



Helping Young Children Grow & Learn: A Guide For Families & Shelter Providers

By Evelyn Reed-Victor, Ph.D., *Virginia Commonwealth University*
and Michele Myers, Doctoral Fellow, *The College of William and Mary*

With funding from the Virginia Department of Education

Information Brief No. 10 Fall 2003

Getting a Great Start

From birth to kindergarten age, babies and young children change in amazing ways! They learn to:

- talk and walk,
- play and interact with other people, and
- grow in their knowledge of the world around them.

As families, we help babies and young children grow up healthy and develop all of their abilities when we cuddle, talk, play, and read together. These everyday activities are a wonderful way to let children know they are loved, that they can learn new skills and information, and to give them a great start for a lifetime of learning.

Sometimes, babies and young children have difficulty with these early steps in development, and families are often the first ones to notice these problems. Research shows that addressing concerns about development as soon as possible is an important way to help babies and young children establish a solid foundation for later learning. In every community, there are educators and specialists who work with families when there are concerns.

To support your child's early learning, we hope this guide will help you:

1. Use **everyday activities** to encourage your child's learning and growth;
2. Notice any **concerns** about your child's development;
3. Find **early childhood programs** in your community; and
4. Identify and locate **resources** for more information about early development. (See pages 7 and 8.)

Using Everyday Activities

From birth, we help babies learn to communicate,

move, interact, and discover the world around them. We also promote their health through regular visits to doctors, good nutrition, and safe transportation. As our toddlers learn to walk, talk, and explore, we can encourage their independence (when they say, "I want to do it myself?") and curiosity (when they point and say, "What's that?"). Between the ages of three and five years, our preschoolers continue to grow intellectually, as well as physically, with our support. For example, they learn to run and jump, listen to and tell stories, play with other children, solve puzzles, and dress themselves.

Everyday activities, such as diaper changing, bathing, eating, and bedtime, are teaching and learning times. For example:

- Babies begin to learn about communication by looking at our faces. We encourage them by looking, smiling, and making sounds with them. Just think how many times we can practice this during diaper changes throughout the day!
- For preschoolers, bedtime is a great time to read books and talk about dinosaurs, kittens or other interests. This everyday activity also gives us a special time to be close to our children and build their love of reading. It is a great way to start a lifetime habit!

Noticing Concerns

When parents don't see the progress they expect, they may be concerned about their child's growth and development. Remember, parents often notice concerns first. As you interact with your baby or preschooler during daily activities, you may notice that she is not sitting up like other babies, or talking like other three year olds. You may be worried that your boy gets tired very quickly and doesn't run and jump like his brothers. Other concerns may include getting sick often or having trouble with sleeping, eating, or temper tantrums.



The following chart can help you think about your child’s development and concerns that may arise. For more details about these developmental steps, the materials provided by the Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia (*Parents Are Often the First to Know When Their Baby Needs a Helping Hand*) and the Virginia Department of Education (*From Crib to Kindergarten*) contain valuable information. (See page 7 of this brief.)

| <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 Smiling 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"> Holding head up Rolling over Sitting up Crawling | <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 & 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 |

| <i>Preschooler steps</i> | <i>Everyday ways to help</i> | <i>Concerns you may have</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Communicating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses many words & longer sentences • Follows 2-3 step directions • Tells familiar stories | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading books and talking about your 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” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to understand what he says • 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 |
| <p>Moving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jumps • Walks up & 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 |
| <p>Playing & Learning:</p> <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 |
| <p>Health:</p> <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 |

Finding Early Childhood Programs

If you are concerned about your child’s development, you can talk with your child’s doctor or nurse and community specialists in early childhood development. They will work with you to find out more about your baby’s or preschooler’s needs. Once they help you identify the specific concern, they also will give you a helping hand with activities and services that support your child’s development.

The **first step** is contacting one of the many early childhood programs in your community. The list on the next page highlights some of the services that are available throughout Virginia.

