Love Talk Sing Read Play

How to build your child's brain and support their development

From the moment your baby is born, they are learning.
You are their first and most important teacher.

NSW Health

NSW GOVERNMENT

By age five, most of your child's brain has already developed

Their brain is built through everyday moments you spend together, like talking, singing, reading and playing

Simple, loving interactions help your child feel safe and secure and lay down their foundations for learning.

You don't need expensive toys or screens.
Your time, love, and attention are what matter most.

For more information on how to support your child's development, visit:

- health.nsw.gov.au/**buildingbrains**
- nsw.gov.au/**BrighterBeginnings**
- **brighttomorrows**.org.au

Find your local child and family health centre

www.health.nsw.gov.au
/child-family-health-services

Child health and development checks

These checks are very important for making sure your child is growing and developing well, from those early weeks right through to starting school.

They're also a chance to ask questions and get help with feeding, sleep, behaviour, and your own wellbeing too.

Every baby is different, even those born in the same family. These checks help make sure your child is thriving in their own way.

You can find these in your child's Blue Book. Checks can be done at a child and family health centre or by your GP (doctor). Centres will do these checks for free if you have a Medicare card.

Before your appointment

Take a few minutes to answer the 'Learn the Signs. Act Early.' questions in your child's Blue Book. These begin from the 6-8 week check.

This helps your nurse or doctor understand how your child is growing.

Aim to complete them all, each check is important:

- [ ] 1-4 weeks
- [ ] 6-8 weeks
- [ ] 6 months
- [ ] 12 months
- [ ] 18 months
- [ ] 2 years
- [ ] 3 years
- [ ] 4 years

Birth to 2 months

Things your baby will start to do

- smile, coo and make gurgling sounds
- turn their head towards sounds
- grasp your finger
- focus on faces and watch you as you move
- try to hold their head up during tummy time by 6 weeks.

You know your baby best

Talk to your child and family health nurse or doctor if your baby:

- doesn't respond to sounds
- doesn't seem interested or listening during play
- isn't feeding as expected
- isn't bringing hands to mouth by 8 weeks.

Your baby's first health and development checks help set them up for a strong start.

Make time for your baby's health and development checks at:

- 1-4 weeks
- 6-8 weeks

Ideas to support your baby's development

Love Talk Sing Read Play

Comfort your baby when they cry. This makes them feel secure and loved, and they'll learn over time that the world is a safe place. You can't spoil a baby by giving them love and attention.

Copy your baby's sounds and expressions. Your baby will enjoy communicating like this. These 'conversations' are the start of language and social skills.

Sing the same lullabies or rhymes at bedtime. Familiar sounds help your baby feel calm and can support sleep. You can sing in any language you like, or the songs you sang when you were pregnant with them.

Look at picture books together. Try a black and white book. Newborns love the contrast of colours because it's easier for them to see. Talk about what you see; your baby is soaking up your words.

Try a few minutes of tummy time each day while your baby is awake. Lay them on a play mat or your chest. Add a baby play mirror nearby; they'll enjoy seeing their reflection. Stay close and stop when your baby seems tired.

2 to 6 months

Things your baby will start to do

- smile, coo and move excitedly and makes sounds when you talk to them
- pass a toy from one hand to the other
- lift head and chest when lying on tummy and start pushing up on their forearms
- follow your face or a toy with their eyes.

By 6 months:

- roll both ways from stomach to back
- sit with little or no support
- recognise familiar songs and get excited for what comes next

You know your baby best

Talk to your child and family health nurse or doctor if your baby:

- isn't squealing, laughing or making vowel sounds (ah, eh, oh)
- doesn't respond to familiar faces or turn to familiar voices
- isn't starting to roll when playing on floor by 6 months
- has lost skills they once had.

Your baby's health and development checks help set them up for a strong start.

Make time for your baby's health and development checks at:

- 6 – 8 weeks
- 6 months

Ideas to support your baby's development

Love Talk Sing Read Play

Show delight in your baby. Give them kisses, hugs and smile at them. They love your attention and watching your expressions. Your interest and eye contact builds trust.

Talk to your baby as you go about your day. Tell them what you're doing, then pause so they can respond. This helps them connect words to actions and emotions. Your voice is their favourite sound.

Make up songs. Use the sounds your baby makes in the songs. Add in hand actions if you like. Singing builds language skills and makes everyday moments joyful.

Read short stories while they sit in your lap. Cuddle up with a short book and read together. This helps your baby feel close to you and builds their attention and listening skills.

Offer your baby one toy at a time. Encourage them to reach and grab the toy, then motion for them to give it back. These games build motor skills and curiosity.

