



# Families

## Learn & Grow Together



MASSACHUSETTS  
Department of  
Early Education and Care



## Ideas to Help Your Child Learn and Grow

**Learn & Grow Together** was developed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) to help you understand and nurture your child. It provides general information about the stages of child development and suggestions for fun activities you can do as a family to help your children learn and grow.

Parents are a child's first and most important teachers and it is in the everyday routines that great learning opportunities happen. This information is meant to be a source of simple and fun ideas and to be a reminder to make the most of every minute!

Each child and family is different. Children learn and grow at their own pace and in their own unique and wonderful way. Families also have their own special and unique traditions. There are many ways that families can learn and grow together—more than what is included in this guide. You can also talk with your friends and other parents to share more good ideas and activities that create meaningful moments for your family.

If you would like more information or links to other resources, please visit our website at [www.eec.state.ma.us](http://www.eec.state.ma.us).

**EEC's Mission:** To lead the way in helping Massachusetts children and families reach their full potential. By providing and coordinating a range of services and assistance, EEC will continuously improve the quality, affordability, and accessibility of early education and care in the Commonwealth.



# How to Use Learn & Grow Together

**Learn & Grow Together** is organized into seven sections: five represent a stage in your child's development; one section focuses on you; and the last section includes website links that provide helpful information. Each section features fun activities and useful tips. The activity and tips page is interactive, meaning that you can check off any of the activities or tips on your computer, add your own ideas, and print them for reference.

**Simply click on the section that interests you, or just scroll through the whole document.**

## Sections of Learn & Grow Together

### Growing Every Day

Infants (Birth to 15 Months)

### On the Move

Toddlers (15 to 36 Months)

### Imagination on the Go

Preschoolers (3 and 4 Years)

### Curiosity Rules

Young School-Age (5 to 9 Years)

### Young Minds at Work:

School-Age (10 to 14 Years)

### Parents Learn & Grow Too!

### Helpful Links

# Infants (Birth to 15 Months)



## Growing Every Day

**Infant development is amazing!** At the end of 12 months, your baby can be three times his birth weight and twice his birth length. Babies follow a similar path of development, yet each is unique. Here is what you can expect to see during the first 15 months of life:

**Babies first gain control** over their heads and then their bodies in the early months of life.

**Rolling over, sitting, crawling, walking, and moving** with a purpose can happen over the course of the first 12-15 months.

**Babies are like sponges**, soaking up all of the talk around them. Thus, talking, singing, reading, and interacting with your baby becomes critical to the development of language. Television and videos are not a substitute for face-to-face interaction with a loving caregiver.

**Babies coo and babble**, but the main way they communicate is by crying. As every parent quickly learns, their baby's cries can change when they are hungry, tired, wet, frightened, or overwhelmed. Responding to infants' crying and holding them often is important and develops a sense of trust.

**Babies have their own temperaments and rates of growth**, as well as their own routine of feeding and sleeping. Each relationship between family and baby is special and unique!

For more information, see the [Helpful Links](#) section.

# Interactive Reference List

(check off ideas and tips, add new ones, and print)

## More Ideas and Tips

Use this space to type in (or print and write in) other ideas that you have.

## Activities to Help You Learn & Grow Together



**Play with simple toys:** Your baby can drop, roll, and chew soft and colorful toys, such as stacking cubes, rattles and soft blocks.



**Use toys at bath time:** Use toys that float or sink. Splash and play with these water toys and always keep one hand on your baby during bath time.



**Sing through routines:** Repeat lullabies, finger plays and games like pat-a-cake and peek-a-boo to help build language skills. Your baby loves the sound of your voice!



**Babies love to look at themselves in the mirror:** Provide child-safe mirrors for the car, stroller or play space. Point and say "here is your nose, there is your mouth, I see your eyes..."



**Read to your baby:** Look at chunky board books with colorful pictures or photographs. Let baby hold the book and turn the pages. This builds a solid foundation for literacy and school readiness.

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## Parenting Tips



**Have a daily routine:** Provide a predictable daily routine for your baby. This gives your baby a sense of security and safety.



**Respond to your baby's cries:** Immediately tuning in to your baby's needs develops attachment and trust. You cannot spoil your baby by responding right away.



**Make sleep-time safe:** Avoid toys, blankets, and pillows in your baby's sleeping area and always put your baby to sleep on his/her back.

If you have questions or concerns about your child's growth or development, use this guide to talk with your child's caregiver, pediatrician, or a teacher at your child's school. If you would like more information or links to other resources, please visit our website at [www.eec.state.ma.us](http://www.eec.state.ma.us).

