

Helping Your Young Child Grow & Learn When You Don't Have a Home of Your Own: Guide for Parents and Guardians

This is a guide for parents who are homeless or have a temporary living arrangement and who have young children (and for people helping them). It offers tips for how to help your child grow and develop, helps you find early childhood programs in your area, and provides resources so that you can find out more about early learning and development.



Born to Learn!

Babies and young children are always learning, changing, and growing! During the first few years of life, children learn so much. They learn how to communicate with others, they learn about the world around them, and they learn to talk and walk. All of this happens in baby steps with your help. As a parent, you are your child's first and most important teacher!

This may sound like a big job, especially if you are going through a hard time right now, but helping your child learn and grow is something you can do everyday.

Making the Most of Daily Routines

Everyday activities can be great teaching and learning times. Smiling and talking to your baby during diaper changes helps you and your baby bond and also helps your baby's learning. Take a book or two in your bag to read to your child on the bus, waiting at the doctor's

office or anytime you have a few minutes. Bedtime is also a great time to read to your child. Life might be busy and stressful right now, but try to be consistent with you child about routines like meal time and bedtime. Also try to be consistent in handling their behavior. Young children can grow and learn best if they know what to expect.

Talking, listening and answering your child helps them learn and grow. Smiling at your baby, comforting your crying baby, and responding when your baby makes sounds are ways you can develop good communication. Keep this up as your baby becomes a toddler and then a preschooler. Answer your child's questions. Listen to your child's stories and ideas. Ask questions and encourage your child's imagination.

Simple Things YOU CAN DO

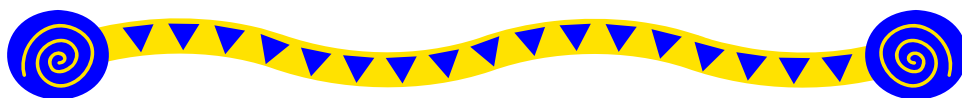


- ◇ Play peek-a-boo
- ◇ Sing
- ◇ Point out alike and different things about what you see, "Look, 2 cars, one is red and one is blue."
- ◇ Hop, skip, and jump with your preschooler
- ◇ Talk to your child about her actions and feelings, "You are busy with that ball" or "You look happy"
- ◇ Play pat-a-cake
- ◇ Play a rhyming game with your toddler or preschooler, say a word and ask him to say a word that rhymes (you may have to help at first).

This chart shows how children develop and how you can help at different stages.

<i>Baby steps</i>	<i>Everyday ways to help</i>	<i>Concerns you may have</i>
Communicating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looks at you Smiles back at you Makes sounds Says “mama, dada” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talking and smiling during diaper changes Responding to gestures (like pointing to a toy) Singing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn’t look at your face Doesn’t make many sounds Doesn’t respond to your voice or loud noises
Moving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holds head up Rolls over Sits up Crawls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helping her play and move in different positions on a comfortable and safe place (mat on the floor, your lap) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn’t hold head up or roll over One side of body moves better than the other Body seems too stiff or too floppy
Playing & Learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watches people and toys Interested in baby toys Tries new actions with toys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Playing peek-a-boo with people and toys Using baby toys for reaching and holding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn’t seem interested in watching or holding toys
Health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eats and sleeps well Has energy to play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following healthy diet Using infant car seat Going to regular medical appointments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequently gets sick Has trouble with eating or sleeping Difficulty finding health services

<i>Toddler steps</i>	<i>Everyday ways to help</i>	<i>Concerns you may have</i>
Communicating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Points or tells what she wants Understands “eyes,” “nose,” “mouth” Shows affection to familiar people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving choices of clothes during dressing or toys during play Naming body parts during baths Singing favorite songs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn’t show or tell you what she wants Rarely points to body parts or familiar toys when named Doesn’t respond to loud noises
Moving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walks Takes off socks or hat Turns pages in book Uses hands to eat and holds cup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Putting toys on edge of sofa or bed to encourage walking along furniture Including finger foods (cereal, soft fruit) during meals Letting him take off socks during dressing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not walking by himself Seems to want to pull to stand but doesn’t do this alone Uses one side of body much more than the other Doesn’t look at or pick up small objects
Playing & Learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Puts toys in and out of containers Stacks toys Imitates actions to simple rhymes (pat-a-cake) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading simple picture books Dancing to music Teaching new finger plays Playing pretend games like driving a car or feeding a doll 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not very interested in trying new actions, words, or toys Rarely imitates adults or other children
Health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eats and sleeps well Has energy to play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following healthy diet Using toddler car seat Going to regular medical appointments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequently gets sick Has trouble with eating or sleeping Gets tired easily Difficulty finding health services



