

# Building Blocks for Resilience



2 to 4 Years

## What this booklet is about?

This booklet provides information, tips, and fun activities to support your child's growing brain, positive mental health, and resilience through:

1. supportive relationships
2. emotional skills
3. social skills
4. problem solving skills
5. community connections

Other books available in this series:

*Building Blocks for Resilience: Birth to 2 Years*

*Building Blocks for Resilience: 5 to 8 Years*



This booklet is for parents and caregivers of children aged 2 to 4 years old. We use the term 'parents and caregivers' throughout this booklet to refer to anyone who cares for children.

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## Introduction

Children need support to develop skills and abilities that will help them solve problems, cope with big emotions, and handle challenges. These are life skills that build a child's confidence, social and emotional wellbeing, and **resilience**.

**Resilience** means being able to 'bounce back' from serious challenges. It's something that we can work on and strengthen throughout life. Many things can affect your resilience including:

- genetics
- **temperament**
- general health
- sleeping and eating patterns
- having a supportive parent/caregiver-child relationship
- having a sense of control over life
- having chances to try new things
- developing self-regulation and emotional skills
- having a sense of hope, faith, and cultural traditions



People who are more resilient tend to have better relationships, do better in school, and are less likely to get depression or anxiety.



**Temperament** describes the way a child experiences the world and interacts with others. Everyone is born with a unique temperament. It impacts things like:

- how strongly we feel our emotions
- how strongly touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound affect us
- how active we are
- how easily we adjust to change
- how long we will keep trying even if things are difficult

For example, when a change in routine happens, some children take it more easily than others. A child who has strong emotional reactions might have a harder time calming down than one who doesn't. Problems can happen when you expect your child to be one way (e.g., sit quietly at the table) but your child acts in another way (e.g., can't sit still, is always moving). Sometimes, you may need to find ways to change your parenting style to match your child's unique temperament.



## Your Child's Growing Brain

Brains are built by our early experiences and relationships with other people. A child's growing brain needs at least one caring and responsive adult for healthy growth and development. Everything around your child is teaching them but parents and caregivers are their most important teachers.



You and your child have **serve and return interactions** everyday. One way to think about serve and return interactions is to imagine a tennis or volley ball game between you and your child where you want to keep the ball moving back and forth. This back and forth interaction helps them know that you have heard and understood their thoughts and feelings. Serve and return interactions that happen over and over in the early years of your child's life are very important for building healthy brain cell connections.

### Examples of serve and return interactions

Your child (the serve)	You (the return)
Does something that you notice (e.g., points, jumps, laughs, makes a face).	Notice their actions and share in what they're doing (e.g., ask what they are pointing to, jump with them, make faces with them). You can't do this every time your child does something but a few times each day will strengthen your connection.
Sees, does, or feels something and they don't know what to call it.	Notice when your child is curious about something and name it (e.g., a person, a thing, an action, a feeling). Naming what your child is focused on helps them understand the world around them, what to expect, and lets them know you care.
Responds to something you do or say (e.g., laughs, answers a question, comes for a snuggle, plays).	Take turns and wait for them. Sometimes, taking turns can go back and forth quickly between you and your child. Sometimes your child may need time to think of their responses. Taking turns and waiting helps your child develop their self-control, ideas, and confidence.
Shares something they need or are interested in (e.g., comfort, play time).	Support and encourage your child's interests and curiosity. Offer support by speaking gently, playing together, or giving a hug. Offer encouragement by nodding and saying "I see!", smile when they show you something, or help them try things many times. This lets them know that their thoughts, feelings, and actions are heard and understood.

Adapted from: *Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University (2017).*



For more information about serve and return interactions go to:  
[www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca](http://www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca)

## Stress

Stress is anything that puts strain on the body by increasing heart rate and stress hormone levels. Stressors can be physical (e.g., very hot or cold temperatures, illness, pain) or emotional (e.g., any situation, event, person we see as negative or threatening).

