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AN IMPORTANT PART OF PARENTING INvolves knowing whAt to expect from your child At any given age. As they grow, children change and acquire skills, and they require different things from you. The following section highlights some of the things you might expect to see in your young child. As children move into the school-age years, language development and reading as well as physical and social issues continue to be some of the exciting challenges they face.
Good nutrition is crucial to your child’s overall development. Not only is healthy eating important for your child’s growth, but getting the right nutrition will make your child feel good.

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN YOUR CHILD’S DIET?¹

- **GRAINS** — Try to select bread, pasta and rice made with the whole grain, rather than white bread or white rice.
- **VEGETABLES** — Try to give your child a variety, including dark and orange vegetables.
- **FRUIT** — Try to eat a variety of fruits and restrict fruit juices. Fruit juices tend to have high calorie contents and are not as nutritious as whole fruit.
- **DAIRY** — Try to choose low-fat or fat-free dairy products.
- **MEAT AND BEANS** — Try to choose lean meats, and include beans, peas, nuts and seeds.
- For more detailed information, visit [http://www.choosemyplate.gov/](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/).

FOOD ALLERGIES

When deciding what to include in your child’s diet, it’s important to be aware of food allergies, which can be mild to severe. Common foods children might be allergic to include cow’s milk, eggs, peanuts, soy, wheat, tree nuts, fish and shellfish. It’s important to discuss the possibility of allergies with your doctor. She or he might recommend waiting until your child is a little older to introduce certain foods.² To learn more about food allergies, go to [http://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Food-Allergies-in-Children.aspx](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Food-Allergies-in-Children.aspx).

HOW CAN YOU GET YOUR CHILD TO EAT A HEALTHY DIET?³

Make meals and snacks fun by giving children a role in preparing meals or making a game out of selecting a new fruit or vegetable to try.

Be a good role model by eating a healthy diet.

Don’t worry if you don’t meet all of your child’s nutritional requirements for the day. As a recent study of the American Dietetic Association showed, even picky eaters will eat all the nutrients they need if they are given a variety of options.
There are many aspects of your child’s physical health. One is nutrition, which was just discussed. Another is exercise and fitness. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children should be active for at least 60 minutes every day. You can engage your child in many activities that will promote physical fitness. A few examples are:

- Going for a bike ride together.
- Having your child help you with the garden or yard work.
- Going for a run at your local high school track or a park.
- Kicking or throwing a football, or hitting a baseball.
- Taking a walk in the neighborhood.

Additional strategies for encouraging physical fitness:

- Swimming at a community pool.
- Walking around the local shopping mall.

- Plan outdoor play dates so your child has the chance to interact and play games such as tag and hide and seek with peers.
- Extracurricular activities such as joining a local sports team are great ways to promote physical health and build your child’s social network.
- Make sure your child’s play time isn’t spent entirely on video games. If you allow video games, consider games that require kids be active, such as the Wii.
language development

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) has spearheaded our understanding of how parents can help foster their children’s language acquisition.

Here are some of ASHA’s suggestions for helping your child learn to talk at different ages:

2 TO 4 YEARS
- Use clear, simple speech for your child to model.
- Repeat what your child says, indicating that you understand. Build and expand on what your child said: “Want juice? I have juice. I have apple juice. Do you want apple juice?”
- Ask questions that require a choice: “Do you want an apple or an orange?” “Do you want to wear your red or blue shirt?”
- Expand your child’s vocabulary. Name body parts, and identify what you do with them: “This is my nose. I can smell flowers, brownies, popcorn, and soap.”
- Sing simple songs and recite nursery rhymes to show the rhythm and pattern of speech.