Preschooler steps	Everyday ways to help	Concerns you may have
Communicating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses many words and longer sentences • Follows 2-3 step directions • Tells familiar stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading books and talking about everyday experiences • Asking child to help with simple tasks (washing table) • Talking each night about what happened during the day – encouraging her to remember her own “story” 	Difficult to understand what he says <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He gets very frustrated when others don’t understand him • Doesn’t talk much or respond to what’s said to him • Doesn’t respond to loud noises
Moving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jumps • Walks up and down stairs • Throws ball • Puts on shoes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Going outside, in the park, or on a playground for running and climbing • Playing catch, kicking a ball • Encouraging more independence in dressing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Falls often or easily • Doesn’t move as quickly as other preschoolers • Doesn’t run or climb stairs • Needs a lot of help with dressing
Playing & Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows basic colors • Draws a person • Likes playing with other children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playing “color” or “shape” scavenger hunt (finding all the blue toys or square shapes) • Drawing together while waiting for appointments • Cutting out magazine pictures and making a scrapbook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn’t seem to understand colors or shapes • Avoids playing with other children
Health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eats and sleeps well • Has energy to play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following healthy diet • Using car seat • Going to regular medical appointments • Helping her learn to wash her hands well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequently gets sick • Has trouble with eating or sleeping • Gets tired easily • Difficulty finding health services

This chart is excerpted from: *Helping Young Children Grow & Learn: A Guide For Families & Shelter Providers*, Information Brief No. 10, Fall 2003, Project HOPE, Virginia, by Evelyn Reed-Victor and Michele Myers.

Is Something Wrong?

It is important to get answers if you are concerned about your child’s growth or development. As a parent you may notice a concern before others would. You might be concerned that your baby can’t sit up like other babies her age. Maybe your toddler doesn’t say many words. Maybe your child is sick and tired frequently. If you have concerns, talk to your child’s doctor or nurse. You might also want to talk to an expert and find out if your child should be evaluated.

If your child is birth to age 3, you should

contact: Illinois Early Intervention at:
www.dhs.state.il.us/ei/
 OR call: 1-800-323-4769

If your child is 3 to 5 years old, you should

contact:
 In Chicago: Chicago Early Childhood Locator,
<http://schoollocator.cps.k12.il.us/ECE/help.jsp>
 or call: 1-800-323-4769
 For outside of Chicago: Early Childhood Special Education, 1-800-323-GROW (800-323-4769)

Early Childhood Programs

Young children are eager to learn and early childhood programs can help prepare them for school. Early childhood programs also provide a stable and caring place for your child to go every day. The law says that homeless young children (and those in temporary living situations) should be given “priority” for enrollment in public early childhood programs. This means that if there is space available, your child should be able to enroll in an Illinois State Board of Education funded Early Childhood program or an Illinois Head Start Program. If there is not space available, your child should be put on the top of the waiting list.

For Assistance:

◇ Illinois State Board of Education funded Early Childhood Program:

www.isbe.net/earlychi/html/directories.htm
 or call: 217-524-4835

◇ Illinois Head Start Program:

www.ilheadstart.org/map.html
 OR call: 618-583-2083



Need Help?

A resource person to help you is the **school district homeless liaison**. He or she can help you even if your children are not old enough for regular school. To find the school district liaison, call the school in your area and ask to be connected to the school district homeless liaison or for their phone number.

Helpful Resources

Illinois Department of Human Resources

To find out about cash, food, and/or medical assistance and other programs, go to: www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=27894
OR call the DHS Help Line at 1-800-843-6154

Illinois Early Learning Project

To find tip sheets on different topics relating to young children's learning and development, go to: www.illinoisearlylearning.org and click on Tip Sheets on the left column.

Zero to Three

For information and resources about growth and development of babies and toddlers, go to: www.zerotothree.org

Reading is Fundamental

For tips and activities to help your child love books and reading, go to: www.rif.org



Quick Contacts

**Illinois State Board of Education
Homeless Education Hotline:
1-800-215-6379**

**Opening Doors Project
1-224-366-8623**

www.homelessed.net



The Opening Doors Project:

Adult Learning Resource Center
2626 S. Clearbrook Dr, Arlington Heights, IL 60005
(224)366-8623
R.O.E. #26—Hancock/McDonough
130 S. Lafayette - Suite 200, Macomb, IL 61455
(309)837-4821
www.homelessed.net

The Illinois Homeless Education Program

Illinois State Board of Education
100 N. First Street, Springfield, IL 62777
(217)782-2948
Homeless Education Hotline: 1-800-215-6379
www.isbe.net/homeless

Sources:

Reed-Victor, E., & Myers, M. (2003). Helping Young Children Grow and Learn: A Guide for Families & Shelter Providers. *Information Brief No. 10*. Williamsburg, VA: Project HOPE –Virginia.
Reed-Victor, E., Popp, P. & Myers, M. (2003). Using the Best That We Know: Supporting Young Children Experiencing Homelessness. *Information Brief No. 9*. Williamsburg, VA: Project HOPE – Virginia.
Horizons for Homeless Children. (2005). *Supporting Children and Families Without Homes: How Can We Help? A Training and Resource Manual*. Dorchester, MA: Horizons for Homeless Children.