Some stress has been described as **positive** (e.g., when your child meets new people, tries new activities). This type of stress increases heart rate and stress hormones for a short time. You can help your child through this type of stress by encouraging them to try new things, encouraging them to keep trying even if they fail, and comforting them when they're upset.

Some stress is **tolerable** (e.g., the death of a loved one, a natural disaster, a frightening injury). Stress that is tolerable increases heart rate and stress hormones for a longer time and can affect a child's brain development and other organs if they don't get support. But, if your child gets love and support from you and other caregiving adults, the stress placed on their brains and other organs will get better and not have any lasting damage.

Other stress (e.g., abuse, neglect) that builds up over time from having many stressors and no adult support is extremely unhealthy for a child. This is called **toxic stress**. This type of stress increases heart rate and stress hormones for a long time. It can damage your child's brain and other organs—leading to physical or mental illnesses and/or addiction problems. Some of the problems caused by toxic stress can be fixed later with support and treatment. But, it's much better to avoid toxic stress in the first place.



Stress can influence your child's brain development.



### Positive Stress

Normal and everyday stress that is very brief and short-lived.



### Tolerable Stress

When a child experiences serious, temporary stress but they receive love and support from parents and caregivers to help them recover.



### Toxic Stress

When a child experiences serious stress for a long time without the love and support of parents or caregivers.



Talk to your healthcare provider or call Health Link at **811** if you or your family are having trouble managing your stress.



When parents and caregivers cope well with everyday stress like staying calm in stressful situations, they show their children how to do the same.

## Self-care for Parents and Caregivers

You are your child's first and most important teacher. Taking care of yourself can help you provide the caring and responsive experiences your child needs.

### Tips

**Practice gratitude.** Celebrate the small, good things that happen each day.

**Look after yourself.** Get enough sleep, eat well, drink water, be active, and take some time for yourself.

**Learn about emotions.** Learn to identify and name your feelings (e.g., sad, joyful, curious).

**Learn your stress signs.** Learn how your body tells you that you're feeling stressed. Your stress signs may be physical, mental, or emotional. You may also act differently than normal. Any time you feel your stress signs, take a few deep breaths.

**Find healthy ways to de-stress.** Find simple self-care activities that work for you. Walk, jog, get outside, listen to music, be creative (e.g., art, journaling), throw or kick a ball around, or talk to a friend.

**Learn ways to stay calm.** Try taking a time out (e.g., make sure your child is safe, step back and count to 10) or focus on your breathing (e.g., take a breath in for 5 seconds and a breath out for 5 seconds, repeat this for 5 or 6 breaths).

**Ask for help.** It's okay to ask for help when you need it. Get the support you need from family, friends, cultural or faith groups, and healthcare providers.

**Hang out with friends.** Do things with other parents and get together with friends or family.

**Use community resources.** Take a parenting class or program. They are a great place to meet other parents and learn about your child's development and what you can do to support it.

**Unplug.** Turn off electronics for some portion of your day. It's healthy to turn off electronics and connect with others face-to-face.



If you're feeling overwhelmed or frustrated, need more information, or want to talk to someone call:

- Mental Health Help Line: 1-877-303-2642
- Health Link: 811



# Supportive Relationships

Children learn about relationships from having relationships with their parents and caregivers. Providing love, patience, kindness, empathy, safety, protection, and comfort to your child will help them learn about healthy relationships.

## Tips

**Connect with your child.** Do things together that you both enjoy (e.g., playing, singing songs, reading, going for walks). When possible, have a special time with your child as part of your daily routine. It doesn't need to last long or be formal. Making time for your child shows you care and lets them know they can come to you if they need help.

**Show warmth and affection.** Receiving affection helps your child feel understood, loved, safe, and secure. Learn how your child likes to be shown affection (e.g., a cuddle, a hug, a smile, kind words, reading with them) and show it often.

