

FIRST TEACHER:

a Parent's Guide to
Growing and Learning



BIRTH TO 8 MONTHS

The Office of Early Learning is proud to present you with *First Teacher: a Parent's Guide to Growing and Learning*. This booklet was created to give you information on your child's development and activities to use in your every day routines. These activities will help your child's development and provide the building blocks for your child's future school success and life.

This booklet is divided into five areas which are key indicators of your child's development and begin at birth. The information in this booklet will serve as a guideline for what your child should know and be able to do from birth to eight months of age. This information follows Florida's Early Learning and Developmental Standards which are used in early learning programs throughout the state.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

LEARNING STYLES

FEELINGS, BEHAVIORS, AND RELATIONSHIPS

TALKING AND LISTENING

THINKING AND REASONING

Your relationship with your child and the time you spend together will help your child's development in every way. Each child is unique and may not master skills at the same rate. If you have concerns regarding your child's rate of development contact your child's doctor.

We hope the information in this booklet will help you make the most of your time with your child.

You are your child's first teacher.

FAMILY MATTERS

Birth to 8 Months

Congratulations on your new baby! Whether you are a first time parent or an old pro, this baby is an individual who will need your constant love, care and attention. The most important relationship in your baby's life is the one with her family. By providing a loving, caring home, your baby will be able to form relationships, develop trust and explore the world. Learning begins at home with you, as you are your baby's first and most important teacher.

In the first eight months of your baby's life, you will see many changes in all areas of her development. This is a very exciting time for you and your baby. You will see physical changes such as gaining head control and grasping for toys. Socially your baby will begin smiling when she sees you or hears your voice. You will also learn how to meet her needs by understanding her cries and facial expressions.

This booklet offers activities and strategies for you to use daily. The easy-to-follow activities will help you build a strong relationship and a foundation for your child's learning and future success. All families are different. Remember to include stories, activities and languages from your own family.





GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

It starts with you

Over the first eight months of your baby's life, she will learn to gain control of her body and begin to make planned movements. She will hold her head up, roll over, clap her hands and eventually be able to hold objects like toys and rattles. By eight months, your baby will change from a dependent infant to an active baby.

Babies rely on their parents and other caretakers to meet their basic needs, such as eating, sleeping and comfort. Self-care skills develop slowly, but soon you will notice that your baby will begin to play a part in her own care. Your baby will begin to coordinate her sucking and swallowing and will reach out to hold her bottles when being fed. Babies can also show their self-help skills by showing awareness of daily care routines. Examples include making sounds when you talk to her during diaper changing and relaxing during baths.

As your baby grows

During the first eight months, your baby's growth and development will go through many changes. She will:

- be alert and awake more often
- roll from back to front and front to back
- turn her head, kick her feet, reach and grasp
- hold her own bottle and toys
- push with her legs and feet like she is trying to stand
- sit up on her own

Playing and learning

Help your baby's development by trying these activities:

- Give your baby a toy to hold in the bath.
This gives her practice holding objects.
- Put toys just out of your baby's reach.
She will learn to reach and grasp.
- Whisper your baby's name and watch her turn toward you.

Taking care of baby

Even though your baby may not like it at first, tummy time is an important activity to help her develop head and neck strength. For short periods of time, place your baby on her stomach on the floor, on top of a blanket or quilt. Put some toys in front of her to look at and try to reach. Your baby will begin to move more and will be ready to explore!

Physical health is important to your baby's growth and development. Make sure she is getting good nutrition and is up-to-date on all doctor's appointments. Your baby's health will thrive when she has healthy food and time to play every day.



LEARNING STYLES

It starts with you

Your baby was born with an interest in exploring and learning. This natural curiosity plays a role in how your baby reacts to objects, sounds, people and new feelings. Give your baby plenty of safe materials, such as balls, toys and books. Talk to your baby about what she can do with them. You will enjoy watching your baby explore and try new things while playing and learning.

As your baby grows

Your baby will show her learning as she:

- reacts to different sounds, objects or voices by using body language and facial expressions
- explores objects by using all her senses by rubbing, banging, tasting and watching
- cries to get attention
- rolls from her back to stomach to reach a toy

Playing and learning

Help your baby's development by trying these activities:

- Give your baby blankets with different patterns and textures to look at and feel.
- Make different sounds. Shake a rattle, make a funny noise and see how your baby reacts to the new noise – not too loud, though. Babies have sensitive ears.
- Introduce and repeat sounds and play with toys to encourage interest and creativity.

Taking care of baby

You can use everyday activities to bond with your baby. Bathing, feeding, changing diapers and even shopping are chances to build a strong relationship as you take care of your baby. Here are some ideas:

- During your baby's feeding time, talk to her about the color, texture and flavor of the food she is eating.
- Put different pictures of your family by your diaper area. Talk to your baby about what she sees.
- When shopping for food, point out different objects and talk to your baby about them.