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# Toddlers (15 to 36 Months)



## On The Move

**Toddlers are busy and eager** explorers with small bodies and big feelings! Toddlers are trying to do things for themselves but still need to be reassured by the adults in their lives. They are experiencing the world and trying to make sense of it all at the same time. Here is what you can expect to see in the toddler years:

**Vocabulary takes off.** Toddlers are learning many new words and putting them together.

**Toddlers start using words** to interact with parents and other people in their lives. This stage is marked by the frequent use of favorite toddler words: "No," "Mine," and "I do it!"

**On the move!** Crawling, dancing, rolling, and running all contribute to a toddler's growth.

**Although they often get frustrated, this is just a temporary stage.** As toddlers develop more language, an understanding of how things work and what to expect, their frustrations melt away rather than melt down.

**Toddlers are straightforward, concrete thinkers** who truly believe a kiss and hug can make things all better!

For more information, see the [Helpful Links](#) section.

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## Activities to Help You Learn & Grow Together



**Turn a walk into learning time:** Talk about what you see, like the colors of cars, or count the number of dogs. Let your child share her ideas with you and expand on what she says!



**Sing your way through routines:** Take a familiar or favorite tune, such as "Row, row, row your boat," and use words to match your activities, such as "Brush, brush, brush your teeth."



**Visit your local public library:** Check out new books to bring home and look at together. Children's librarians can help you find books to read with your child and may host special story times for toddlers.

## Parenting Tips



**Be patient with your little explorer:** Toddlers need to repeat activities many times until they can predict what will happen in a given situation.



**Acknowledge feelings:** Give your child words for what he is feeling. "I know you are sad." He has to know you understand him before he can listen to you.



**Redirect:** Head off a tantrum by offering another activity when you see your child is becoming frustrated. As you play with your child, you will learn to tune into the signs that she needs a change of scene.

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# Preschool Years (3 & 4 Years)



## Imagination On The Go

**Preschoolers are active** and more confident of how their bodies move. Here is what you can expect at this stage:

**They like to use their fingers** to build with blocks, use crayons, and do puzzles.

**You will see great growth** in your child's language, imagination, and ability to play with other children.

**They are curious about the world** and want to understand how everything works. They often ask questions and share their own stories and experiences.

**This stage often marks the development of imaginary play** and role playing, when children create rich and involved fantasies.

**Busy preschoolers have a growing interest in playing** cooperatively with other children. All the time you spent encouraging your toddler to take turns now pays off!

**Preschoolers learn concepts** of reading, math, writing, and science as part of their play and everyday routines!

For more information, see the [Helpful Links](#) section.





# Young School-Age (5 to 9 Years)



## Curiosity Rules

**When children start** the formal school years, they become more independent and their world begins to expand. Here is what you can expect at this stage:

**Children are experiencing physical growth and changes** at this stage. They are becoming stronger, have better coordination, and more energy.

**Your child's natural curiosity** is also flourishing! You may be asked to respond to their questions with greater detail. In return, your child is able to relate experiences and solve problems with more depth and logic.

**An understanding** of the difference between fantasy and reality emerges.

**As they become confident readers**, school-age children may enjoy reading a book on their own.

**During this stage, your child is forming more relationships** outside of the home with peers, teachers, coaches, and others.

**In order to embrace your child's expanding world**, participate in their school or after school (organized and/or informal) activities. Allowing your young school age child to be more independent and active in his or her environment will enhance family moments.

For more information, see the [Helpful Links](#) section.

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## Activities to Help You Learn & Grow Together



**Engage with story starters:** Begin to tell a story and stop at a suspenseful moment. Let your child continue the story using his own thoughts and imagination.



**Plan a scavenger hunt:** Encourage your child to partner with a sibling or friend. Let each team select a few items to hide in the home or designated area. Teams may give hints for hard to find objects.



**Talk about current events:** While reading the newspaper, waiting at the bus stop, or eating dinner, talk about an article or current event. Encourage your child to give her reaction and share her perspective or thoughts.

## Parenting Tips



**Reinforce mastered skills:** Give children opportunities to be successful in new activities that build on skills that they have already learned.



**Encourage humor:** Humor in your daily communications with your child can enhance positive family experiences.



**Set reasonable limits:** Provide consistent and loving support to your independent learner as he becomes skilled at making his own choices.

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# School Age (10 to 14 Years)



## Young Minds At Work

**There is noticeable** growth and change in the child of 10-14 years. Here is what you can expect at this stage:

**During these years**, physical exercise, good nutrition, and an appropriate amount of sleep are important.

**Their young minds are able to understand logical** and abstract thinking. They are learning quickly and need to be challenged in new and exciting ways.

