

# Getting Your Child Ready for School

A Parent's Toolkit

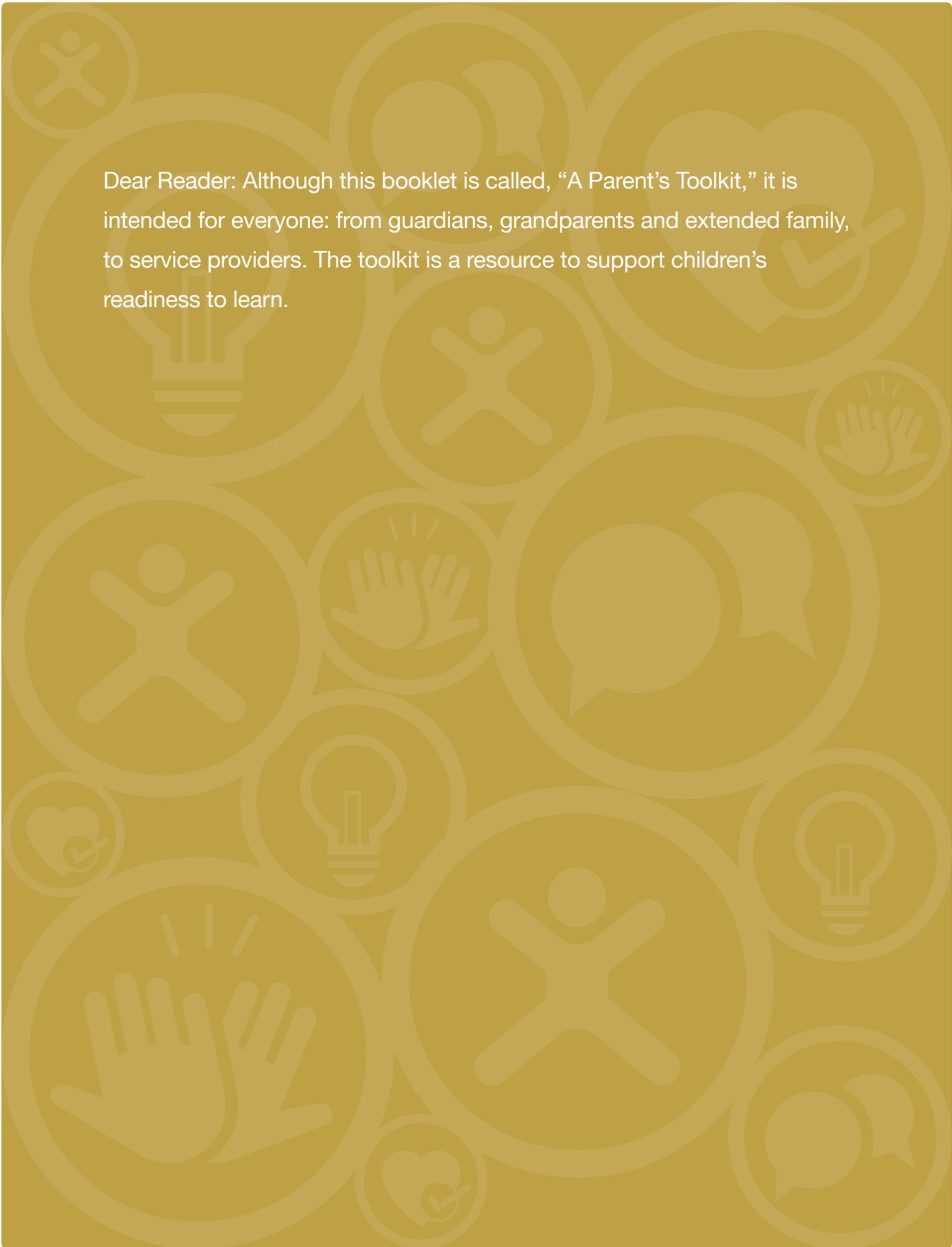


Children & Families  
Commission  
of Orange County



**The Children and Families Commission of Orange County** receives funding from the 1998 Tobacco Tax (Proposition 10) that was passed by California voters to improve the health and early education of children from birth to 5-years of age.

