

## Home Learning

This factsheet explores natural learning opportunities in your home and suggests ways to enhance them for your child's best outcomes.

Research indicates that a stimulating home environment leads to long-term developmental benefits, including improved language, early reading skills, and school readiness.

### Why is home learning important?

**At birth, your baby's brain is only 25% formed, but by age three, it will be 80% developed. This highlights the critical importance of the early years for brain development.**

A strong bond with your child, filled with love, touch and cuddles, aids brain development. Parents who provide comfort and care in early childhood influence their child's later development and behaviour. From birth, the brain receives information through the five senses - sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. Supporting these senses in young children is crucial for their learning and development.



### What is home learning?

Home learning includes all the activities you do with your child at home. Simple activities such as chatting, singing nursery rhymes and playing with your child are all part of home learning and contribute significantly to your child's development. This process starts from birth; newborns begin to learn by mimicking your actions and responding with babbles. Engaging in these activities helps lay a strong foundation for your child's future learning and development.

### Did you know...?

All the small things you do with your baby or young child, like cuddling, chatting, singing and playing, make a difference and all support the development of your child's confidence, learning and security as they grow older.

## Learning through play

Children learn best through play, both indoors and outdoors. Play is essential for development, and it doesn't always require manufactured toys. Everyday activities like shopping, baking, gardening, and playing together offer rich learning opportunities. Here are some ideas to enhance your child's learning through play:

- Children often enjoy playing with simple items like cardboard boxes, which can transform into anything from playhouses to spaceships, fostering imaginative play
- Enjoy special one-on-one time, such as at bath time or bedtime, this is vital for bonding and relaxation
- Use bath time to introduce toys like animals, foam letters, bath crayons, and bubbles
- Everyday household objects like pots, pans, spoons, and brushes can provide endless possibilities for exploration and discovery, such as filling, emptying, or creating sounds
- Have daily screen-free time for undistracted play
- Watch TV shows and online programs together to share the experience
- Involve your child in daily tasks, such as sorting laundry or setting the table, which you can use to introduce counting, sorting, and problem-solving skills
- Encourage communication and curiosity during play by asking questions like, "What do you think will happen if we...?" to promote deeper thinking.

## Sharing books together

Sharing books with your child nurtures their learning and development while strengthening your bond, as you sit or snuggling up together. You don't always have to read the text; you can make up stories or talk about the pictures. For babies, hearing your voice provides comfort, while older children begin to recognise letters or words and understand that print carries meaning.



Children often have favourite books that they enjoy hearing repeatedly. This repetition is a key part of the learning process and provides a sense of comfort. To make your child's favourite story even more engaging, you can:

- Sing the story
- Listen to an audio version
- Act it out with puppets
- Draw pictures or write letters to the characters
- Extend the story by asking your child what else might happen to the characters, encouraging their imagination and creative thinking.

## Schemas

Often children will go through stages of displaying repeated behaviour such as dropping food from a highchair, emptying the kitchen cupboards, lining up toys or items such as cars in a row or transporting toys from one area to another. These repeated behaviours have been named schemas by early years researchers, who found that these repeated patterns of behaviour are part of a healthy child's development.

The range of schemas children display can be frustrating for parents, such as a trajectory schema, when they want to throw everything. However, by understanding these behaviours better, you can build on them to further support your child's development.

## Working together

Working with your child's nursery is key to supporting their development. Nurseries value your insights, so sharing information about your child's interests, favourite books, toys, and activities helps staff tailor their plans to your unique child. Children thrive when engaged in activities they enjoy.

As your child gets older you may find they give you brief answers about their day. Try asking open-ended questions to show interest and encourage them to share more. This can also help extend their learning and expand their vocabulary. Avoid pushing with too many questions if they're not responsive.

### Open-ended questions

- What was most fun at nursery today?
- What made you laugh today?
- Which friends did you play with?
- Did anything make you sad today?
- What toys have you played with?



## Further information

- Activity ideas: BBC Tiny Happy People - <https://bbc.in/3TUQnoj>
- Stories and activities: BookTrust - <https://bit.ly/3XKBTcF>
- Activity ideas: National Literacy Trust - <https://bit.ly/47yEJFc>
- Start for life advice for 0-2: NHS - <https://bit.ly/4eoOZlx>
- Talking to your baby or child when out and about - <https://bit.ly/4e8t9Ty>
- A parent's guide to schemas - <https://bit.ly/4dfdS1Y>