- If you are concerned about the development of your **baby or toddler** (ages birth to two years), you can contact the Infant and Toddler Connection of Virginia. You will be connected with the local community infant program.
- If your concerns are about your **preschool child** (ages two to five years old), you can contact the local school division, and ask for the Preschool or Child Find services coordinator. No matter where you live, services are available to help answer your concerns about your child’s development.



“Your relationship with your child is the foundation of his or her healthy development.”

Healthy Minds, developed by Zero to Three and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

When you call, an educator or specialist from the infant program or school will talk with you about your concerns and try some simple activities with your child to compare your child’s progress with children of the same age. If your baby or preschooler seems to be developing more slowly in some area, other specialists (in communication, movement, or learning) will help assess your child’s development. You are an important member of this process, because you can describe what you see your child doing everyday. If these assessments show that your child is delayed in development, special services will be offered to help you support your child’s growth and learning.

If your baby or child is not delayed in development, other early childhood programs may be available, such as playgroups for babies and parents, or preschool classes through Head Start, Even Start, or the Virginia Preschool Initiative. These early childhood programs help you give your baby, toddler, or preschooler the very best start in life - right from the beginning.

**“On our journeys through life,
we never know
what lies ahead of us,
but if everybody works
together, we can
overcome any obstacle.”**

Infant and Toddler Connection of Virginia



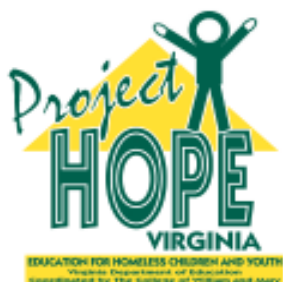
Early Childhood Programs

| Your child’s age | Program | Contact information | Services |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Birth to two years | Infant and Toddler Connection of Virginia (All communities have early intervention services available.) | 1-800-234-1448 www.infantva.org | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free developmental screening and review of your concerns • Help from specialists in communication, movement, learning, and health • Ongoing visits |
| Two to five years | Local public schools (All communities have preschool special education; most communities have other types of preschool programs to encourage early learning, such as the Virginia Preschool Initiative, Even Start, and Title I Preschool.) | Contact your local public school and ask for their Preschool Coordinator or Parent Resource Center Call the Virginia Department of Education: 1-804-225-2865 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free developmental screening and review of your concerns • Help from specialists in communication, movement, learning, and health • Preschool special education or early education • Transportation |
| Three to five years | Local Head Start program (Many communities have Head Start programs.) | Contact Virginia Head Start Collaboration Coordinator: 757-823-2758 or info@vaheadstart.org | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free developmental screening and review of your concerns • Help from specialists in communication, movement, learning, and health • Preschool classes • Transportation |



Read Twenty Minutes a Day

Project HOPE-Virginia, Education for Virginia's Children and Youth
www.wm.edu/hope 757-221-4002 Toll free 877-455-3412



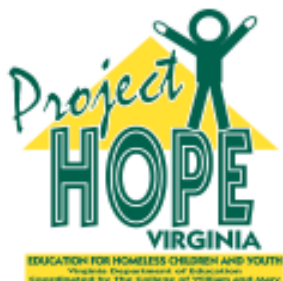
Talk About the Story as You Read

Project HOPE-Virginia, Education for Virginia's Children and Youth
www.wm.edu/hope 757-221-4002 Toll free 877-455-3412



Get Others in on the Reading Act

Project HOPE-Virginia, Education for Virginia's Children and Youth
www.wm.edu/hope 757-221-4002 Toll free 877-455-3412



Read at Nap Time

Project HOPE-Virginia, Education for Virginia's Children and Youth
www.wm.edu/hope 757-221-4002 Toll free 877-455-3412

Of course, thirty minutes is better. Allow enough time to finish a story or chapter and to talk about it. Use poetry to begin and end a story time.

A tip from: Child Care Action Campaign <http://www.kidsandpolitics.org/>

If the story is set in the city, talk about how the pictures of buildings in the book look like buildings in your town. If there are things the child doesn't understand, explain as you read. Listen to the child's comments and insights. Let her know that her thoughts are valuable. The talk surrounding a book is important, too.