4 TO 6 YEARS
- When your child starts a conversation, give your full attention whenever possible.
- Make sure you have your child’s attention before you speak.
- Pause after speaking. This gives your child a chance to continue the conversation.
- Talk about spatial relationships (first, middle and last; right and left) and opposites (up and down; on and off).
- Work on forming and explaining categories. Identify the thing that does not belong in a group of similar objects: “A shoe does not belong with an apple and an orange because you can’t eat it; it is not round; it is not a fruit.”
- Help your child follow two- and three-step directions: “Go to your room, and bring me your book.”
- Play games with your child such as “house.” Exchange roles in the family, with you pretending to be the child. Talk about the different rooms and furnishings in the house.
- Take advantage of daily activities. For example, while in the kitchen, encourage your child to name the utensils needed. Discuss the foods on the menu and their colors, textures and tastes. “Where does the food come from? Which foods do you like? Which do you dislike? Who will clean up?” Emphasize the use of prepositions by asking him or her to put the napkin on the table, in your lap, or under the spoon. Identify whom the napkin belongs to: “It is my napkin.” “It is Daddy’s.” “It is John’s.”
During the age span of 4 to 9 years, most children learn to read. You might have a child who is not as interested in books and might put off learning to read until she or he is in school. Or you might have an eager 4-year-old who recognizes and verbalizes words when she or he reads with you at night. Whatever your child’s age, it is important that you instill a sense in her or him that reading is fun. Not only will reading help your child’s overall learning ability, but when you read together, you will strengthen your bond with your child.

Fun ways to help your child learn to read:
- Read books out loud with your child from the time she or he is very young.
- Use funny voices or animal sounds.
  - Act out the stories.
  - Run your fingers along the text so your child relates the words to the story.
- Look at the pictures and ask your child to name the things she or he sees in them.
- Ask your child to join in if there is a song or a phrase repeated in the story.
- Ask your child questions while reading (“What do you think will happen next?” “Why do you think they did that?”).
- Always answer your child’s questions about the story.

Strategies for sparking your child’s interest in reading:
- Model reading. If your child sees you value reading, she or he will likely try to imitate your behavior. When you read a book or the newspaper, encourage your child to read one of her or his books.
- Go to the library. The public library is a wonderful resource. Not only does it save you money while offering a large selection of books to choose from, but many libraries have programs to encourage early reading. Also, kids love to take “trips,” so taking a trip to the library makes reading even more special and important.
  - Use books as presents and prizes. By giving your child books as either a present or a prize (if you’re rewarding positive behaviors), you’re sending a message that reading is a treat.
It is helpful to prepare your child for school before he or she begins and to develop a good relationship with his or her teacher once the school year starts. This will make it easier to handle any school issues that you or your child experience.

How do I prepare my child for preschool and kindergarten?

There are many ways to prepare your child for her or his first school experience. You can take practical steps such as teaching your child his or her name, address and phone number. You can take your child on a tour of the school and see if you can meet the teacher ahead of time. Also, you can read fun stories to your child and teach her or him about numbers in an enjoyable way. For instance, have your child count and sort items you have bought at the grocery store. Have your child help you follow a recipe. And teach your child to participate in group activities so she or he gets used to socializing. For example, register your child for a dance class or a group program at the YMCA.

How do I build a good relationship with my child’s teacher?

The stronger the relationship between you and your child’s teacher and the more you communicate with each other, the better the learning experience will be for your child. Here are some tips for maintaining a good relationship with your child’s teacher:

- Briefly introduce yourself at the beginning of the year or during back-to-school night.
- Offer to volunteer in the classroom.
- Keep in touch with the teacher often, but without being seen as a “pest.”
- Talk about your child’s day in school when she or he gets home.
- Address any problems right away by calling or e-mailing the teacher.
- Remember that PARENT stands for partner, advocate, resource, encourager, negotiator, team member!
In today’s society, many children spend at least some of their days being cared for by someone other than their mother or father. While parents might have mixed feelings about sending their kids to child care, out-of-home care has many benefits. Children often enjoy these experiences because they have opportunities to play with kids their age. Centers should have structured lesson plans, even for babies. Child care also allows parents time to work outside the home or to have breaks.

Steps to choosing high-quality child care:

1. Start looking for child care as far in advance as possible because many centers have waiting lists.
2. Visit child care programs and ask lots of questions. You will want to know about the adult-to-child ratio, the group size, the child care provider’s background and qualifications, the turnover of employees at the facility, and the accreditation of the facility.
3. Make a choice about child care by weighing the pros and cons, but be careful not to let tempting pros, such as low cost, cause you to ignore dangerous cons, such as an unaccredited facility.
4. Partner with your child care provider so you continue to be involved in your child’s care even when you are not there.
5. Pros and cons of different types of child care

