



National Day Nurseries Association

★Brighter thinking
for early years

Factsheet

A photograph of a baby with blonde hair, wearing a striped diaper, crawling on a wooden bench. The baby is looking back over their shoulder towards the camera with a smile. The background shows a blurred wooden structure, likely a crib or another part of the bench.

Parents' Guide to Home Learning

Parent Guidance

Parent Guide to Home Learning

This factsheet looks at what is naturally occurring within your home and offers ideas to broaden this further to ensure your child goes on to achieve the best outcomes they can. The term 'home learning' is generally used in nurseries by nursery staff to describe any type of learning that takes place in the home between the child and their family members, including grandparents, aunts and uncles.

If your child attends a nursery, the staff there will work with you to find out about your child's interests. Research shows that a stimulating home environment is linked to long term gains in children's development. When nurseries and parents work together effectively, research has shown that this can benefit children's learning and development the most. These benefits include improved language development and early reading skills, as well as supporting them in gaining the skills so they are ready for school.

Why is home learning important?

At birth, your baby's brain is only a quarter formed but by the time your child reaches the age of three their brain will have developed to 80%?

This shows how crucial the early years are as the brain develops more in this time than at any other time in their life.

A strong attachment between you and your child, with lots of love, touch and cuddles, all help the development of the brain. A parent who provides a special emotional relationship that involves an exchange of comfort and care in early childhood will influence development and behaviour in later life.

From birth, information travels to the brain via five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. Enhancing and supporting these in babies and young children is essential for children to learn and develop.

What is home learning?

You may hear the term 'home learning' and worry that you are not doing this but simple activities such as chatting, singing nursery rhymes or songs and playing with your child are all part of developing their learning. It should take place as soon as your child is born. At only a few weeks old, babies will begin to copy you by pulling out their tongue or bending their fingers when you do. You may notice how your baby will babble to you in turn when you talk to him or her. This is all part of early communication.

Having special one to one time each day, where possible, is valuable for you and your child. Having this at bath time and/or bedtime can help children to relax before they go to sleep.

Use bath times to introduce different toys and games than those they have elsewhere including plastic animals, foam letters and numbers, waterproof books, bath crayons, items that float and sink, bath mirrors, washcloth puppets, windup toys and bubbles. Everyday household items like kitchen utensils, sieves, funnels etc. and containers are also great fun. These all benefit your child's development, as they experiment with the resources and begin to understand the world around them. Pretend play extends their imagination as they play with the water, puppets and animals (ensure children are fully supervised during bath times).

Sharing books with babies and young children is so important

Sharing books not only helps their learning and development but also strengthens your relationship as you sit or snuggle together whilst sharing a book. You don't always have to read the book word for word, sometimes you can make up the story or just talk about the pictures. It is the activity of looking at books together that is the most important element so that your child begins to develop a love of books, know that print carries meaning and that we turn the pages one by one. They will also begin to recognise some familiar words and associate pictures with words.

Babies and young children will enjoy the quality time with you and hearing your voice reassures them that you are there. Sharing books supports your child's language development and introduces them to new vocabulary. Older children will begin to recognise some familiar words and learn that print carries meaning. Talking about the author, illustrator, front page and back page can be introduced as children become older to develop their understanding further.

Often children will have favourite books and ask for them night after night - this is all part of the learning process and can be comforting for children. As children get older they will use recognition of words and pictures to read with you and should be encouraged to start reading a story to you too.

If your child has a favourite book or story you could extend it in several ways, including:

- Singing the story
- Listening to the story on a CD
- Acting out the story with your child or using puppets of the key characters
- Drawing pictures from the book (or making marks, which are the early stage of writing) or writing a letter to the characters
- Extending the story, asking your child what else might happen to the characters and encouraging their imagination skills.

A healthy balanced diet

A healthy balanced diet and regular activity are essential for children's health and well-being as when a child receives these, they are ready to learn and able to reach their full potential.

Did you know...?

Encouraging children to eat well and learn about food in the early years not only protects their health when they are young but also sets the foundations for their future health and well-being. Letting babies and young children explore new foods and textures through play will support them to develop good attitudes towards trying different types of food.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of children diagnosed as overweight, obese, having poor dental health, suffering from rickets, type two diabetes and at risk of iron deficiency.

Providing a healthy balanced diet with a range of nutrients helps children to grow and develop. This means ensuring they have a range of starchy foods such as potatoes, at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, meat, fish, eggs, beans and other sources of protein, milk and dairy foods. Avoid giving too much salt and sugar. Salt can give them the taste for salty foods which can cause serious health problems in later life. Often foods that contain too much sugar fill children up without providing any nutrients; they can also lead to tooth decay.

