

Learning on the Go at Home

You can turn everyday household chores and activities, like **doing laundry**, into fun learning games for your child, no matter how young she or he is.

Laundry is a frequent activity that young children love to join in — from watching clothes tumble to matching up socks. Find fun ways to help your children take part in these chores.

Connect

You can make children a part of this everyday task in ways that are fun for you and your child.

Watch and listen

Look at your child to see what he or she is interested in. Is your baby curious about how the clothes feel? Does your toddler like to take clothes in and out of the laundry basket? Is your preschooler interested in sorting clothes by color?

“Curiosity is an important part of mastery. It’s the desire to know. And the nice thing about it is you never get there. It’s not like you ever get to the point where you know everything or you’ve mastered everything.”

*Jack P. Shonkoff, MD
Samuel F. and Rose B. Gingold Professor of
Human Development and Social Policy
Brandeis University*

Extend

For your baby

- › Just because your baby doesn’t talk, doesn’t mean he or she isn’t learning language. Follow your child’s gaze to see what seems to intrigue him or her. Try to see this experience through his or her eyes. Talk to your child about what he or she is watching or what you’re doing: “Now I’m putting the clothes in the washing machine” or “Here goes the soap” or “You’re watching the clothes spinning in the dryer.” Children whose caring adults connect language to their everyday experiences learn to speak, communicate and eventually read better.

For your toddler

- › If your toddler likes to take clothes in and out of the laundry basket, have him or her help you put the clothes into the washer and dryer. Ask questions like “Can you find the pants and put them in the dryer?” Or, name colors together. These activities can be fun and help build language and thinking skills.

For your preschooler

- › If your child likes to sort things, have him or her make piles of the light clothes and the dark clothes. Older children can also help by finding matching pairs of socks, or finding all of the shirts to put into a pile for folding. These activities can build math and cooperation skills. Feeling useful also helps children feel good, which encourages them to continue to want to be helpful.

Learning on the Go at Home

For many, meals are a time when the whole family comes together. Learn how your **mealttime** discussions can help the development of your child, and ways that meals foster learning.

Connect

Studies show that meals are one of the most important times to be together as a family.

Catherine Snow and her colleagues at Harvard University conducted research on literacy development by taping what happens at family meals. **They found that the families who interacted with each other at meal times were more likely to have children with better literacy skills in the school-age years.** Family mealttime interaction took place when caregivers extended children's interests, which helped children use language to analyze, sequence, and predict while helping children appreciate the joy of language.

Watch and listen

Do your children listen to what you and others say? Do they have opportunities to talk, listen and take turns? Do they look forward to telling you about their day? What sounds and words do they try to say? What are they trying to communicate?

Extend

With your baby

- › Give your baby ordinary kitchen objects, such as plastic cups or wooden spoons, to play with while you are fixing a meal.
- › Name the foods you are eating and talk about foods your baby loves to eat.

With your toddler

- › Let your young child help make the meal — let him or her tear the lettuce for a salad, stir the spaghetti sauce or put napkins on the table.
- › Ask your toddler to name the foods you are preparing or to fix a pretend meal for his or her toy animal or doll while you fix dinner for your family.

For your preschooler

- › Ask your child to tell you a story about his or her day or tell him or her a story about yours during mealttime.
- › Create family traditions at meal times, such as a song that you always sing or a game like "I Spy" that you always play.

Learning on the Go at Home

Help your child wind down at the end of the day, and discover ways to make **bedtime** less stressful and more calming for all involved.

Connect

Bedtime is time to wind down. Creating a schedule that your child comes to expect makes the transition from an active day to a quiet time easier.

Many parents create “a special time” to be together at bedtime. Sometimes they read or tell stories. Other times, they let the child select what she or he wants to do.

Watch and listen

What helps your child get ready for bed in the most peaceful way, and what stirs up your child? Emphasize the calming activities and turn them into family traditions.

Extend

For your baby

- › Create a consistent bedtime schedule that your child can count on.
- › Think of bedtime as a quiet time to be together rather than a scary time of separation. Your attitude will help build a more positive attitude in your child.

For your toddler

- › Create traditions: First we take a bath and brush our teeth, then we read a story, put on the nightlight, give a kiss and go to sleep. With practice, a consistent schedule will help children learn to go to sleep by themselves.

For your preschooler

- › Your preschooler can take a more active role in planning bedtime traditions and use special time for listening to stories, making up stories about his or her stuffed animals, or for talking about the day.

Anytime

- › Be curious about your own learning and about how your child learns. Parents and caregivers who are truly engaged and excited about learning are more likely to have children who do the same.

Have fun! Children and adults learn best when they are connected to others, when they're learning about something they want or need to know, and when they're having fun. So don't make learning in everyday moments a chore, or something to strike off of your to-do list to give your child the best early start. Instead, make it something that *you* enjoy. The gift of joy in lifelong learning is a very important gift you can give your children.