



Investing in School Readiness

Helping Your Child Love to Learn



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You are your child's first teacher.

Understanding how children grow and change during their first five years can help you give your child a great start.

Fairfax Futures is delighted to present *Helping Your Child Love to Learn* designed as a complement to Fairfax County's Office for Children's Early Learning Guidelines. The Guidelines are currently being used by early childhood educators to help children enter kindergarten ready to succeed. We hope you will find *Helping Your Child Love to Learn* useful as you partner with the professionals who help care for and educate your children.

This booklet, made possible through a generous grant from the Freddie Mac Foundation, includes simple activities you can enjoy with your child as part of your daily routines at home. Whether enjoying conversations in the car while running errands, or matching the socks as they come out of the dryer, the time you spend talking and interacting with your child doing everyday activities can stimulate curiosity and nurture your child's lifelong love of learning. It is these kinds of daily experiences that help prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond.

Enjoy your child's first five years – working in partnership with early care and education professionals, you are laying the foundation for your child's bright future.

Social & Emotional Development

From birth, children's social and emotional development can be seen in how they interact with others and express their feelings. Infants and toddlers learn who they are and to trust family members, and preschoolers learn the values and behaviors that are acceptable to their families and communities. As children learn to make friends, cooperate and balance their needs with the needs of others, they develop the skills to become confident, competent and successful people.



When your child is an infant or toddler:

- Teach your baby the idea of give and take; when your baby drops a rattle, pick it up and return it to your child.
- Help your child identify familiar faces by putting photos of your child and family members where your child can easily see them.
- Allow your child to calm herself by sucking her fist or snuggling with her favorite blanket.
- Give your child words that describe emotions and talk about being happy, sad, or angry.

Experiences like these will help your infant or toddler:

- Begin to recognize and smile at people who are part of their daily lives.
- Feel secure in their relationships with adults.
- Begin to feel competent and confident about interacting with others.



When your child is 2 to 3 years old:

- Let your child make simple choices, like which shoes to wear.
- Allow your child to do things herself, like brush her own teeth.
- Tell stories about the things your child did as a baby.
- Have conversations with your child about emotions by looking at pictures of people who look happy or sad.
- Give your child opportunities to play with another child or a sibling where each child has a task, like rolling or throwing a ball back and forth.

Experiences like these will help your 2 or 3 year old:

- Begin to be able to talk about emotions, preferences, and abilities.
- Express pride in accomplishments.
- Begin to understand the consequences of actions on others.

When your child is 4 to 5 years old:

- Develop simple family rules and routines, explaining them so your child can understand them.
- Write sentences or phrases your child tells you to go with the drawings of friends or family that your child creates.
- Let your child help you with simple tasks, like emptying the silverware from the dishwasher.
- Put toys in places where your child can get them and put them back without your help.

Experiences like these will help your 4 or 5 year old:

- Feel good about who they are.
- Learn to express feelings appropriately and show self-control.
- Cooperate with others.
- Feel a sense of belonging within the family and community.

Approaches to Learning

Children enter the world ready to learn. The simple things you do with your children every day can nurture your child's curiosity, interest in doing new things, and willingness to solve problems. This all creates a love of learning that will help your children succeed in school.



When your child is an infant or toddler:

- Place toys where your child can easily reach and explore them.
- Let your child play with many different types of objects.
- Give your child items that make a sound or change when your child handles them.
- Play simple games like Peek-A-Boo where you make items appear and disappear.
- Ask your child simple questions and give simple answers.

Experiences like these will help your infant or toddler:

- Seek out experiences that are interesting and stimulating.
- Initiate play activities independently.
- interacting with others.



When your child is 2 to 3 years old:

- Let your child do things without your help, such as taking off shoes or drawing with crayons.
- Ask your child questions that must be answered with several words, not just “yes” or “no.”
- Help your child use objects creatively – dance with a scarf or use it as a hat.
- Allow your child to complete tasks, like putting together a simple puzzle.
- Encourage your child to solve simple problems, like cleaning up spilled milk, by asking, “What happened? What can we do?”

Experiences like these will help your 2 or 3 year old:

- Participate in an increasing variety of tasks and experiences.
- Make independent choices.
- Show an ability to concentrate on a task until it is completed.

