

Early Learning

Target Audience: Parents & Family Members

Tone: Supportive and encouraging

Overview: This should inform families of their role in supporting their child in the first 3 years and explain the important things a child learns during this time, the benefits of supporting the child, and how best to support them.

The Importance of Early Learning

From first words to first steps, so much happens in a child's first few years of life. While infants and toddlers ages 0 – 3 are busily growing their social and emotional worlds, families play a key role in supporting and encouraging development. You are probably already doing things that will help your child grow and develop. Here are some ideas to help you do even more for them, little things that don't take extra time or money but can make a big difference in your child's overall growth.

The first three years of a child's life is full of learning. You could say that learning is a child's job. They spend their time learning how to focus, how to move, how to feed themselves, and the very important job of learning language. Language development, the ability to listen, understand and learn the names of people and things, is the foundation for all of life's communication.

Early learning for infants

You and others close to your child are the most important teachers for your infant. Infants learn when you talk, sing and read to them, even if they don't yet understand or are unable to respond. Hearing words and patterns of speech are important building blocks for future speech. As your infant looks at you and listens to you, they learn how to respond to words and expressions. It's also important for you to respond to your child— their smiles, coos and cries are how they communicate. That's why cuddling, touching and making eye contact are so important for infants. They are also ways to bond and build a close relationship with your child.

Early learning and toddler milestones

As your infant grows into a toddler, you'll see them achieve more milestones, like waving bye-bye, recognizing their name, saying new words and getting around by walking and climbing. You can help them reach these growth markers by providing support, encouragement and opportunity. Now's the time to introduce toys like easy puzzles and shape sorters. Continue reading daily, and help your toddler point to and name objects in books and around the house. Sign up for storytimes at your local library and bring home new age-appropriate picture books

and puppets. Talk to your toddler about what you are doing, like "Mama is washing the dishes" and what they are doing, like "Are you pulling off your socks?" to help them make the connection between words and their meaning.

Early Learning for ages 2 – 3 years old

Every day your little one will come up with a new word or skill, like kicking a ball or jumping. Between the ages of 2 and 3 years old, watch them enjoy make believe play, show care or concern for friends and be able to do basic tasks like feeding and dressing themselves. Help them with plenty of opportunities to try new things and keep encouraging them with smiles and praise.

You will want to keep reading to your toddler every day. Allow them to show off some of their new independence by asking them to pick out a favorite story, hold the book or turn the pages. Puppet and finger play games also let your toddler use new language and movement skills and take the lead in playing together. Encourage make believe play by singing songs to an audience of stuffed animals. Engage your child's imagination by placing crayons or pudding paint out for experimentation.

Toddlers of this age can be challenging as they show a wide range of emotions, delighted with new things one minute, then having a tantrum over the end of a play session in the next minute. Remember that your child doesn't act up just to make you mad. There's usually a reason or something going on that she can't put into words. Many times, it's something as simple as they're tired or hungry, or frustrated, or coming down with a cold. A nap or a healthy snack can usually fix the problem.

Where to find more information

One great source of information and tips for every stage of your child's development is the free Center for Disease Control [Milestone Tracker app](#), which families can download for free. With it you can track your child's development and milestones, while learning tips on how to encourage them as they grow and reach each milestone.

Your child is shaped by all that they experience. So, it is important to make sure that everyone who watches them supports and encourages them to learn and develop, both in and out of the home. This is true for grandparents, neighbors, family and other child care providers. To get tips on how to select quality child care, visit [Great Start to Quality](#).

When Early Learning happens late

Sometimes, your child doesn't reach an expected milestone at the expected time, also known as a developmental delay. If you think this might be the case, talk to your pediatrician. In addition to wellness visits, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children be screened for general developmental milestones at regular times. If you get help addressing developmental delays between birth and age 3, you can make a difference in your child's

development well past the school age years. Ask your pediatrician or call [Early On Michigan](#) at 1-800-EARLY-ON for a referral.

For more information and ideas about how you can help your child learn and thrive, visit michigan.gov/mikidsmatter.