



# 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

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Infants (Birth to 15 Months)

### On the Move

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### Imagination on the Go

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# 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.



# 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.



# 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.



# 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.



# 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.



# Selected Helpful Links

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