.
Interact with your baby by imitating what he or she is doing—noises, faces, etc.
Take walks around the house and outside, and name the things you see.
Use your infant’s name when interacting with him or her.
As your infant gets older, make interactive games longer and more involved.
Make a safe place on the floor for your infant to explore the surroundings.

12 – 36 months
Communicate with your toddler in the same tone and rhythm you use with adults—not baby talk. Use short phrases and requests, and encourage verbal give and take.
Respond consistently so your toddler learns what to expect.
Give your toddler things that are visually stimulating. With your toddler, label and discuss things you find in picture books, magazines, and catalogs.
Take walks and name the things you see.
Make a safe place for your toddler to explore the surroundings.
Place a toy under a blanket and help your toddler find it.
Water play with cups and measuring spoons is a good sensory activity.
Playing with toy strollers, wagons, and walkers exercise new walking skills.
Figurines of animals and people promote classification skills and pretend play.
Make reading a daily activity. Encourage labeling, naming, and making noises.
Use finger play and interactive songs to promote fine motor skills.
Give your toddler empty kitchen containers to use in pretend play.
Trucks and wagons that hold and transport things promote large motor skills and encourage pretend play.
With older toddlers, play games that involve matching things such as animals and people with different occupations.
Give older toddlers different art supplies, such as washable paints and markers, crayons, and chalk. These promote fine motor skills and encourage imagination.
Promote creative play by giving your child everyday items to pretend with, such as wooden spoons and bowls or a sheet to put over chairs to make a play house.

Give your child arts and craft supplies, such as crayons, chalk, round-ended scissors, and colored paper.

Read to your children every day. Allow them to choose books at the library.

Take walks and allow your children to set the pace.

Allow plenty of time to investigate and collect things.

Label things you see on the walk and discuss them.

Play board games and other games that involve luck rather than skill, such as Candyland with younger children or matching and counting games.

Give your toddler simple puzzles with five to 10 pieces.

Provide lots of science and math tools, and encourage your child to use them. For example, use a magnifying glass to look at things you find on a walk, and use a ruler to measure things and compare lengths and heights.

Give your child old or outdated clothing and shoes for dress-up play.

Involve your child in daily cooking. For example, allow him or her to prepare food, measure, mix, and stir.

You can promote hand-eye coordination by playing games such as bean bag toss, bowling, and ring toss.

Giving your child three-wheel toys, such as a tricycle or toy wheelbarrow, will help develop their hand-eye-foot coordination.

You can help your child develop gross motor skills by going on walks, playing outdoors, playing on playground equipment, dancing, swimming, and gardening, such as raking and digging.