A tip from: Child Care Action Campaign <http://www.kidsandpolitics.org/>

Have big brothers and sisters join in by reading to younger ones while you are busy. The child needs to see that everybody gets pleasure from reading. The child also discovers that, though the words are the same, everybody reads the story differently. He sees that reading allows for individuality and creativity.

A tip from: Child Care Action Campaign <http://www.kidsandpolitics.org/>

When children are overly tired and bouncing off the wall, read them a story. Start with a short poem or two. The magic of words and the sound of your soothing voice calms down even the most energetic kid.

A tip from: Child Care Action Campaign <http://www.kidsandpolitics.org/>

Explore Early Childhood Resources

Many resources in document, CD Rom and video format are available on the internet. If you are living or working in a shelter, check out the early childhood booklets and videos in your shelter's family resource library. Each one is full of helpful tips about your child's growth and learning!

Everyday Activities

Healthy Minds

- How can we give our children the experiences that nurture their growing brains? Seven flyers describe important play ideas for different developmental stages, birth to three years.
www.zerotothree.org/healthyminds/main.html

I Am Your Child

- Whoopi Goldberg, Jamie Lee Curtis, and other well-known stars are featured in these videos about parenting and early development. A parent resource guide to accompany the videos is available.
www.iamyourchild.org

Topics include:

- *The First Years Last Forever* (a good start in development)
- *Ready to Learn* (early communication & reading)
- *Quality Child Care* (choosing the right child care)
- *Safe from the Start* (safety tips)
- *Preparing for Parenthood* (healthy pregnancy)
- *Your Healthy Baby* (health & nutrition needs)
- *Discipline* (emotions and behavior)

Learning & Growing Together

- This **short book** is full of helpful tips for parents about understanding infants' unique styles and how they communicate through behavior.
www.zerotothree.org/LearningGrowing/LGHome.html

The Magic of Everyday Moments

- These **5 brochures** show how we encourage babies' development during meals, baths, shopping trips, and other activities. Each one focuses on self-confidence, curiosity, social skills, self-control, and communication.
www.zerotothree.org/magic

Checking Progress and Concerns

Parents are often the first to know when their baby needs a helping hand

- This **booklet** includes a checklist of skills your baby will be learning from birth to three years. You can use this to keep track of your child's development. If you have concerns, the booklet includes the phone number of the Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia.
www.infantva.org

From Crib to Kindergarten

- This **developmental wheel** also helps you keep track of your child's development, from birth to age five.
Parents can order these free of charge by calling the VA Department of Education.
The wheels can be ordered in larger quantities via the form at this web address: <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/sped/earlychildhood.html>

Internet and Multimedia Resources

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

www.cec.sped.org

CEC advocates for appropriate governmental policies, sets professional standards, provides continual professional development, advocates for newly and historically underserved individuals with exceptionalities, and helps professionals obtain conditions and resources necessary for effective professional practice.

- *Discover IDEA CD* (2002). Available from The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) for \$7.95, contact them toll-free at 1.888.232.7332.

IDEA Partnerships

www.ideapractices.org

The IDEA Partnerships are four national projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to deliver a common message about the landmark 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

- *IDEA Requirements for Preschoolers with Disabilities*. (2000). Available from The Council for Exceptional Children on the web in html and pdf formats.

National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC)

www.nectac.org

The NECTAC mission is to strengthen systems at all levels to ensure that children (birth through five) with disabilities and their families receive and benefit from high quality, culturally appropriate and family centered supports and services.

- *Reflections on Early Childhood*. (2001). Eleven minute video where three adults with disabilities reflect on their early childhood experiences. Available for \$15.00.

U.S. Department of Education

www.ed.gov

This site provides information for teachers, school personnel, parents, and families, as well as updates and guidance on implementing federal legislation at the local level.

- *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success*. (1999). This guide, developed by the National Research Council, provides tips for parents in helping their children learn to read.