**Build routines.** Develop day-to-day routines so your child knows what to expect.

**Comfort your child.** When your child is hurt, scared, sad, or angry, recognize and accept their feelings and then comfort them. This lets them know they're not alone when they handle unpleasant feelings. Your comfort lets them feel closer to you and they will continue to learn healthy ways to comfort themselves as they get older.

**Ask questions.** Asking questions can help your child be more curious, creative, and independent. For 2-3 year olds, ask "what" questions. Point to an item and say "What is this?" or "What is this called?". As they grow older, try asking questions like: "What did you like most about your day?"

**Encourage their efforts.** When they are learning new things, encourage their efforts in trying (e.g., "I can see this is hard to do. I like how you keep trying!").

**Limit screen time.** For children 2 to 4 years, limit screen time (e.g., any time spent with smart phones, tablets, television, video games, computers, or wearable technology) to less than 1 hour a day.

## Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety can be normal for toddlers and pre-schoolers. If your child has a difficult time separating from you, staying can make the problem worse. It can be helpful to make your goodbyes short, tell them when you'll be back, and give them a comfort item. When they're able to calm down with the help of other caregivers and then on their own, it builds their confidence and makes separation easier over time.



Talk to your healthcare provider or call Health Link at **811** if for more than 2 or 3 weeks after starting a new routine ( e.g., daycare) your child is crying for longer than 30-45 minutes after you leave.

# Activities Starting at Age 2

## Camp Out

Make a fort with your child. Bring in some stuffies, a flashlight, and snacks. Pretend to camp, play shadow puppets, or sing songs together—let your child take the lead! A tent creates a new, magical space and shuts out distractions so you can connect with your child.



## Read Together

Read or tell stories to your child that show ways people care about each other. This will help your child understand the actions that go along with caring for others.



For suggestions on books you can read with your child go to page 31.

## Stuffy Song and Dance

Use your child's favourite stuffy, sing some favourite songs in a silly voice, or pretend that the stuffy is singing the song. Make the stuffy dance, have your child join in with another stuffy, and have fun. Being silly with your child is a great way to connect.



# Activities Starting at Age 3

## Cooking Time

Invite one of your child's friends over for a play date to do a simple baking activity. Get the ingredients ready ahead of time and organize the children to make muffins. Your child will get practice taking turns, sharing, and working with others.

## Hide and Seek

Invite your child to play hide and seek. Count to 10 and then search for them, talking aloud about the clues you're using to find them (e.g., "I see something wiggling. I wonder if they're near that chair." or "I hear a laughing noise near the door."). Take turns hiding with your child.

## Show and Tell

Play 'show and tell' with your child. Take turns showing and talking about your favourite things (e.g., foods, toys, books). Ask lots of questions and you'll learn more about what your child likes.



# Activities Starting at Age 4

## My Turn, Your Turn

Use a song like *Five Little Monkeys* and take turns saying each line of the rhyme. Make up actions to the song or act it out with their stuffies. Your child will have fun playing with you and acting out the song.

### Five Little Monkeys

Five little monkeys jumping on the bed

One fell off and bumped its head

Mama called the doctor

And the doctor said,

No more monkeys jumping on the bed

Four little monkeys jumping on the bed

One fell off and bumped its head

Mama called the doctor

And the doctor said,

No more monkeys jumping on the bed

Three little monkeys jumping on the bed

One fell off and bumped its head

Mama called the doctor

And the doctor said,

No more monkeys jumping on the bed

Two little monkeys jumping on the bed

One fell off and bumped its head

Mama called the doctor

And the doctor said,

No more monkeys jumping on the bed

One little monkey jumping on the bed

One fell off and bumped its head

Mama called the doctor

And the doctor said,

Put those monkeys right to bed



## Secret Handshake

Invent a super-secret handshake for you and your child. Take turns adding a step (e.g., like shaking twice or giving a high-five). Use it for saying hello or goodbye.