When your child is 4 to 5 years old:

- Allow your child to make choices, and to explain to you why the choice was made.
- Understand that your child’s ability to plan activities is growing.
- Let your child learn about things by taking them apart and putting them together.
- Help your child learn how to solve problems creatively when, for example, trying to figure out how to build block structures so they won’t fall down.
- Ask your child questions like “Why?” or “What” as you explore new things together.

Experiences like these will help your 4 or 5 year old:

- Become curious about how and why things happen.
- Enjoy finishing tasks.
- Learn how to solve problems.
- Love to learn.

Language

Children enter the world ready to communicate. They begin by using sounds, facial expressions and movement to tell us what they need. They learn to respond to our words and begin to say words of their own. A child's abilities to listen, speak, read and write are all connected, regardless of what language is heard.



When your child is an infant or toddler:

- Talk to your baby in the language you speak at home about what you are doing while you comb your hair, get dressed, cook, clean and other activities.
- Sing simple songs to your child.
- Show your baby pictures of people, animals and objects.
- Imitate the sounds your child makes and watch for a response.

Experiences like these will help your infant or toddler:

- Develop the beginnings of language through listening and speaking.
- Name objects and use simple two and three word sentences.
- Begin to respond to requests and questions during everyday conversations.



When your child is 2 to 3 years old:

- Play games that encourage your child to talk, for example using a toy phone.
- Read books to your child and talk about words that are new.
- Listen to your child talk about things that are interesting like visiting the zoo or going to a birthday party.
- Take your child on visits to see people they know and enjoy.

Experiences like these will help your 2 or 3 year old:

- Show an increasing ability to participate in conversations.
- Understand simple instructions and follow directions.
- Use increasingly complex sentences and varied vocabulary.

When your child is 4 to 5 years old:

- Introduce new words to your child as you are driving in the car or doing errands.
- Create stories with your child or act out stories you know using toys, dolls and stuffed animals.
- Offer to write down what your child tells you and then read it to him.
- Let your child talk on the phone with family and friends.

Experiences like these will help your 4 or 5 year old:

- Listen and respond to conversations.
- Ask you about the meaning of new or unfamiliar words.
- Enjoy listening and responding to spoken and written words.
- Feel comfortable talking with a small group of people.

Literacy

During children's first five years of life, they learn skills that will help them grow up into successful readers and writers. These literacy skills grow from experiences like looking at pictures, singing songs that have words that rhyme, reading books, scribbling and drawing.



When your child is an infant or toddler:

- Respond to your child's sounds and repeat them.
- Sing simple rhyming songs to your child.
- Share different types of books and reading materials.
- Write a grocery shopping list together with your child, talking about the items on the list.
- Help your child use chunky crayons and chalk.

Experiences like these will help your infant or toddler:

- Begin to appreciate and know how to use books.
- Imitate your use of writing tools and begin to mark simple marks with crayons or markers.
- Begin to notice the sounds of letter names.



When your child is 2 to 3 years old:

- Read poems and fables that have rhymes and words that have similar sounds.
- Make cards for birthdays and special events that your child can illustrate or sign.
- Take your child to the library to check out books.
- Help your child make simple books with family photographs, writing the names of family members under their pictures.
- Point out street signs and the letters that make up words, like S-T-O-P.

Experiences like these will help your 2 or 3 year old:

- Develop a growing awareness of the beginning and ending sounds of words.
- Begin to have a set of favorite books.
- Show an increasing awareness of print on signs in the neighborhood or labels on food.

When your child is 4 to 5 years old:

- When reading books with your child, ask questions like – “I wonder what will happen next?”
- Talk with your child about words that rhyme.
- Point out printed words on objects in your home, like words on cans of food or clothing.
- Help your child write a list of things to buy at the grocery store.
- Collect pictures that begin with the same letter or sound.

Experiences like these will help your 4 or 5 year old:

- Notice patterns of sounds in spoken words by making up poems and rhymes.
- Retell a story with a beginning, middle, and ending.
- Develop an interest in printed letters and numbers.
- Learn how written words are used and can write some letters, especially those in their name.