For more information on healthy eating and menu planning, try visiting the NHS Live Well Eat Well website ([link below](#)).

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?

The importance of the early experiences of home, nursery and school in improving children's learning

If your child attends a nursery, it's important to work together. Nurseries value the information you give them as you are your child's first teacher and you know them best. Passing on valuable information about your child's interests and/or favourite books or toys or where you have been at the weekend helps the nursery to plan specifically for your child's individual needs. Children learn best when doing something that they enjoy and combining their interests with learning will help them to progress.

Additionally, you could ask the nursery what your child enjoy doing there, so you can add to this at home.

You may receive photos or stories from your child's nursery showing you what they have been doing and nurseries will value receiving feedback from you, to link to the learning portfolio or learning journey. Most nurseries develop learning journeys for each child to build up a picture of their progress from when they start until they leave. The reflection of the child's journey is about their life and therefore photos or comments from home are encouraged and welcomed, allowing a joined-up picture of the child's life.

Whether your child attends nursery or not you may also choose to develop photo albums or scrapbooks including certain milestones or favourite pictures. These provide lovely opportunities for children to look back on their achievements over the years.

You may ask your older child after nursery if they have had a nice day and they may nod or just say yes. Often parents want more information, so try asking more open-ended questions such as:

- 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?

These show your child that you are interested in what they have been doing and may encourage your child to tell you a bit more about their day or if they have any interests, issues or concerns. This may also extend their learning and development in terms of recalling experiences and extending vocabulary. Don't be too concerned if they continue to nod their head and try not to push them by asking too many questions.

Play

Did you know...?

Children learn best through play.

Playing both indoors and outdoors is the most important way in which children learn. Providing a variety of play opportunities is not always about using manufactured toys. Everyday routines such as shopping, baking, gardening and spending time playing together with your child will support their learning and development.

Although some television and online programmes provide children with some learning opportunities, try to watch these together to share learning as well as having a set time each day without the television/tablet on, to allow for play without distraction from the television. Trying to achieve a balance of screen time, toys and play experiences will mean that your child can learn through a range of different ways. Communicating through play and asking questions can extend the activities and learning further e.g. “What will happen if we...”

Home learning also includes involving your child in everyday activities, such as asking your child to sort the washing, match the socks or help set the table. These encourage counting and sorting opportunities as well as problem solving. Children enjoy joining in with dusting, hoovering and tidying as well digging in the garden, planting seeds and flowers or watering the plants.. These all involve your child in day-to-day experiences while continuing to widen their experiences and vocabulary.

You may notice that your child may choose to play with empty cardboard boxes rather than the actual toys. This is usually because these boxes can be used for several different purposes and allow children to use their imagination to make them into different things - one day a box could be a playhouse and the next it could be a spaceship. Other everyday items such as pans, tins, jewellery, wooden spoons, brushes etc. all allow children to investigate and explore, fill and empty or make sounds. Simple activities such as using decorator’s paintbrushes and water outdoors are effective - as they paint water up and down the fence or wall this is developing pre-writing skills as well as their understanding of the world e.g. the water will dry quicker when it’s warm outside and their marks will disappear. When providing these activities, it’s important to make sure children are safe and supervised.

Schemas

Did you know...?

Young children display patterns of repeated behaviour sometimes referred to as 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. These researchers studied a number of children and found that repeated patterns of behaviour are part of a child’s development.

Often the range of schemas children display can be frustrating for you as parents. By understanding some of these behaviours a little more you can build on them, which will further support your child’s development.

Further information

- BBC Bitesize: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/primary>
- NHS Live Well Eat Well: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>
- Baby Centre: <https://www.babycenter.com/>
- Literacy Trust: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/>
- Schemas: <https://play.eureka.org.uk/blog/schemas-parents-need-know-childrens-behaviour-patterns/>

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Our factsheets are written by early years experts for the early years workforce. Most NDNA factsheets are free to our members.

NDNA is the national charity and membership association representing children's nurseries across the UK. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability, so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours.

We are the voice of the 21,000-strong nursery sector, an integral part of the lives of more than a million young children and their families. We provide information, training and advice to support nurseries and the 250,000 people who work in them to deliver world-class early learning and childcare.

See the full range of NDNA factsheets at www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets

The information provided in this factsheet is for use by early years practitioners only. It has been written by early years experts but is not intended to be, and should not be relied upon, as a substitute for professional advice. NDNA has endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of the information presented in this factsheet. NDNA assumes no legal liability or responsibility for your interpretation or use of the information contained within it.

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