Dear Reader: Although this booklet is called, “A Parent’s Toolkit,” it is intended for everyone: from guardians, grandparents and extended family, to service providers. The toolkit is a resource to support children’s readiness to learn.



# Introduction

Getting Your Child Ready for School is a parent resource that is based on the Early Development Index (EDI). The EDI is a teacher-rated measure of kindergarten children's readiness to learn at school in five areas of early childhood development. This parent toolkit provides tips and information for each of those five EDI areas.

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|    | <b>Communication Skills and General Knowledge</b> | <b>02</b> |
| The child can communicate his or her needs and takes part in imaginative play.     |   |           |
|   | <b>Emotional Maturity</b>                         | <b>04</b> |
| The child pays attention to directions and is willing to help others.              |   |           |
|  | <b>Language and Cognitive Development</b>         | <b>06</b> |
| The child is able to read simple words and write his or her own name.              |   |           |
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| The child can hold a pencil and sustain energy throughout the full school day.     |   |           |
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| The child gets along with others and follows rules and instructions.               |   |           |
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# Communication Skills and General Knowledge

**What is it?** Communication is the ability to clearly express one's needs and to understand others (both talking and listening). General knowledge is an interest in the outside world.

**Why is it important?** Children who can communicate well—as both listeners and talkers—and who are curious to learn about the world around them, are children who are prepared to succeed at school and throughout life.

## Don't just talk—spend time doing active listening

- Really pay attention to what your child is saying.
- Look for opportunities to model good listening skills. Be flexible and know how to read your child's cues. Giving your child your attention will encourage him or her to open up and talk to you.
- Talk about the weather, what your child did in school, plan a trip together, or talk about your day— whatever is of interest to you and your child.

## Be available to your child

- Enjoy your meals together at the dinner table. This shows your child that “we always have time for one another.” It also promotes a sense of belonging within the family.
- There are many things that demand our attention, but none is as important as your child.

## Ask your child about his or her day

- Find a comfortable time to talk about your child's day. Model this for your child by talking about your own day.
- Ask open-ended questions, such as “What happened at school?” and “What did you do outside?” Asking such questions will lead to more conversation than asking a question that only has a simple “yes” or “no” answer.
- Try making a meal together. You can find out about each other's likes and dislikes, as well.

## Encourage your child

- Children need encouragement to feel good about themselves. Children who are confident are more likely to try new things.
- Communication requires confidence, so it is important to respect your child's efforts and never make fun of his or her mistakes.
- Modeling works best when you are trying to teach children something new. From learning a new sport, new song or new language, to going to a new place for the first time, life is full of opportunities to learn new things together!



## Develop an open, honest relationship with your child

- Let your child ask questions and express his or her fears. This teaches your child to talk about things that are troubling him or her.
- Be open about issues that directly involve your child's frame of mind and emotional well-being.
- If your child is interested in something, show him or her that you are available to help and to give guidance and answers.

## Be aware of things that are important to your child

- Create a Personal Picture Book or Scrapbook with your child. Use photos of family and friends, and include images of your child's favorite objects. Making your child his or her own special book will make him or her feel loved and special. Looking at the book together will help him or her learn about words, reading and writing. 
- Make up a story about your child, using his or her name as often as you can. Have good things happen to your child in this make-believe story and include references to your child's favorite things or people. 
- Talk about your child's favorite books, toys and movies. In turn, your child will want to learn about the things that are important to you and others. This will benefit your child as he or she learns how to socialize, make friendships, and communicate with peers.

## Model communication skills from the very start

- When holding your baby, respond to what she or he does—if she giggles, you giggle; if he smiles, you smile. Change your voice to match different facial expressions.
- Put a variety of safe and interesting things near your baby (for instance, touch-and-feel books, a child's mirror, a colorful mobile). Describe to your baby what he or she is seeing and touching.
- Play "Name that Thing": Wherever you are, name the items you see around you and your baby. 

## Encourage imagination, curiosity and problem solving

- While reading your child's favorite book, change some of the most important words in the story. Do it in a fun and obvious way so that your child will catch on and then provide you with the original story line.
- Put an item that will make a distinct sound into two matching containers (for instance, two containers with dry rice and two with water). Let your child shake the containers and match the sounds.
- Play "Name That Emotion": In books and on TV, ask your child to guess what a character is feeling, why the character is feeling that, and what he or she might need.



