

Helping Your Child Grow

Activities for 33 to 42 months



Spend time cuddling and playing with your child every day. This is especially important if you have been away from each other during the day. Your child missed you and needs to reconnect! Give them 10 minutes of one-on-one time soon after you come home from work. Sit down, breathe, and hold your child. Let them know how much you missed them. Ask your child about their day. That little bit of focused time will help them feel secure and calm. Without this, your child may become fussy or act out to try to connect with you.

Night-Night Talk Times

Bedtime is a special time to get close and connect with your child. Talk about the day and what will happen tomorrow. Ask them simple questions about their day: "What was the best part?" "Were there any hard parts?" "How did you feel?" Listen carefully so your child knows that what they are thinking is important to you. You may need to help them get started talking. Even if your child can't answer all your questions, they are still listening and learning how to think about their day.

Puppet Friends

Your child is discovering their imagination. Through pretend play, they can explore different feelings and imagine they are someone (or something) else. Maybe your child wants to be a superhero, a fairy, a cat, or a police officer. One fun way to do this is with puppets. You can make a simple puppet from a sock or a small paper bag. Draw eyes and a mouth with a marker, cut out ears, and glue on yarn for hair. Make one puppet for your child and one for yourself. Have your puppets go on adventures together and explore their world.

Feelings Faces

Draw simple pictures of faces that show feelings, such as happy, sad, mad, surprised, or scared (emojis are good examples!). Talk about these feelings with your child. Have them point to the face that shows how they feel on the inside. Ask your child why they are feeling that way. Then have them point to one that shows how someone else may be feeling: "Can you point to the picture that shows how you think your baby brother is feeling?" "Why do you think he's feeling that way?"

Nature Walk

Go on a nature walk with your child and take turns showing each other interesting things. Be curious together! Everything is new and interesting to them. Pick up a bug that is safe to handle and talk about it. You can talk about how the bug looks or feels. "Look at this little red ladybug. Its legs feel tickly on my hand. Do you want it to hold it?" Now it's your child's turn to find something interesting. They may be scared of new things. Teach your child which things are dangerous and which ones are safe.

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How Does It Feel?

Stay close by when your child is playing with another child. At this age, children need help sharing and taking turns. Use conflicts and disagreements as learning opportunities. Ask your child to think about how their friend may feel. “Maria, you have all the dolls. Look at Alma’s face. How do you think she feels?” Encourage them to try to solve this problem: “What would help Alma feel better?” When your child does show signs of caring for others, make sure you notice: “You shared your doll with Alma. What a kind friend you are! Nana is very proud of you.”

Story Time

Ask a librarian to help you find some children’s books about feelings. Reading stories about feelings helps your child think and talk about their own feelings. Talk to them about the story: “Lion got really mad in this story. Do you feel mad sometimes?” “What makes you feel better when you are mad?” Teach your child ideas for how to calm down. For example, breathing in and out for 5 seconds, or talking about their feelings with a parent or teacher.

The Great Big World

Show your child new things, and take them to new places. Are there museums nearby? Parks? Interesting neighborhoods? Libraries? See the world through your child’s eyes. Talk about the things that they are seeing. When your child is feeling confident, calm, and happy, they will be curious about everything—especially when you are sharing this experience with them.

Big Helper

Your child is watching you and wants to try doing the things you do. When you sweep, give your child the broom (or a dustpan) and let them help. “You are sweeping. What a big boy. Thanks for the help!” This is a way for your child to learn from you. It also helps them know they play an important role in the family. They will feel good about their new skills and feel proud they are “helping.”

Let’s Dance

Your child needs times to move around and use their arms, legs, and the rest of their body. Put on some music and dance together! You can use scarves or light blankets to wave around while you dance. Try different types of music. Ask your child if the music sounds happy, sad, silly, mad, or scary. Talk about how the different kinds of music make each of you feel. Encourage them to make a facial expression to show the feeling.

Give Me a Break

Your child needs quiet times to relax. Children do not need to be busy all the time. If your child is in childcare, there will be break times. At home, you may need to plan quiet times. Make a comfy nest with pillows, blankets, and books. When possible, cuddle up together and take a break. After lunch, a rest time or a nap may help the rest of the day go more smoothly.

Little Challenges

Little challenges help your child learn to work hard and keep trying (persist). They will need encouragement when they are getting frustrated: “You can do it.” “You’re almost there—keep trying.” Your confidence in your child’s skills will help build their confidence. Skills such as learning to ride a tricycle (or bicycle with training wheels), climbing to the top of a structure, or drawing a simple shape offer opportunities for them to learn how to persist.