FEELINGS, BEHAVIORS & RELATIONSHIPS

It starts with you

Your baby is beginning to develop and recognize feelings and relationships. She will become comfortable with important caregivers and begin responding positively when she interacts with them. She will soon greet you with a smile after you have been away from each other.

Have you ever been in a situation where you did not feel comfortable or welcome? What feelings did you have? Like adults, babies need to feel safe and secure to build self-confidence. Relationships are important for creating a sense of trust.

The first months of your baby's life are very important to her future development. Babies need to feel cared for and loved. The most important thing you can do at this time is to bond with your baby. Through your everyday activities, you help to build this bond. Spending time with your baby will let her know that you care for her. When you respond to your baby's cries, coos, movements and cues, you are setting the stage for learning.

As your baby grows

During the first eight months of your baby's life, she will show development in forming relationships as she:

- responds to facial expressions
- responds to touch
- cries to let you know she is hungry, uncomfortable or unhappy
- raises her arms to be picked up and comforted
- smiles at others
- responds to caregivers and parents by smiling and kicking her feet
- uses a blanket, pacifier or teddy bear to calm herself when she is upset

Playing and learning

Help your baby's development by trying some of the following activities:

- Respond to your baby's cries in a consistent and positive manner.
- Talk and sing to your baby often in a soft, soothing voice.
- Spend time holding your baby, or swaddle your baby to make her feel safe.
- Set the same schedule every day for your baby but be flexible to meet your baby's sleeping, eating and other care needs.

Taking care of baby

Caring for your baby takes a lot of time, energy and patience. When you and your baby's care givers use daily routines, your baby will develop strong relationships. It is important for each of you to share what works for your baby. This helps babies build trust and security. Building these relationships establishes the base for your child's development.



TALKING & LISTENING

It starts with you

The most common way that your baby communicates with you at this age is by crying. When your baby cries, he is telling you he has a need. Your baby will have a special cry for hunger, attention and wanting to be held – just to name a few. Paying attention to and learning your baby’s cries and body language will help build trust. This is also a good way to reduce your stress from the “guess what my baby wants” game so you can give him what he needs. Your baby’s cries won’t be his only form of communication forever. Your baby is beginning to develop language skills and will start to express himself by looking at you when he hears your voice, and smiling when he hears his name. It is a heart melting moment when your baby begins to coo and smile back at you.

As baby grows

Your baby will show his beginning language skills as he:

- moves his arms and legs when he hears a familiar voice
- turns and smiles when he hears his own name
- coos, babbles and makes different sounds
- reaches for books
- points at objects, animals or people
- claps and waves
- repeats sounds

Playing and learning

Help your baby's development by trying these activities:

- Talk to him while you are feeding him. Talk about what you are doing. For example, during feeding ask, "Is that milk yummy in your tummy?"
- Talk to your baby when you are dressing him in the morning. "Let's put on your shirt and pants. Here are your socks. Socks go on your feet." Hearing words helps your baby learn their meanings.
- Sing simple songs while you are changing diapers, like "Daddy will change your diaper, your diaper, your diaper. Daddy will change your diaper and make baby clean."
- Copy your baby's sounds and wait for him to respond.

Taking care of baby

Help support your baby's language by talking to him — even if it feels one-sided. Your baby will learn new words and sounds by hearing you talk. He will watch your face and body for cues on what words mean.



THINKING & REASONING

It starts with you

Babies use their senses to learn about their surroundings. Your baby is beginning to recognize familiar voices and faces. She will begin to respond to you with smiles and coos. She will also enjoy reaching for new toys and learning how they work.

As your baby grows

During the first eight months of your baby's life, she will show her thinking and reasoning skills as she:

- babbles to you and waits for a response
- reaches out and grabs things
- holds objects and puts them in her mouth
- imitates familiar sounds and movements
- smiles when presented with a familiar object, like her teddy bear or bottle
- knocks down a block tower
- raises her bottle as the milk level drops

Playing and learning

Help your baby's development by trying some of the following activities:

- Give her plenty of things to look at and hold. Make sure there are different shapes, colors and patterns. Talk to your baby about what she sees and what she is doing.
- Introduce different toys with different colors and textures. Babies learn by feeling, looking, touching and tasting.

Taking care of baby

It's OK to let your baby play on the floor. Place your baby on a blanket on the floor. Provide her with enough room for her to move around and for you to join her. Make sure there is not anything near that could hurt her. Put out toys for her to play with and explore. Talk to her about the toys she is looking at or reaching for. Your baby will enjoy learning how to coordinate her muscles and move towards what she wants. She will also discover new objects and what she can do with them.



THE POWER OF FAMILY

The first few months of your baby's life can be rewarding and exhausting for you. Remember to take care of your own needs and be sure to talk to your doctor if you feel like you are struggling, need support or something doesn't feel right. It is important to take time for yourself and ask for help from friends and family members.

Below are strategies to help you take care of yourself:

- Don't stress over activities for your baby. By taking time to talk about what you are doing, giving her time to explore new objects and discussing the world around, you are building the groundwork for your baby's learning success.
- Take a few minutes each day to do something for yourself, such as read an article in a magazine, surf the web or close your eyes and picture yourself somewhere you would like to be. Try to get as much rest as you can each night.

