Promoting Developmentally Appropriate Behavior

You & Your Foster Child

A guide for foster parents

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.

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- 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.

3 – 5 years

- 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.