## Memory Book

The next time you come back from visiting your family or friends, help your child make a memory book. Print photos from the visit or draw pictures. Write the words they use to describe their favourite memories from the visit.



# Emotional Skills

Building your child's resilience is also about helping them learn to manage their feelings in a positive way. Toddlers and pre-schoolers may have strong emotions that can be overwhelming for them (e.g., excitement, frustration, impatience, anger). They don't have words to express how they're feeling. Instead, they often show their feelings with their bodies (e.g., have a 'temper tantrum', hit, bite, throw things). It takes time and practice to develop skills to manage strong feelings. With a lot of help, time, and patience, you can help your child learn to recognize, name, and manage their emotions and actions.



All feelings, even the ones that are uncomfortable are okay. It's how we act when we feel these emotions that can be a problem.



If your child is having a strong emotional reaction and if you begin to have strong feelings of frustration or anger, take a brief time out. Step back and count to 10 or take some deep breaths. Make sure your child is safe while you calm yourself or ask for help.

Never shake or harm your child for any reason. Shaking or harming your child can cause serious injury. If you, your child, or your family are having difficulty coping with stress, substance use, or strong emotions talk to your healthcare provider or call Health Link at 811.

## Tips

**Look after yourselves.** Get enough sleep, eat healthy food, and be active daily.

**Model and talk about feelings.** The way you talk about and handle *your* feelings can help your child learn to talk about their *own* feelings. It can also help them understand how others feel. When you talk about how you feel, also say what you do (e.g., "I feel frustrated. I'm going to take a deep breath to help me feel better.").

**Name emotions.** Talk about your feelings (e.g., happiness, sadness, anger) and help your child name their feelings when they happen (e.g., "You look like you're feeling happy that you got a blue cup."). Describe why you think that (e.g., "You are smiling and laughing.").

**Accept all feelings and emotions.** There are no 'bad' emotions. Even unpleasant emotions like anger, sadness, and frustration teach us valuable lessons. What matters is how we act when we feel these emotions. Help your child learn what to do (e.g., ask for help when they get frustrated instead of throwing things).

**Connect.** Provide warmth, comfort, and affection for strong feelings and reactions. Help your child by connecting with them and using a **time-in** to calm down. A **time-in** means moving to a safe spot, giving cuddles, hugs, a hand on their shoulder, or just being nearby to reassure them that they're okay.



Use the 'How do you feel?' activity on page 27 to help your child name and understand emotions.

**Connect emotions to things that happen.** Help your child understand what happens affects how they feel (e.g., “You’re crying because grandma had to leave. This makes you feel sad.”). Connecting what happened (grandma leaving) to the emotion (feeling sad) helps your child understand that emotions can make them act in different ways.

**Ask for what you want.** Ask for the behaviour that you want to see (e.g., “Walk please.” or “Use a quiet voice.”) rather than saying what you don’t want to see ( e.g., “Don’t run.” or “Don’t yell.”).

**Offer options.** You can’t always give your child what they want, like when there is an issue of safety or you have set limits (e.g., less than 1 hour of screen time). If your child is upset, accept their feelings with empathy and offer options (e.g., “I can see that you’re sad that we can’t watch another show today. Would you like to read a book together or go play at the park?”).

**Apologize.** If you’ve had a strong emotion and how you handled it has upset you or your child, apologize for your actions and comfort your child. (e.g., “I’m sorry I yelled. I was scared you would get hurt. I shouldn’t have yelled.” Comfort them.) This will show them how you say sorry and mean it instead of forcing them to say sorry just because you tell them to.

## Helping Your Child with Fears

It’s normal for toddlers and preschoolers to have fears of certain things (e.g., animals, insects, the dark, doctor or dentist visits, thunderstorms, monsters). Even if your child’s fear seems silly, it’s real to your child. Trying to convince your child there is nothing to worry about will usually make your child more upset (e.g., “Don’t be silly. There’s nothing to be afraid of.”). Instead, name the fear and offer reassurance and comfort (e.g., “I understand the dog scares you. This dog is friendly. Let’s walk past it together or I can hold you while we walk by it.”, “I know you’re afraid that there are monsters under your bed. There are no monsters. We can look under your bed together to see.”)