6 to 12 months

Things your baby will start to do

- crawl on hands and knees and pull to stand
- hold a spoon or small bits of food in their hand to try to feed themselves
- try to drink water from an open cup
- play games with you, like peek-a-boo
- look for things they see you hide
- enjoy dropping objects on the floor
- call their parent ‘dada’ or ‘mama’ or other special names
- take steps while holding onto furniture.

You know your baby best

Talk to your child and family health nurse or doctor if your baby:

- doesn’t respond to you
- isn’t babbling and making different sounds
- isn’t sitting, crawling or pulling to stand
- doesn’t point to things or swap objects between hands
- isn’t learning to eat family foods
- has lost skills they once had.

Your baby’s health and development checks help set them up for a strong start.

Make time for your baby’s health and development checks at:

- 6 months
- 12 months

Ideas to support your baby’s development

Love Talk Sing Read Play

Your baby may cry or cling to you when meeting new people. Stay calm and comfort them. If you’re leaving, say goodbye and let them know that you’ll be back soon. This helps them feel safe in new situations.

Use mealtimes to connect. Turn off screens and chat with them in your language, like ‘you’re eating a banana! It’s squishy, isn’t it?’ Give them time to respond with a look, a sound, or movement.

Sing nursery rhymes with hand actions like ‘Twinkle, Twinkle’ or a song from your culture. Your baby will love joining in by clapping, waving, or bouncing along. Repetition and rhythm help your baby tune into sounds.

Make story time fun. Use different voices, point to pictures, and let your baby touch the book. Even if they don’t sit still, they are still listening, watching, and learning.

Play simple games that involve taking turns, like hiding toys under cups, or dropping blocks in a container. These help your baby build memory, build their confidence and solve simple problems.

12 to 24 months

Over the next year, your child will start picking up new skills. Every child grows at their own pace, so don't worry if they don't do everything at once.

Things your child will start to do

- walk and climb stairs with a bit of help
- drink from an open cup, with a few spills
- pick up things between thumb and pointer finger, like small bits of food
- scribble with a crayon
- say at least 6 words that others can clearly understand
- copy everyday home activities, like brushing the floor
- point to things when named, or to start a conversation
- recognise themselves in the mirror.

You know your child best

Talk to your child and family health nurse or doctor if your child:

- isn't using words or actions to communicate, like saying 'up' or lifting arms up to be picked up
- isn't walking steadily by 18 months
- doesn't respond to others or show interest in familiar people
- can't follow simple instructions, like 'find your shoes'
- has lost skills they once had.

Your child's health and development checks help set them up for a strong start.

Make time for your child's health and development checks at:

- 12 months
- 18 months

Ideas to support your child's development

Love Talk Sing Read Play

Your child is starting to feel big emotions. Use gentle words, praise the good things they do and guide them through tricky moments with redirection or distraction. It helps them feel safe and understood.

Talk while exploring the world together. At the park or in the garden, name what you see, like 'look at that big tree!' Give your child time to respond with a sound, point or smile.

Sing simple songs with finger movements, like 'Open, Shut Them'. Your child will love the rhythm, movements and the excitement of what comes next.

Look at picture books together. Children love sturdy board books they can carry. Let them turn the pages. You don't have to read every word, and you can also make things up.

Your child may start playing alone for short bursts but still loves having you nearby. Offer simple games like putting shapes or pegs in a container. Play helps them practise thinking skills.

2 years

Over the next 12 months, your child will start picking up new skills. Every child grows at their own pace, so don't worry if they don't do everything at once.

Things your child will start to do

- join two words together like 'more water'
- know some of their body parts
- build a tower of 6 or more blocks
- push and pull toys
- use a preferred hand
- notice when others are upset or hurt
- get dressed with help
- run, jump and kick a ball
- say their name, 'me', 'I' and 'you'
- turn pages of a board book
- follow 2-step instructions, like 'go to your room and bring your shoes'.

Your child's health and development checks help set them up for a strong start.

Make time for your child's health and development checks at 2 years.

You know your child best

Talk to your child and family health nurse or doctor if your child:

- aren't interested in playing with toys or others
- are falling a lot or walking unsteadily
- find it hard to use small objects
- can't copy actions or words
- can't understand simple instructions
- aren't speaking in sentences, are drooling or have very unclear speech
- has lost skills they once had.

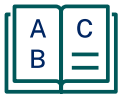
Ideas to support your child's development

Love Talk Sing Read Play

Try offering a cuddle or a gentle distraction when your toddler has a tantrum. They're still learning what emotions are and how to handle them. Your calm presence teaches them how to feel safe even when big feelings take over.