Mathematics

Within the first few months of life, children show an interest in mathematical concepts. You can help them learn about numbers and counting, space and size, and shapes and patterns through simple daily activities.



When your child is an infant or toddler:

- Help your child notice the size of objects by arranging things by how large or small they are.
- Count buttons as you dress your child or count the number of crackers you serve as a snack.
- Use toys that allow your child to sort shapes.
- Show your child how to recognize patterns – arrange toys or food by whether they're the same or different.

Experiences like these will help your infant or toddler:

- Notice things that are the same or different, more or less.
- Use a few number words like “one” or “two”.



When your child is 2 to 3 years old:

- Make counting a part of daily routines. Count steps as you walk or the pieces of food as you put them on a plate.
- Allow your child to put one spoon on top of each napkin for each person eating dinner.
- Put large beads on a piece of string, making a pattern by using different colors or shapes of beads.
- Ask your child to help you sort socks by color and size.

When your child is 4 to 5 years old:

- Ask your child to help you use measuring cups and spoons when following recipes.
- Talk about time with your child. For example: “a long time,” “a short time,” “before you go to school,” or “after dinner.”
- Help your child trace the shapes of household items onto pieces of paper.
- Ask your child to guess how many grapes will fill a cup, then fill the cup with small sized food like raisins to see the difference in number.

Experiences like these will help your 2 or 3 year old:

- Recognize common shapes like circle, square, and triangle.
- Enjoy grouping objects so that similar objects are together.
- Make comparisons based on size (big or little) or position (under or over).

Experiences like these will help your 4 or 5 year old:

- Look for patterns and measure objects in a variety of ways.
- Learn to count.
- Understand how to compare sizes and amounts.
- Name and describe the characteristics of shapes.

Science

Children are naturally interested in observing the world around them, asking questions about what they see, investigating objects and trying to predict what might happen. Through simple activities at home, you can help your child get ready to enjoy learning science later in school.



When your child is an infant or toddler:

- Give your child a variety of safe objects to explore that have various textures and smells.
- Carry your infant to things that are interesting to touch or smell like leaves on a tree.
- Walk around the neighborhood and show your child new plants, animals and people.
- Let your child play with toys that respond to your child's actions, such as toys that move or make a sound when the child pushes or pulls them.
- Take your child outside everyday so that he or she can experience different types of weather.

Experiences like these will help your infant or toddler:

- Use senses to explore objects.
- Recognize and name animals they have seen in books or on trips to the zoo.
- Anticipate effects of actions or the responses of toys.



When your child is 2 to 3 years old:

- Show your child how objects and events are related, such as why ants gather around a piece of food on the ground.
- Look at books or catalogs that show flowers or plants.
- Help your child take care of a pet and watch it grow together.
- Let your child help you make popsicles from fruit juice and explain how the cold freezer turns the mixture into a solid.

Experiences like these will help your 2 or 3 year old:

- Talk to you about what is happening and what is observed during everyday activities.
- Ask you questions about “why” certain things happen.
- Develop an appreciation for living things like plants and animals.

When your child is 4 to 5 years old:

- Encourage your child to collect objects, such as rocks, and compare their sizes, shapes and colors.
- Read books to your child that describe changes in seasons, plants and insects like butterflies.
- Plant seeds in glass jars so that your child can describe what happens as the roots, stems and leaves grow.
- Ask your child to guess what might happen when storm clouds gather or when you hear thunder.
- Talk with your child about the weather and talk about how the weather might influence what clothing to wear.

Experiences like these will help your 4 or 5 year old:

- Begin to develop procedures for investigating the world.
- Try to figure out answers to simple problems.
- Notice and describe patterns in nature and events.

Creative Arts

Children can learn to use music, art and pretend play to express what they think and feel. When you encourage your child to express ideas and be imaginative, your child will discover new interests, abilities and ways to communicate.



When your child is an infant or toddler:

- Play different types of music for your child – music that's fast and slow, loud and soft, etc.
- Gently move your child's body while listening to music.
- Encourage your child to imitate your actions by offering similar materials, like mixing bowls while you are cooking.
- Introduce your child to the fun of making marks when using a finger or hand to make designs in the sand or snow.