**You may notice that your child is now able to concentrate** for longer periods of time and can memorize and recall larger amounts of information.

**Puberty begins** sometime in this age span and varies from child to child.

**Children may show an interest in sports or the arts** while others may be more social and concerned about their relationship with friends.

**Your 10-14 year old is working to develop his or her own identity** and may worry about "fitting in."

**Encourage independence by** giving them some control over their lives but remember they still need direction, understanding, support, and positive reinforcement from the adults in their life. As a result, you should see that they are capable of using good judgment and accepting responsibility for their actions.

For more information, see the [Helpful Links](#) section.

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## Activities to Help You Learn & Grow Together



**Create a dictionary:** Have your child write a word and its definition and then decorate the page. Hang on the fridge and talk about ways to use the word in a sentence. After a few days, pick out another word! Collect the pages and create a “child’s” dictionary!



**Have a “game night”:** Games promote the every day skills of cooperation, honesty, and making choices. Games strengthen skills used in school such as memorization, spelling, problem-solving, and taking turns.



**Talk about when you were growing up as a child:** Telling family stories and history can be the beginning of tracing the family tree. Children can interview other family members, write out the stories, and use photographs to create a family scrapbook.

## Parenting Tips



**Positive reinforcements:** Give support to your child through open communication. Give the message: “We can talk about anything.” You can promote a trusting and positive self image in your child.



**Set up a homework area:** A stationary work space, a specific time set aside for the task, and perhaps a “no TV” rule can help your child concentrate. Try to be available to answer any questions or help with homework.



**Safe internet use:** Make internet use a family activity and support your child’s responsible and safe exploration of the web.

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# Parents Learn & Grow Too!



## Make Time for You

**Before a baby is born**, parents may have an image of the kind of parents they will be. As your child grows, you need opportunities to set realistic expectations for yourself and your child. New parents and babies are forming attachments to each other and it is this time of physical and emotional closeness that sets the stage for future development. As the relationship grows in the toddler years, parents may discover their own parenting style—somewhere between laidback and firm.

Regardless of your style, routine and structure are important to your child. Parents play the primary role of helping their children understand the world around them during the preschool and school-age years. Parents continue to provide guidance and support as children become preadolescents, while respecting their emerging independence and keeping the channels of communication open. The role of parenting can make you feel great joy and humility. Giving yourself permission to focus on your own needs will allow you to bring your best energy and thinking to the exciting, rewarding and challenging role of parenting.

For more information, see the [Helpful Links](#) section.

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## Activities to Help Take Care of You



**Spend time doing activities that you enjoy** and that make you feel good.



**Find a few tasks or activities** that you can easily “let go” to make life less busy.



**Talk with other parents about parenting** for joint problem solving, laughter, and insight.



**When you take out library books with your children**, take out a book for you, too.



**Make time to get outdoors** – finding a safe place to take a twenty minute walk can change your outlook on the day.



**If life events feel overwhelming**, contact a friend, family member or professional for support. We all have these moments.



**Listen to books on tape or CD** while you commute to work or travel to run errands.



**Take advantage of free events** in your community – lectures, musical events, or conferences.



**Allow yourself to dream** – write down your goals and priorities.

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# Selected Helpful Links

-  Administration for Children and Families [www.acf.hhs.gov/index.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/index.html)
-  American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry [aacap.org/cs/root/facts\\_for\\_families/facts\\_for\\_families](http://aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/facts_for_families)
-  American Academy of Pediatrics [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)
-  Federation for Children with Special Needs [fcsn.org/index.php](http://fcsn.org/index.php)
-  Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care [www.eec.state.ma.us](http://www.eec.state.ma.us)
-  Massachusetts Department of Public Health [www.mass.gov/dph](http://www.mass.gov/dph)
-  Massachusetts Department of Social Services [www.mass.gov/dss](http://www.mass.gov/dss)
-  Massachusetts Department of Education [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu)
-  MassResources.Org [www.massresources.org/](http://www.massresources.org/)
-  Massachusetts School Age Coalition [www.mass-sac.org](http://www.mass-sac.org)
-  National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies [www.naccrra.org](http://www.naccrra.org)
-  National Association for the Education of Young Children [www.naeyc.org/families](http://www.naeyc.org/families)
-  One Tough Job [www.onetoughjob.org](http://www.onetoughjob.org)
-  Partnership for a Drug Free America [www.drugfree.org/Parent](http://www.drugfree.org/Parent)
-  Tufts University Child & Family Web Guide [www.cfw.tufts.edu](http://www.cfw.tufts.edu)
-  U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov)
-  U.S. Department of Education [www.ed.gov/index.jhtml](http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml)
-  Zero to Three [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)