Beach ball means that activity is a Kid Builder activity.

# Emotional Maturity

**What is it?** Emotional maturity is the ability to recognize and to express both positive and negative emotions in ways that are healthy, respectful, and appropriate to the situation. It is also compassion and the willingness to help and comfort others.

**Why is it important?** Children who are emotionally healthy and able to understand and get along well with others are children who are prepared to learn and succeed at school and throughout life.

## Encourage your child to reflect before acting

- Play the “What Next?” game: Tell your child about a challenging scenario, then ask, “What next?” For example, “Sam broke his mom’s vase... What next?” Learning that his or her actions have consequences helps your child to control his or her behavior and to think ahead to what the results of his actions will be, so that he can change his actions to have a positive result. 🎨
- Encourage your child to use words when problems arise (for example, “I’m mad”). During a disagreement, allow your child to express his or her emotions—both positive and negative—and encourage your child to listen when others express their emotions. 🎨

## Manage fearfulness and impulsiveness in your child

- When your child does something inappropriate, give him or her a consequence that matches the behavior. For example, if your child is coloring on the table instead of the paper, gently take the crayon away until she or he is ready to color on the paper. Remember to give your child another chance and praise him or her immediately for the appropriate behavior.

- Provide choices every day, such as selecting snacks, clothes, or toys. This will help your child become confident in the decisions he or she makes.
- Don’t push your child to do things that make him or her afraid. Instead, give your child time to take small steps toward the activity.

## Encourage your child to have compassion for other people

- Respond to your child with compassion when he or she is hurt, sick or upset. For example, when your child falls down and gets hurt, respond to his or her cries in a caring and consoling manner. Your child will learn to respond to others in the same way.

## Help your child deal with feelings at an age-appropriate level

- Label your child’s feelings when he or she is upset, then show him or her different ways to cope. For example, “You seem mad. Would you like a hug? Would you like to look at a book in a quiet place?”
- Show your child how to deal with strong negative emotions, such as anger, sadness or frustration. Your child is always watching and learning from you so remember to model appropriate ways to deal with emotions.



## Start teaching emotional health and showing attachment from the very first moments of life

- Respond sensitively to your infant's needs, especially every time your baby cries during the first six months. Use your words to label the emotions you see. For example, "so sad... baby's crying." 🌈
- Play "So Happy To See You!". Use your face and voice to let your baby know how much you love him or her. When you smile and are excited to see your baby, you are strengthening the bond between you and teaching him or her how to express love.
- Play different types of music with a variety of "moods". Take your baby in your arms and dance.

## Show your child the importance of helping and getting along with others

- Set a regular time each week or month for a "play date" between your child and one or more of his or her friends. Having a regular time to play will help to strengthen their friendship. Have your child plan a game or activity for the play date. Your child will be looking forward to the regular meeting time. 🌈
- Every week give your child a few jobs around the home (for example, dusting, making bed, tidying up toys). Doing chores helps your child gain confidence in his or her abilities and gives him a feeling of importance that he is a helpful part of your family. 🌈

## Give your child opportunities to be caring and thoughtful to others

- Give your child some cuddly toys to care for (for example, wash, feed, hug). Talk about what your child is doing, and how helpful and caring she or he is being.
- Make a "Teddy Bear Hospital" for all your child's cuddly toys and act out imaginary situations as you and your child help the toys "get better."
- Play "Guess the Feeling": You act out an emotion and your child will guess what you are feeling. Include your child's toys or stuffed animals. This adds other personalities and situations to the game.



Beach ball means that activity is a Kid Builder activity.

# Language and Cognitive Development

**What is it?** Language includes word recognition, reading and writing. Cognitive development includes remembering, problem solving, and decision making. Some examples of cognitive development are counting and recognizing shapes and numbers.

**Why is it important?** Children who enjoy stories and being read to, and whose cognitive development is appropriate to their age, are children who are prepared to learn and succeed at school and throughout life.