NEWSLETTER

Your Child's Social-Emotional Development

33 to 42 months

Your child is growing fast and is now a preschooler! Your child is talking much more, and you are getting to know who they are as a person. They are better able to manage their emotions now, and there are fewer physical or vocal outbursts. However, your child can still fall apart under stress. Take a deep breath and help them calm. This ability to calm—or regulate—is one of the most important skills your child is learning. They learn how to regulate with your help and through your example. What helps you stay calm? Breathing? Taking a break? Talking to someone? Talk to your child about how you calm down when you are having a big feeling.

"I'm Still Your Baby"

Your independent child still needs the comfort of your arms and gentle touch many times a day. Touch and physical connection are an important part of your relationship with them. There will be times when your child has big feelings and only a loving hug from you will help. Research shows that touch is calming for both your child and you.

Friends Forever

Friends are becoming more important to your child. While playing with friends, they may engage in pretend play, becoming a fairy, a pirate, a doctor, or a teacher. Playtime still results in conflicts and big feelings, but your child has more words and ideas now about how to solve problems. Your preschooler may think about ideas such as turn taking or sharing. Often, they will come to you for help solving problems.

The Beginnings of Empathy

Empathy is the ability to recognize someone else's emotions and respond with care. Empathy is a complicated skill that develops over many years. Your child may be able to express their own feelings now. They are beginning to learn how to recognize other people's emotions too: "Look at Emma's face. She looks scared." Teach your child how to respond with care: "Daddy looks like he's sad. I bet a hug would cheer him up." They learn how to care for others from you and your example.

What Is Social-Emotional Development?

Social-emotional development is your child's ability to

- Experience, express, and manage emotions
- Develop positive relationships with you and others
- Explore their environment with curiosity and confidence

Social-emotional skills

- Develop through positive and loving interactions with you and others
- Are key to your child's success in school and in life

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Your Child's Social-Emotional Development, 33–42 months

Routine Check-Ins

Your child's sense of safety and security in the world is growing. They can now explore and interact with friends and family without you as close by. Your child may ask you to stay with them at a friend's house, yet rarely come over to touch base with you. You may feel a little sad or neglected. Keep in mind that this is a sign of your child's growing confidence. You still play a critical role in supporting them emotionally. When your child does have big feelings, they will come right back to the comfort of your arms.

Special Jobs

Your child is gaining new skills every day and can be truly helpful around the home. Give them special jobs around the house, like sorting socks after the laundry is done, handing out napkins at dinner, and finding their pajamas for bedtime. Your child will take pride in doing these jobs and their important role in the family. "Thank you for sorting socks, honey! You are a big help."

Nighttime Connections

A good night's sleep can mean the difference between an easygoing, happy child and an angry, fussy child. You also need to get enough sleep to be emotionally available for your child. Use your bedtime routine as a special time to connect. At this age, your child may have nightmares, fears of the dark, or fears of being alone. Let them talk about their fears. Cuddle up and let your child know you will keep them safe. A nightlight, special blanket, or stuffed animal may help.

Hungry and Fussy

When your child is fussy or falling apart, they may be hungry. Offer food every 2 to 3 hours. Make sure you take healthy snacks along whenever you go on an outing. If your child is starting to get fussy, offer a little food. Now you and your child can keep having fun, positive interactions with each other!

Monitoring Screen Time

Too much screen time can lead to sleep, eating, and attention problems. This includes television, game, computer, phone, and tablet screens. Scary or violent screen time can lead to stress, fears, and behavior problems. Your child develops healthy relationships through positive back-and-forth interactions with you, family members, and friends. Healthy relationships prepare your child for school and life. Screens cannot!



The Trouble with Change

Having a consistent daily routine offers a sense of safety and security to your preschooler. However, sometimes changing activities may make your child angry or frustrated. This is especially true when you are interrupting an activity your child enjoys. During these times, make sure you give your child a warning: "In 5 minutes it will be time to clean up your toys so we can go shopping." Make sure the next activity includes something your child will enjoy: "I need your help shopping. Let's make a list together."



Helping Your Child Calm Down, 33-72 months

Your child now often lets you know what they need before they get upset. However, they still struggle to calm down when they have big feelings. With your support, your child can learn how to stay calm and focus (self-regulate). These social-emotional skills are important to your child's overall well-being and ability to learn. Preschoolers who can self-regulate find it easier to make friends and adapt to home and school routines. Use the ideas on this tip sheet to help prevent upsets and to teach your child how to stay calm when they do have big feelings.