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<th>TYPE OF CHILD CARE</th>
<th>PROS</th>
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| Child care provided by relatives | - Care is inexpensive.  
- Relatives form bonds with your child.  
- Formal programs might not exist in your area. | - Parents might get too much advice from relatives.  
- Relatives might feel freer to discipline your child in ways you do not like.  
- You might not have backup if a relative is sick. |
| Family-based day care | - Child care is less expensive.  
- Groups are small. | - The provider is less likely to be licensed or regulated.  
- You might not have backup if the provider is sick. |
| Center-based day care | - Child care is reliable and licensed.  
- Children have lots of social interaction. | - Centers are more expensive and less personal.  
- They may be closed on holidays. |
Traveling with children does not have to be stressful if you do a little research before starting out. If you are traveling with your child by car, you want to make sure you have an appropriate car seat for your child’s age, height, and weight. In this age range (4 to 9 years), most likely your child will be riding in a belt-positioning booster seat. Children use the car’s regular seat belts with these booster seats. If the seat is backless, it should provide head support. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends that all children should travel in booster seats until they are at least 8 years old and at least 4 feet 9 inches tall.13

What are some common mistakes that parents make regarding booster seats and car safety?

- Using a secondhand car seat. You should not use a car seat if it has been in a car crash or if you do not have its original instructions. Also, car seats usually have expiration dates on them because the plastic parts wear out. Never use a car seat beyond the expiration date.14
- Not using the right type of seat belt for the booster seat. Check the instructions that come with the booster seat to learn which seat belts are appropriate. Booster seats must be used with lap and shoulder belts. When using a booster seat, make sure that the lap belt lies low and snug across your child’s upper thighs and that the shoulder belt crosses the middle of your child’s chest and shoulder. You may want to have your car seat installation checked by a professional at a child car safety inspection station.15
- Letting your child sit in the front seat too soon. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration suggests that you wait until your child is 13 years old before allowing him or her to ride in the front seat, and even then, the administration recommends that your child sit in the back seat as often as possible.16
Keeping your child safe must be your number one priority. While your child might not need the constant supervision that toddlers need, children ages 4 to 9 still need a considerable amount of care. If you are keeping safety in mind, you will prevent accidents and dangerous situations.

**First aid and choking**


**Remember:**
- Choose age-appropriate toys. Do not give small children toys that are heavy or fragile. Inspect toys for small or loose parts, sharp edges, points, loose batteries, and other hazards.
- Keep toxic chemicals and cleaning solutions safely stored in childproof cabinets.
- Create a safe environment and supervise children carefully, particularly near water, furniture, electrical outlets, stove tops and medicine cabinets.

**Child abuse**

Make sure you talk with your child about being careful around people he or she doesn’t know. Make sure your child knows that if a stranger approaches and asks for help finding a dog or offers candy, your child should run to a safe place as soon as possible. In addition, you should teach your child the difference between appropriate touching and inappropriate touching, and let your child know that if anyone touches her or him in an inappropriate way or a way that makes her or him feel uncomfortable, she or he should let you know immediately.

If you have any concern that your child is being abused by a caregiver, you need to address the situation immediately! No matter how hard it might be to face the fact that a caregiver might be abusing your child, do not overlook the signs. Physical signs such as bruises, abrasions, broken bones, etc., particularly if they are repeated injuries, signal that there could be a problem. Behavioral changes such as excessive crying, resistance to being left with that caregiver, lack of appetite, mood swings, lack of communication, or regressive behaviors can be signs that abuse might be occurring. Go with your gut feeling. If you suspect child abuse, remove your child from the abusive environment, talk to the caregiver, and if you still have concerns, call the child abuse reporting line in your area. Do not leave your child with this caregiver again until you are certain your child is not being abused.
PARENTING YOUNG CHILDREN CAN BE BOTH EXTREMELY DEMANDING AND EXTREMELY REWARDING. Every day brings something new and exciting, but it also brings new challenges for parents. Helping children make the transition to school and helping children establish social relationships can set the stage for tackling your child’s other daily activities. Taking time and understanding the unique needs of children in this age group will undoubtedly help you enjoy this special time of life.
homework

1. What do you think are your child’s strengths, and what makes him or her unique?

2. Which of the topics covered in this section provided new and/or helpful information for you?

3. What do you think is the most challenging aspect of parenting your child at this age?

4. Name at least three activities that you can see yourself engaging in to help promote your child’s positive development?
endnotes