## Read to your child

- Making books, stories and storytelling a part of your child's daily routine will encourage his or her love of literacy and build communication skills.
- Story time isn't just for bedtime. There are many chances to encourage reading throughout the day. From reading cereal boxes at the kitchen table, to making a grocery list together—all help to encourage a love of reading.

## Talk about what's happening

- When we talk, we describe what's going on around us and help put names to the things we see and experience.
- Make conversation with your child an important part of every day. Remember: your child learns about language by watching and imitating you.

## Play, play, play!

- Rhymes and songs are fun for you and your child, but they also build your child's understanding of and appreciation for language—how it works and how it's used. Children learn lots of new words through songs, rhymes, riddles and chants.
- Play is children's work—it is how they build their brains and learn about the world we live in.
- Every time your child is playing with you, he or she is exploring the world with his or her senses and learning how things work.

## Limit screen time

- Young children learn through doing. That is why active play helps them learn more than passive experiences like playing on a smart phone or watching TV.
- Limit television and screen time and look for ways to engage the whole family in activities like board games, creative play, and going to the library.



## Use daily routines as opportunities to learn

- Cooking provides opportunities to measure and count.
- A trip to the grocery store creates opportunities to develop language, communication and decision-making skills.
- Making your child an important part of your everyday activities makes learning fun!
- Play “Number of the Day”: Throughout the day, search for things that come in two’s. See how many things you child can find or create in two’s. At mealtimes, help your child group his or her food in sets of two’s, and count as your child eats them. Help your child learn what the number looks like by showing him or her the number on a piece of paper or in a book. 🌍

## From your child’s first day, open up his or her world to a love of learning

- Walk around your home with your child pausing to look at things. Name the items you see. This supports vocabulary development.
- “Read a Poem”: Teach your child the rhymes from your childhood or find a book of children’s poems at the library or bookstore. Make up a tune and hand motions to help your child remember the words. 🌍
- Have fun playing “What Sound Does the Animal Make?”: Cut out pictures of various well-known animals. Ask the question, “What sound does a.... make?” and then answer by making the sound. 🌍
- Make artwork using stickers and whatever items you can find around the house or outside. Together with your child, sort and count the items (for example, beads, leaves, shells) while working on your project.



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# Physical Health and Well-Being

**What is it?** Physical health and well-being is physical readiness for school (for example, not arriving at school hungry), physical independence (for example, well-coordinated movements), as well as gross motor skills (for example, able to catch and throw a ball) and fine motor skills (for example, able to handle crayons and pencils).

**Why is it important?** Children who are healthy and happy are children who are prepared to learn and succeed at school and throughout life.

## Children who get enough sleep, eat right and keep active will:

### Do better at school

- Active living helps children have better concentration, memory, creativity and problem-solving skills.

### Have a healthy body weight

- Daily exercise builds a healthy heart, encourages muscle growth and helps develop strong bones.

### Develop healthy self-esteem

- Active living helps children feel good about themselves. It reduces anxiety and depression and makes children better able to deal with stress.

### Play with others

- Active living provides opportunities for children to socialize, make friendships, and practice self-discipline.

## From your child's first days, encourage him or her to be healthy

- Give your child some "Tummy Time": While your baby is lying on his or her tummy, place interesting objects, such as shiny toys, on the ground and cheer while your baby reaches for them. 
- Give your child items to hold and bang together. Talk and sing while he or she has fun making noise and practicing hand-eye coordination.
- Play "Copy-Cat": You perform a simple action (for example, smile, stick out your tongue, or clap) and cheer whenever your baby copies you. 