Keep in Mind

- All behaviors have meaning. Is your child hungry, tired, sick, bored, or stressed? Do they need attention? Learn your child's rhythms and personality. Aim to prevent upsets.
- You have the biggest influence on your child's behavior. Your child learns how to self-regulate from you. Be kind and respectful with your child, even when you are angry.
- Physical touch is calming for both you and your child. Hug, hold, and touch your child many times a day. Cuddle up and read to your child if they need to calm down.
- Open-ended playtime with friends helps your child learn to self-regulate. Your child learns how to wait (take turns), talk through disagreements, and negotiate while playing.
- Monitor and limit screen time. Screen time can lead to attention and behavior problems. Your child needs to learn to stay calm and focused while engaging in real-life activities with real people.

Suggestions

- Stick to a consistent daily routine. Consistent routines can decrease struggles. Your child learns that even if they fuss, bedtime is still going to happen the same way, every day. Consistency means there is less need to fuss!
- Develop clear expectations, and be consistent. Your child can learn rules if you stick to them every time.
 - Keep rules simple and positive—the simpler, the better. For example: "Use gentle touch."
 - Explain why a rule is a rule: "We use gentle touch because hitting hurts. We don't hurt each other."
 - Give a positive alternative: "If you need something, tap me gently and use your words to tell me what you want."

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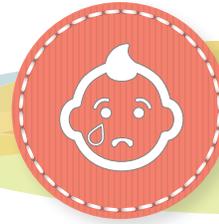


Helping Your Child Calm Down, 33-72 months (continued)

SUGGESTIONS (continued)

- Teach play skills by playing with your child. Teach your child how to share, trade, and take turns with friends. Teach them how to talk about it when they get frustrated or disappointed during play.
- Give alerts. It's hard for your child to stop an activity they are enjoying. Before you move your child to a new activity, give them an alert so they have a little time to finish up: "In 10 minutes it will be time to clean up and have a snack."
- Provide simple choices. Choices allow your independent child a little control over their day: "Blue shirt or red shirt?" "Crackers or toast?" "Store first or bank?"
- Focus on the positives. Catch your child doing the right thing and praise them: "Good idea!" "Thanks for your help." "I'm proud of you." "High five!" "Thanks for waiting patiently."
- When you ask your child to do a task, use a "first/then" statement. A first/then statement pairs a request with something you know your toddler enjoys: "First pick up your toys [request], and then we'll go to the park [fun]."
- Teach your child a "calm-down plan." Choose a time when your child is calm and talk to them about ways to calm down. Examples of calm-down plans include taking several slow breaths, taking a break, talking it out, asking to be held, and switching to a different activity.
- Read books about big feelings. Ask a librarian for suggestions. Reading books about others' big feelings lets your child know their feelings are okay.
- When your child starts to have a big feeling or tantrum, stay calm and try these ideas:
 - Move your child if they are not in a safe spot. For example, if your child is lying in the middle of a busy grocery store aisle, gently pick them up and move them to a safe place.
 - Help your child calm down. Your child cannot listen to words or think clearly when upset. Say, "I want to help. You need to calm down first." Use the calm-down plan you made.
 - Resist the temptation to bribe. Offering your phone or candy to calm your fussy child does not help them learn how to self-regulate.
- Once your child is calm, talk about feelings and solutions. "You were angry. You and your friend both wanted the toy. What can you do?" "You seem sad. How can I help?"

Questions? Concerns? Talk to your child's health care provider.



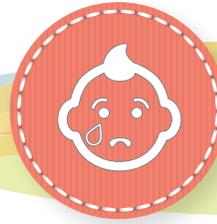
Stress and Your Child

Stress occurs from many things, such as having too much to do, not having enough money, moving, or losing a job. Trauma occurs when someone experiences something that is physically or emotionally harmful. Are there times when your life is stressful? Have you or your child seen or experienced anything scary or frightening? Sometimes, adults think babies and young children are “too young to understand” or “too young to remember.” However, research shows that babies and young children do get stressed and do have memories of trauma. Both babies and children feel stress in their bodies and show stress through their behaviors. The good news is that you can do things to protect and help your child—even if life is stressful or you have experienced trauma. Remember, whatever is going on in your life is not your child’s fault. Take a deep breath when you are frustrated. With your love and protection, you can help your child feel safe.

