

Providing Early Stimulation

Did you know that . . .

- *Babies are able to see and hear from the time they are born?*
- *Children learn as much in the first 4 years of life as they will learn in the next 13?*
- *Babies begin to learn right at birth?*



Once parents felt obliged to take care only of their babies' physical needs for food, diaper changes, bathing, and dressing. Now we know that from an early age babies are ready for action. They respond excitedly to new objects and new people, but at the same time welcome the familiar.

From the different experiences they have, children begin to learn about their world. The greater the variety of experiences they have, the more they learn.

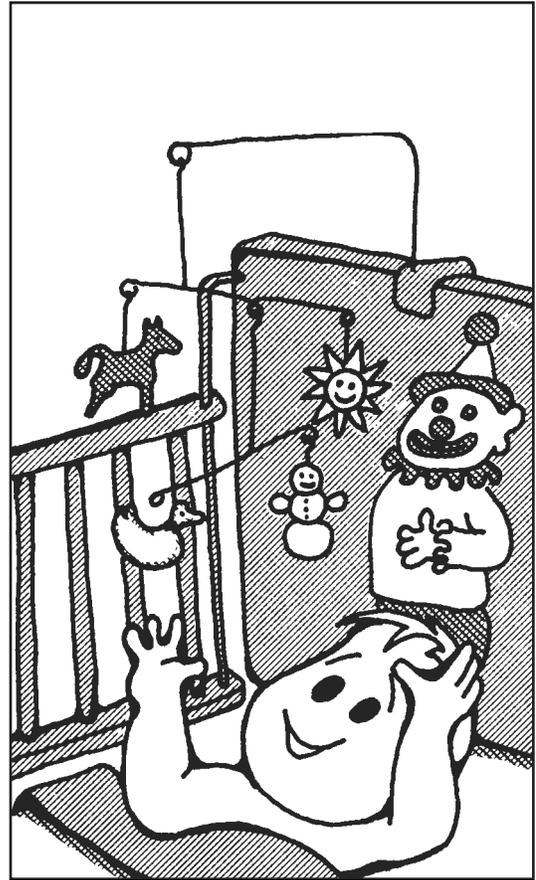
As parents, you are in every way your children's first teachers. Babies are ready to respond with all of their senses, but it's up to you to provide opportunities for them to use these senses.

The cradle of learning

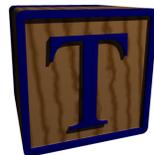
Often it seems that newborn babies are just lying in their cribs doing nothing. Actually, they are very active and hard at work. Their bodies are growing and their minds are developing. From birth they want to hear your voice, see your face, and feel your touch. They want to explore their world and their expanding abilities.

Even though babies can't understand exactly what you are saying or doing, they are taking in a great deal. They react to special things you do for them—playing simple games with them, hanging objects over the crib, putting pictures on the wall, and giving them brightly colored toys.

These efforts are your children's first learning experiences. The path to these experiences is through the senses—hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, and touching. Given opportunities to use their senses, children begin to learn what the world is all about.



You're never too young to learn



The first years of life, researchers tell us, are the most important for the child. This is the time when the most rapid development takes place. Children need to use all their senses during these early years. If they don't, they may not develop as much as they could, and may even fall behind in one or more areas of growth.

Watch your children as they try out new skills and activities. If they lose interest, try something new. Babies get bored, just as we do. On the other hand, if they ignore something you've given them to play with, it may be that they're not ready for it yet.

An everyday experience

You can easily provide your children with sensory experience during their early years. For example, much learning can take place during feeding and dressing times. In fact, a little extra effort can make these routines come to life.

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H E L P I N G • C H I L D R E N • G R O W

To help your children as they learn, keep in mind these points:

- Give them different experiences so each of their senses is used.
- Watch to see what interests them and provide activities to fit these interests.
- Talk to your children; listen to them; respond to what they try to say.
- Give children freedom to discover what the world is like on their own.

It's your privilege to be able to awaken children to the world around them. This experience can be a joyful one, for you as well as your child.

Exploring the world day by day



Some examples of learning experiences that young children enjoy at different ages are given below.

At birth. Babies spend most of their time sleeping and eating. Their first learning experiences will be from the warmth and movement of your body and the sound of your voice.

- Don't be afraid to pick your baby up often. Change his or her position and point out different things.
- Talk at every opportunity so he or she can hear your voice. Sing or provide music for your baby to listen to now and then.

From 2 to 6 months. Children grow more aware of their world. They begin to smile at their parents. Their eyes are able to focus on and follow objects. They may begin to reach for things.

- Prop your baby up or use a baby seat to encourage looking around.
- Hang bright objects over the crib—mobiles, paper shapes, or pieces of cloth with bells.
- Put the child in a safe area near where you work so you can be watched and heard.

From 6 to 9 months. Curiosity greatly increases. Babies may be able to sit up, crawl, pull themselves to their feet, and pick up small objects.

- Encourage reaching and crawling by putting brightly colored objects beyond his or her reach.
- Arrange places in your home where he or she is free to crawl and explore.

- If you occasionally put your baby in a playpen, provide a variety of toys like sponge blocks, rattles, and squeeze toys. Move the playpen around to change the scenery.

From 9 to 15 months. Children will probably enjoy dropping objects. They may stand alone, take their first steps, and even say a word or two. They'll probably try to get into everything.

- Give them simple household objects like kitchen pots or wooden spoons to play with.
- Talk to them while you're feeding, dressing, or bathing them, naming different objects they touch or look at.
- Read to them, pointing to pictures and naming the objects.

From 15 months to 2 years. Children will start to creep up stairs and be more active. They'll start to throw and kick objects.

- Read to them regularly, and their enjoyment of books will grow.
- Many favorite toys can be found at home, like plastic bowls and large boxes to crawl in and out of.
- As you shop with them, talk about the things you're seeing. On a long ride, take toys to amuse them when they become bored.

From 2 to 3 years. Children usually develop a desire to master as much of the world as they can. Let them do as many tasks as they are able.

- Take preschoolers on trips to museums, the library, or the zoo, and to watch people working at different jobs.
- Play word games like "I see something round. What is it?"
- Give them tasks at which they can succeed, and praise their success.

From 3 to 5 years. Children develop more physical strength and coordination. They become very talkative and their vocabulary increases rapidly.

- Give them simple household chores such as setting the table.
- Carry on short conversations with them. Don't be afraid to use words they don't understand, and explain their meanings.
- Encourage them to discuss television programs they've seen.

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