## Singing and playing games are fun ways to promote health

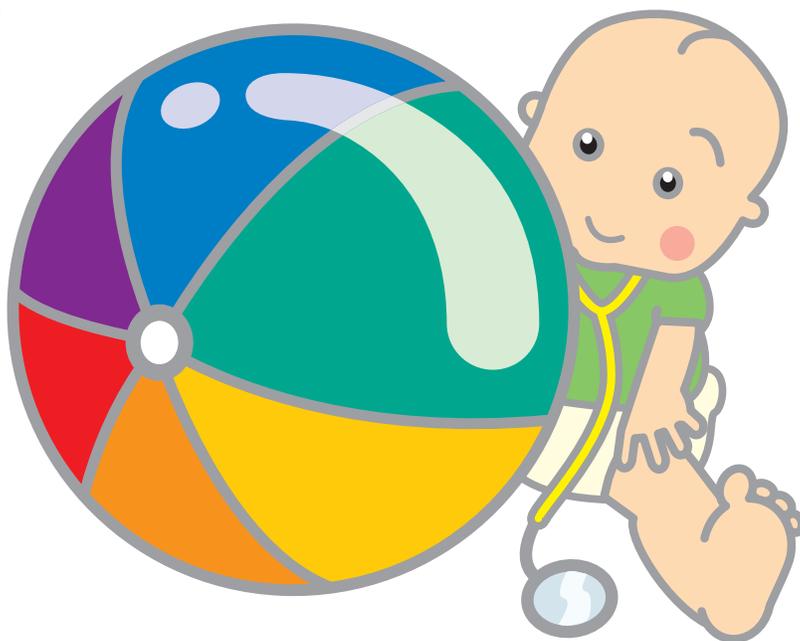
- Do the “Mirror Dance”: You and your child dance to your favorite music in front of a large mirror. Also try “Freeze Dance,” where everyone has to freeze like a statue as soon as the music stops. 
- Sing, sing, sing!—especially music and movement songs, such as the Hokey Pokey.

## Health and well-being also includes eating well, dressing for the weather, and proper hand-washing and hygiene

- Make a weekly “Meal Calendar” and let your child pick a meal that he or she will help prepare. Breakfast is an especially easy one to make, and it is said to be the most important meal of the day.
- At the grocery store, play “I Spy” shopping game with your child. Let your child put the items in your shopping cart that he or she spies. 
- Provide a wash cloth and a little soapy water in a bowl and let your child wash plastic toys.

## Healthy activities can be simple

- Take short walks together around the neighborhood. This is a great time to play “I Spy” and “I Hear.”
- At your local park, you can play tag, hide-and-seek, or make up your own game.
- Make an indoor obstacle course using pillows, chairs, pots, pans, measuring cups and water—anything and everything! Activities could include walking along a chalk line, jumping over a box, and crawling through a tunnel.



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# Social Competence

**What is it?** Social competence is cooperation and the ability to get along with others and make friends. It is also taking responsibility and showing respect, as well as the ability to solve problems and adjust to routines. Socially competent children have positive work habits and are eager to explore new things, such as books, toys, and games.

**Why is it important?** Children who get along well with others, and who can adjust to new situations, are children who are prepared to learn and succeed at school and throughout life.

## Teach your child acceptable behavior in public places

- Visit a variety of places with your child (for example, grocery store, doctor's office). Before you visit these places, give your child very clear and specific expectations (for example, "no running, indoor voice only, and remember to say please and thank you").
- Plan ahead of time for long outings. For example, bring small toys or coloring activities to restaurants, the doctor's office, or any place your child must wait a long time.
- Speak respectfully to your child and others. Children imitate what they hear.

## Encourage your child to control his or her behavior

- When a problem arises between your child and a playmate, try not to give a solution right away. Give children an opportunity to come up with their own ideas on how to solve the problem. But stay nearby and coach when it is needed.
- Be consistent—create a schedule and household rules that are enforced the same way every time.

## Help your child learn appropriate respect for adult authority

- Build a strong relationship, based on trust and respect, with your child. Follow through on your promises and your child will feel that she or he can rely on you.
- Talk to your child about being respectful to family members and other people, and then show her or him how it's done by modeling respect to those around you.

## Teach your child how to cooperate and follow rules

- Talk to your child about sharing and taking turns, then set up an activity where you and your child can take turns.
- Play with a large ball. Take turns rolling it to each other. After a while, include a stuffed toy in the game, just as you would include another child. 🌍
- Set up play dates for your child with one of his or her friends. Plan for games and activities that are short, simple and cooperative (not competitive).