Virginia Resources

Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC)

<http://www.peatc.org>

Northern VA 703-923-0010 (Voice/TTY)

Toll free for VA parents 800-869-6782

Richmond VA 804-819-1999 (Voice/TTY)

Toll free for VA parents 866-819-7328

Spanish 703-569-6200

Special education information and support for families of children with disabilities.

Virginia Interagency Action Council for the Homeless (VIACH)

<http://www.viach.state.va.us/index.html>

804-371-7175

Organization of federal and state agencies, local continuums of care, and non-profits who serve individuals experiencing homelessness.

Virginia Department of Education

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/parents>

800-292-3820

Resources for families of students in Virginia schools, including information about enrollment, Standards of Learning, and contact information for state and local school division staff.

A Parent's Guide to Special Education. (2001). This resource is available at no charge.

Project HOPE – Virginia

See contact information below

The office of the state coordinator for the education of homeless children and youth, Project HOPE-Virginia is part of the Virginia Department of Education and administered through The College of William and Mary. Other information briefs developed by Project HOPE-Virginia are available on our website. There is no charge in Virginia for these resources. (Some items have quantity limits.)

Family Access to Medical Insurance Security

866-873-2647

<http://www.famis.org>

Virginia's health insurance program for children of working families covers all the medical services growing children need to avoid getting sick, plus the services that will help them make a speedy recovery if they do become ill or get hurt. Assistance is available in English and Spanish.

Child Health Investment Partnership (CHIP) of Virginia

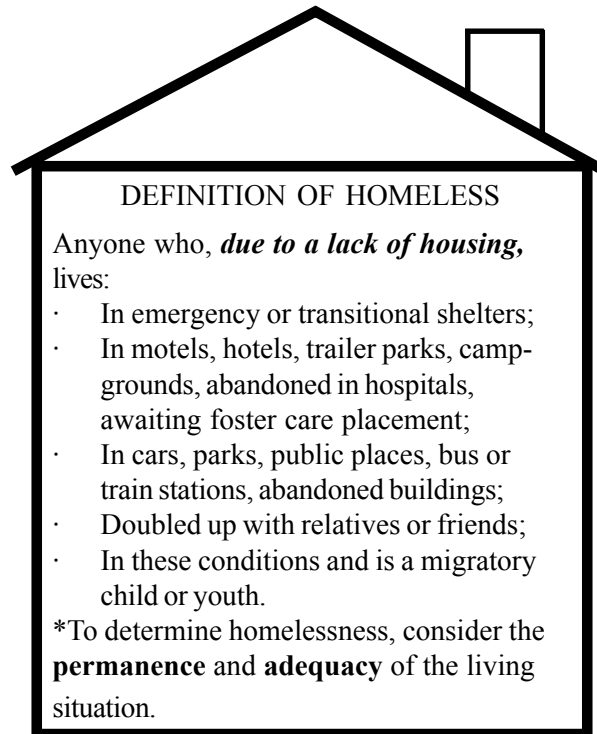
804-783-2667

Local offices around Virginia organize community resources for families to provide access to comprehensive care.

Project HOPE-Virginia
Virginia Department of Education
The College of William and Mary – SOE
P.O. Box 8795
Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795
(757) 221-4002 Toll Free (877) 455-3412
Email: homlss@wm.edu

This and other information briefs are available on the Project HOPE-Virginia website:

<http://www.wm.edu/hope>



DEFINITION OF HOMELESS

Anyone who, *due to a lack of housing*, lives:

- In emergency or transitional shelters;
- In motels, hotels, trailer parks, campgrounds, abandoned in hospitals, awaiting foster care placement;
- In cars, parks, public places, bus or train stations, abandoned buildings;
- Doubled up with relatives or friends;
- In these conditions and is a migratory child or youth.

*To determine homelessness, consider the **permanence** and **adequacy** of the living situation.

Project HOPE-Virginia is Virginia's Program for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. The College of William and Mary administers the program for the Virginia Department of Education. Funding is authorized under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act, Title X, Part C of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (P.L. 107-110). The purpose of Project HOPE is to ensure the enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless children and youth in school.