Your toddler is bursting with curiosity, so **ask and answer questions all day long!** 'Where do we go to kick the ball?'. Keep the conversation rolling when you're at the park, in the car, or having a meal.

Try simple songs with clapping and hand actions, like 'If you're happy and you know it'. You might be doing most of the singing, but they'll love the rhythm and movement, and soon enough, they'll be leading.



Everywhere you go, there's something to read! Point out traffic signs or food labels in the supermarkets. Try saying, 'That's the stop sign,' or 'Look! It's a picture of apples.' Little moments like this build early literacy.

Try a colour-sorting game using everyday things, like socks, pegs, or blocks. 'Can we find all the red ones?' It's fun, simple, and helps your child learn to notice patterns and group things together.

3 years

Over the next 12 months, your child will start picking up new skills. Every child grows at their own pace, so don't worry if they don't do everything at once.

Things your child will start to do

- talk well enough for other people to understand most of the time
- understand the idea of same and different, like big and little
- draw a person, with body, arm and legs
- enjoy jokes
- name some colours and count some numbers
- play the same game beside another child
- often can't tell what's real and what's make-believe
- show sympathy when others are upset
- can jump, hop and stand on one foot for 2 seconds
- enjoy routines and rituals, like bathtime and reading before bed
- follow 3 step instructions, like 'pick up your toy, put it on the chair and give it some food'.

Your child's health and development checks help set them up for a strong start.

Make time for your child's health and development checks at 3 years.

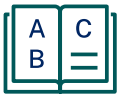
You know your child best

Talk to your child and family health nurse or doctor if your child:

- isn't interested in interactive games, make-believe or doesn't respond to others
- doesn't speak clearly or has speech fluency problems or stammering
- can't follow instructions with three steps
- can't jump or hop on the spot
- has difficulty scribbling
- has lost skills they once had.

Ideas to support your child's development

Love Talk Sing Read Play



Help your child put their feelings into words. You might say, 'You're upset because you lost the game. That's really hard.' Giving their emotions names helps them make sense of what's going on inside.

Three-year-olds love telling stories! Ask things like, 'What did we do at the library today?'. Showing interest makes them feel heard and helps grow their language skills.

Keep singing together in any language, especially the songs they've heard before. They might start to sing along or do some of the actions on their own. They're learning through repetition and fun.

Let your child choose the books. It's OK if they choose the same ones over and over. Invite them to repeat familiar lines or finish a sentence: 'The bear went over the...?' It's all part of their growing confidence with language.

Plant seeds in a pot and watch them grow together. All you need is a sunny windowsill. It's a great way to teach your child about living things, and they might even want to taste the herbs or veggies they grow!

4 years

Over the next 12 months, your child will start picking up new skills. Every child grows at their own pace, so don't worry if they don't do everything at once.

Things your child will start to do

- hold a pencil in a tripod grip
- draw a house (door, window, roof chimney) and can copy a square
- skip and walk along a line
- throw and catch a ball well
- count 10 or more things
- tell the difference between real and make believe
- have a back-and-forth conversation about a recent or past event
- play with other children and may have a close friend
- colour pictures neatly staying in the lines
- can use 5-6 words or more in sentences.

Your child's health and development checks help set them up for a strong start.

Make time for your child's health and development checks at 4 years.

You know your child best

Talk to your child and family health nurse or doctor if your child:

- isn't using the toilet on their own during the day
- doesn't show a wide range of emotions
- is usually withdrawn and not active
- has difficulty drawing pictures
- can't give first and last name
- is not playing with other children
- is not able to have a conversation
- can't wash and dry hands, or get undressed without help
- has lost skills they once had.

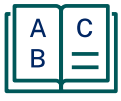
Ideas to support your child's development

Love Talk Sing Read Play

Your child might feel a range of emotions about starting school. They might be excited or nervous. Talking to them about this and even visiting the school together can help prepare them.

4-year-olds are full of stories and imagination. They'll tell long tales and explain what happened to them that day. It's a joy to watch their thoughts come to life.

Let your child take the lead with songs they know well. They'll love singing their favourites or teaching you the actions. You might even hear them singing to themselves during play.



Visit the library together and let your child choose books about their interests, like dinosaurs or dogs. Stories about real-life changes can help them understand about what's coming next, like starting school.

Try games that build memory, cooperation and following instructions, like 'What's the time, Mister Wolf?' or simple board games. These activities help your child learn turn-taking and build skills they'll use in the classroom.

This resource builds on the original 2009 Communication Strategy developed by Dr Roger Blackmore and Lynn Garlick.

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