Experiences like these will help your infant or toddler:

- Begin to respond to sounds and music by making sounds and movements.
- Create simple marks and scribbles.
- Imitate what others do during everyday activities.



When your child is 2 to 3 years old:

- Give your child a chance to paint, even if it's just with water on rocks or the sidewalk.
- March or make simple movements while listening to music; talk about the movements with words like up, down, fast and slow.
- Offer your child scarves or small pieces of fabric to use while moving to music.
- Put a blanket over a table to create a place where your child can create a pretend house.
- Let your child play dress up by putting on a large shirt or hat, and play in front of a mirror.

Experiences like these will help your 2 or 3 year old:

- Participate with increasing interest in music and dance experiences.
- Spontaneously begin to create simple drawings.
- Build imagination by pretending that toys are real or acting like someone else.

When your child is 4 to 5 years old:

- Walk around your neighborhood and collect things your child can use to make art, such as colorful fall leaves.
- Take your child to see different types of dance performances at schools, libraries, parks or community centers.
- Join your child in “make believe” by pretending you are at a restaurant or at the doctor’s office.
- Let your child make music by using pots, spoons and other kitchen items.
- Talk with your child about the shapes, colors and designs on buildings and houses where you live.

Experiences like these will help your 4 or 5 year old:

- Express thoughts and feelings through art.
- Improve hand-eye coordination.
- Explain the difference between real and pretend.
- Follow the beat and rhythm of music.

Health & Physical Development

Parents can help children strengthen their muscles, control their bodies and learn to move in more complex ways. Many daily routines also build a child's understanding of healthy living – from eating healthy foods to brushing their teeth.



When your child is an infant or toddler:

- Give your child space to practice rolling, crawling, standing and walking.
- Use toys and objects to show your child how to use her hands, separately and together.
- Help your child visually follow the movement of objects and try to reach for them.
- Support your child's interest in eating food by serving finger foods.
- Set a regular time for brushing your child's teeth.

Experiences like these will help your infant or toddler:

- Become increasingly able to roll over, sit, stand, and run.
- Grasp objects more easily and transfer objects from hand to hand.
- Begin to participate in personal care routines like washing hands, brushing teeth, and eating.



When your child is 2 to 3 years old:

- Arrange pillows and boxes on the floor for your child to climb on, around and through.
- Play simple games like rolling or kicking a ball back and forth.
- Encourage your child to walk up and down steps.
- Let your child help you make meals by doing simple tasks like spooning flour into a bowl.
- Teach your child about safety and health by explaining why we sit down on the bus, use a car seat, look both ways before crossing a street, or eat healthy foods.

Experiences like these will help your 2 or 3 year old:

- Show increased skill and control when balancing, jumping, kicking, and throwing balls.
- Gain strength and dexterity when using tools like crayons or scissors.
- Grow in hand-eye coordination when building things or putting together puzzles.

When your child is 4 to 5 years old:

- Help your child improve balance and coordination with activities like putting a string on the floor and walk along it, one foot in front of the other.
- Take your child to a playground at parks or schools.
- Ask your child to help serve food and pour drinks during family meals.
- Give your child pencils and paper and other types of writing materials.
- Point out places and people related to health and safety, like hospitals and fire fighters, and discuss their work.

Experiences like these will help your 4 or 5 year old:

- Control and strengthen large muscle movements.
- Use hand movements to complete complex tasks.
- Understand the importance of eating healthy food.
- Perform routine tasks like getting dressed and using the toilet independently.
- Become aware of basic health and safety rules.

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Fairfax Futures | 12011 Government Center Pkwy | Suite 920 | Fairfax, Virginia 22035 | www.fairfax-futures.org

For additional information:

National Association for the Education of Young Children
www.naeyc.org

ZERO TO THREE
www.zerotothree.org

Family Communications, Inc. Mister Rogers Neighborhood
www.fci.org

PBS
www.pbs.org/wholechild/

Reading is Fundamental
www.rif.org/

Reach Out and Read
www.reachoutandread.org

Fairfax County Department of Family Services
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/service/dfs/factsheets/HealthyFamilies.htm

Fairfax County Office for Children
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc

Fairfax County Public Schools
www.fcps.edu/start/kindergarten.htm
www.fcps.edu/ss/preschool/childfd2.htm