

# Encouraging development

## Supporting growth in your child's first five years

**F**rom birth to age five your child will grow, learn and develop by leaps and bounds. As a parent there are many activities you can do on a daily basis to support your child's development.

As an infant, your baby needs lots of "face time" and experience with making sounds. Talk to your child, sing to him, and imi-

tate some of the noises that he makes. Play games and look at books together, naming items on the pages and helping her turn pages. Provide opportunities for your baby to reach for toys to develop precision with grasping and securing a toy. Play with toys that require using two hands together, like rolling a ball on the floor. Your baby will initially use his whole hand to grasp items. Small foods like cheerios will help to teach your baby to use his fingers.

"Tummy time" helps your

baby to develop control over his head, arms and legs. Motivate your baby by placing a favourite toy just out of reach. Creeping forward will occur, followed by crawling. Encourage sitting by supporting your baby's hips and pulling to stand by putting toys on the edge of the couch. As your baby reaches one-year-old, listen for his first words.

As a toddler, your child needs experience with words so talk about everything you see and do together. She will begin to develop two to four word combinations, so model short sentences like "shoes on" and "more juice." Take turns and share toys together. When cleaning up, be repetitive and say "in" every time you put a toy in its container.

Walk with your child to the park for opportunities to explore and develop balance. Encourage bending over, squatting and picking up items from the ground. Take the stairs together and count them as you go.

As a preschooler, your child needs opportunities to work with her hands. She will begin to develop a dominant hand,

which will help her to become more precise with colouring, drawing, and cutting. Teach her to draw shapes to prepare for printing. Make crafts and collages together. Be creative! Playing with a ball outside encourages running, kicking, throwing and catching with hands together and then with her dominant hand.

At this stage, encourage your child to talk about events in her life, have conversations, and tell simple stories. Listen for her to begin to use adult-like grammar, answer questions, and follow more complex directions. At around five-years-old she should be interested in trying to print her name.

It is important to remember that children are individuals, which means that some may learn new skills more quickly than others. If you have concerns about your child's development, talk to a professional.

■ Courtney Hall is an Occupational Therapist for the Reach Child and Youth Development Society Therapies Program. For more

information on Reach Therapies Program contact 604-946-6622 ext. 318 or visit [reach-development.org](http://reach-development.org).