Keep in Mind

- Babies and young children show stress through their behavior. Changes in your child’s behavior, such as in sleeping or feeding, might be a sign of stress.
- Long-term stress affects a child’s developing brain. It is important to recognize stress in your child so you can help reduce it.
- Here are some possible signs of stress in young children:
 - Eating disturbances
 - Difficulty sleeping
 - Regression in skills such as potty training
 - Clinginess; not wanting to leave you
 - Headaches or stomachaches
 - New fears; nightmares
 - Problem behaviors such as hyperactivity or aggression
- Your child might experience stress when developing and learning new skills—for example, when they begin to separate from you, or when they are toilet training.
- Young children don’t understand why they feel stress. You can help your child by naming their feelings and reassuring them that they will be okay.
- All families experience different types of stress. Children and families also react to stress in different ways. Your child learns to react by watching you.
- Your love, comfort, and gentle touch help to protect your child against stress.
- Behavioral health specialists can help you and your child deal with severe or ongoing stress. Talk to your health care provider.

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Stress and Your Child *(continued)*

Suggestions

- Be aware that your baby or young child is paying attention to everything they see and hear.
- As much as possible, keep your baby or child away from situations or images that are violent or scary. This includes shows or games on television, phones, computers, and tablets.
- Limit talk about your fears and worries around your baby or young child. When your child is nearby, be positive.
- You can reduce your child's stress by staying calm and using a calm voice—even when you are stressed.
- Comfort your child when they are scared or worried. Hold them close and talk to them. "That loud noise was scary. Did it scare you? How can I help?"
- Talk to your young child, even your baby, about how you think they are feeling. Use words such as happy, scared, mad, or worried. When your child begins to talk, encourage them to use feeling words.
- When big changes happen in your family's life, such as welcoming a new baby or moving, keep your schedule and routines as much the same as possible. Routines help children feel safe and secure.
- Make sure your child's day has a mix of active and quiet times. This gives your child different ways to deal with any stress.
- Prepare children for the big changes (such as starting preschool) and little changes (such as saying goodbye at preschool) in their lives. Change is stressful. Knowing what to expect will help decrease fears and worries.
- Let your child know you love them and will always be there for them. Your child needs you to let them know things are okay. They will feel secure knowing that you are there for them.

Questions? Concerns? Talk to your child's health care provider.



Getting Ready for Kindergarten

Entering kindergarten is a big change for you and your child. It is an exciting time, and it also might be a little scary for you both. You can help by preparing yourself and your child for this big step well ahead of time. Provide opportunities for your child to practice being away from you and being more independent with self-help skills such as eating and dressing. Visit the school and find out what to expect. These steps will increase your child's confidence and make both of you feel more prepared for this big change!

In the Year Before Kindergarten

- Set up times for your child to play with other children—including future classmates, if possible. Knowing how to play and get along with peers is a big part of kindergarten. Having a friend in class will help your child feel more comfortable.
- Teach your child how to do things independently. This will help your child start to build autonomy—the ability to do things separately from you.
- Let your child dress without your help. Teach your child how to open food containers. Teach them all the steps of using the bathroom alone. Your child's self-confidence will grow as they learn how to do things independently. Be sure to praise your child's growing independence: "You dressed all by yourself this morning!"
- Encourage your child to practice writing their first name. Teach them their address and telephone number.
- Limit television and other screen time to 1 to 2 hours a day. Your child will need to be able to stay calm and focus on real-world activities or a teacher for periods of time.
- Encourage your child to stick with activities for longer periods of time. This helps your child build self-regulation skills—the ability to monitor and control their own behavior.
- Take your child with you out into the world—to the library, grocery store, and other places. This will help your child feel more secure exploring new places.
- Create bedtime and wake-up routines over the summer before kindergarten starts. Help your child prepare for the school schedule.
- Visit your local school and your child's classroom. Meet the teacher. Find the bathroom! This will help build your child's confidence.

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Getting Ready for Kindergarten *(continued)*

In the Weeks Before School Starts

- Encourage your child to share how they are feeling about starting kindergarten. Talk with them about any concerns or fears.
- Visit a library. Find books about starting kindergarten, and read and talk about them together.
- Let your child know it's okay to be nervous and excited all at the same time.
- Talk about things that made (or make) you nervous. Share with your child about how you take care of yourself when you are nervous.
- Talk positively about school and the fun activities and new friends your child will make.
- Teach your child how to ask for help from the teacher.
- Make a plan for the first day of school. Talk about what will happen.

On the First Day

- Spend some time with your child at the school on the first day. Let your child know when you will leave and what time you will return. Your child trusts you to return and needs to be told when that will happen. Do not sneak away.
- When you see your child at the end of the day, give them a big hug and tell them you missed them. Talk to your child about their first day! Attend to your child without other distractions.

Questions? Concerns? Talk to your child's health care provider.