## Right from the beginning, encourage your baby to develop good social skills

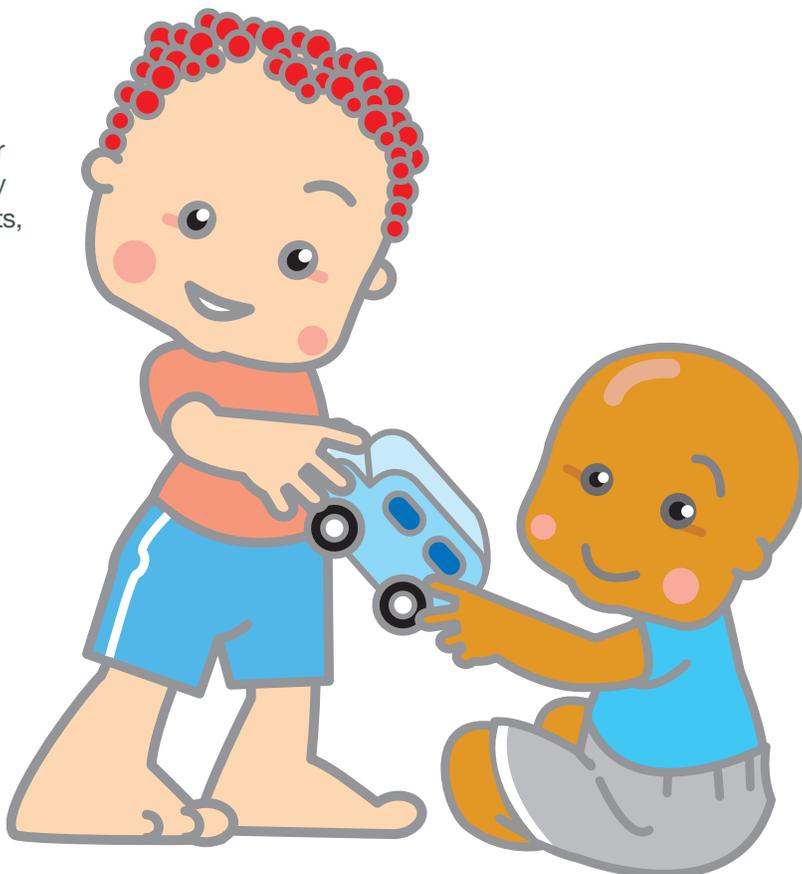
- Lie down on the floor next to your baby and talk, read a book, or sing.
- Give your baby a chance to be with other babies. For example, participate in a baby play group in your community to engage young minds and encourage parent-child involvement.
- Play “Hide, Find and Hug”: It’s just like hide-and-seek within a very small area, but with a hug as the reward for finding the “hider.”

## Imagination is a great tool for teaching social skills

- Play “Dress Up”: Save old clothes or costumes for dress up. Play along with your child and model positive social interaction. 🌍
- Play the “What would you do?” game: Make up different social situations and ask your child what she or he would do. For example, “What would you do if a friend came to your birthday party with socks on her ears?” 🌍

## Encourage your child to play and work with other children

- Provide lots of opportunity for your child and his or her friends to play and work together.
- Give the children a common goal to work on. For example, they can bake cookies together, first by taking turns pouring and measuring the ingredients, then by stirring the batter.



Beach ball means that activity is a Kid Builder activity.

# The Importance of the Early Years

During the first five years of life, your child's brain develops dramatically. Research has shown that during those years, your child is developing **socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually**. That is why a good start in life—days full of caring, sharing, kindness and creativity—will set the foundation for future success and happiness, in school and throughout life.

The tips in this booklet are built upon two important facts.

**1** Your child is constantly watching and learning from you. This makes you your child's first and best teacher.

**2** Children learn by playing, so have fun and be confident your child is learning from your actions.

By remembering these two facts and practicing some of this booklet's tips every day, you are helping to ensure that your child is ready for school.





This toolkit is adapted from the “Understanding the Early Years Toolkit” developed by Understanding the Early Years Malton Service Providers Network and the Peel District School Board. The Children and Families Commission of Orange County, in partnership with the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities (under license from McMaster University), is implementing the **Early Development Index (EDI)** throughout Orange County.

For more activities to do with your child, download the free **Kid Builder** app from your smartphone or at: <https://kidbuildersapp.firebaseio.com>



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