- Make sure you are getting plenty of rest and exercise. Rest and exercise reduce stress and make for happier parents and children. A great way for you to exercise and bond with your baby is to take your baby for a walk.
- Not only is it important that your baby receive proper nutrition, but you also need fruits and vegetables! Keeping yourself healthy will allow you to have the energy needed to care for your baby.

It's OK if you can't do it all. Speak up and let your spouse, partner or a friend know you need help. Just as your baby tells you his needs, you have to tell someone your needs. Parenting is a difficult and rewarding experience. Many times, it is hard for others to know you need help until you ask. So speak up! Others are often willing to hold a baby while you do the laundry or run an errand. Babies can sense tension or stress and may react by crying, refusing to eat or not sleeping. Taking care of yourself will help make your bond even stronger.

Remember, you are your child's first teacher!

All babies develop differently and at different times. If you have questions or concerns about your baby's development or behavior, it is important to take action early. Talk to a doctor, your baby's teacher or contact any of the resources listed in the back of this booklet.

PARENT RESOURCES

OFFICE OF EARLY LEARNING

Provides state-level support and direction for parents, teachers and early learning professionals. OEL administers three statewide programs including: the state child care subsidy program, School Readiness, the free Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program for four-year-olds, and the Child Care Resource and Referral program for all Florida families. 1-866-357-3239 (Toll-free), (TTY: 711)

2-1-1

24-hour hotline where parents can access national, state, and local information and referral services. 2-1-1 connects parents to information to assist families with food, housing, employment, health care and counseling services.

Dial 211

www.211.org

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

General ADA information is available including answers to specific technical questions, free ADA materials, and information about filing a complaint.

1-800-514-0301 (Toll-free), (TTY: 1-800-514-0383)

www.ada.gov

CHILD CARE RESOURCE & REFERRAL NETWORK (CCR&R)

Helps families find local child care programs that fits their unique needs. CCR&R connects families to local resources and provides information on how parents can find, locate and afford quality child care.

1-866-357-3239 (Toll-free), (TTY: 711)

CHOOSE MY PLATE

Offers information and resources on healthy eating choices and habits for children and families.

www.choosemyplate.gov

**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN & FAMILIES (DCF)
LICENSING WEBSITE**

Responsible for the administration of child care program licensing and training throughout Florida. DCF also administers programs addressing issues such as, adult and child protective services, homelessness, food stamps, refugee services, and adoption and foster care.

www.myflorida.com/childcare

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Department of Education/Office of Early Learning (DOE/OEL) for information on readiness rates of Voluntary Prekindergarten providers.

1-866-447-1159 (Toll-free)

www.fldoe.org/earlylearning

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH/CHILDREN'S MEDICAL
SERVICES/EARLY STEPS**

Provides services to infants and toddlers (birth to thirty-six months) with significant delays or a diagnosed physical or mental condition.

1-800-654-4440

www.cms-kids.com/families/early_steps

FLORIDA ABUSE HOTLINE

24-hour hotline that receives reports of abuse and exploitation of children, elderly, and adults with disabilities.

1-800-96-ABUSE or 1-800-962-2873 (Toll-free)

www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse

**FLORIDA'S CENTRAL DIRECTORY OF EARLY
CHILDHOOD SERVICES**

Provides information and referrals on disabilities and special health care needs for families, service coordinators, and other professionals who work with children with special needs.

1-800-654-4440 (Toll-free)

www.centraldirectory.org

FLORIDA CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

Child support services that include locating missing parents, establishing legal paternity, and establishing, enforcing, and modifying support orders.

1-800-622-KIDS or 1-800-622-5437 (Toll-free)

www.myflorida.com/dor/childsupport/

FLORIDA KIDCARE

Health insurance program for uninsured children younger than age 19. The Florida KidCare program assesses eligibility based on age and family income.

1-888-540-5437 (Toll-free), (TTY: 1-877-316-8748)

www.floridakidcare.com

MYFLORIDA.COM

Florida's Government Website

www.myflorida.com

FLORIDA HEALTHY START

Ensures that all Florida families have access to a continuum of affordable and quality health and related services.

727-507-6330

www.healthystartflorida.com

HEAD START

Head Start is a national school readiness program that provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to children from low-income families. For Head Start programs in your area, visit the listed website.

www.floridaheadstart.org

PARENTS WITHOUT PARTNERS

Provides help to single parents through discussions, professional speakers, study groups, publications and social activities for families and adults.

1-800-637-7974 (Toll-free)

www.parentswithoutpartners.org

VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN

A free voluntary program designed to prepare four-year-olds for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success.

1-866-357-3239 (Toll-free), (TTY: 711)



For more information about what your child should know and be able to do visit the Early Learning and Developmental Standards at www.flbt5.com.



Office of Early Learning
866-357-3239