# Activities Starting at Age 2

## Funny Faces

Make a silly face and ask your child to make a sillier one. Take turns to see who can make the silliest face!



## Music Time

Sing a song that will help your child learn the names of emotions. Try the actions and make different expressions with your faces as you sing *If You're Happy and You Know It*.

If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands, clap, clap! (*clap hands*)

If you're sad and you know it, cry out loud, boo hoo! (*rub tears*)

If you're mad and you know it, cross your arms! (*cross arms*)

If you're excited and you know it, shout hooray! (*hands in the air*)

Make up your own verses such as:

If you're angry and you know it, stomp your feet! (*stomp feet*)

If you're scared and you know it, hide your face! (*hide face*)



## Waiting Games

Rhymes, songs, and other simple activities help your child learn ways to cope with emotions like impatience and frustration while waiting.

- Teach them little rhymes or songs (e.g., "Count to eight, it helps me wait: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8!").
- Create singing conversations. Instead of talking back and forth, quietly sing what you want to say. How does your child respond? Try whispering and keep going back and forth to make it a game.
- While waiting for food to be ready, play the game, "I'm so hungry I could eat a \_\_\_\_." Look for objects around the room to fill in the blank (e.g., "I'm so hungry I could eat a chair!") The sillier the better!

# Activities Starting at Age 3

## Blow Fishy Bubbles

Breathing activities can help children get calm when they're upset. Practice breathing when your child is calm and ready to learn. Then, you can remind them to use it anytime they need it (e.g., upset, at bedtime).

Have some bubble mix and a bubble wand ready. Sit down so you're at eye level with your child. Say and do this at the same time:

- "Take in a deep breath."
- "Make your lips like a fish! Blow out through the little hole in your lips."
- "Watch the bubbles float away."



If it's too cold outside to blow bubbles try using them at bedtime.



## Red Light Green Light

Playing games that get your child to stop and start can help them manage their impulses and learn patience.

- Set a start and stop point.
- Stand at the stop point with your back to your child.
- When you say "green light", your child moves toward you.
- When you say "red light", your child must stop. Look to see if they stop.
- If your child is still moving when you say "red light", they have to go back to the beginning.
- If they reach you and touch you without getting caught moving, they win.
- Take turns.

## Food Faces

Cut up your child's favourite fruit or vegetables in a variety of shapes and sizes. Help your child make different food faces on their plate (e.g., happy, sad, mad). Have fun eating and talking about the names of emotions and what they look like (e.g., "What does a happy face look like?", "Can you show me a happy face?"). Learning the names of emotions and what they look like can help them recognize those feelings in themselves and others.

# Activities Starting at Age 4

## Freeze Feelings

This is a great way for your child to be physically active, learn about emotions, and manage impulses through stop and start activity.

- Put on some music and let your child know that they're going to dance until they hear the music stop.
- When the music stops, say and act out a feeling like 'sad' and then have them make a sad face.
- Start the music again and repeat. Try different feelings (e.g., scared, happy, angry, excited).

## Feelings Book

Create a book of feeling words and together draw or cut and paste pictures of people showing different emotions. Write the emotion you think they are feeling beside the face. Remind your child that you can often tell how someone is feeling by looking at their face and body (e.g., smile, frown). Look at the pictures and words together and ask your child questions about what they see (e.g., "What do you think that person is feeling?").





# Social Skills

Your child will develop many social skills early in life that will help them make friendships and get ready for school. Social skills are about relating to others. For children ages 2 to 4, important social skills include: learning to share, taking turns, following rules, compromising, and learning **empathy**. These skills develop alongside emotional skills and take time, practice, and encouragement from you and other adults for your child to learn.

**Empathy** is being able to see the world through someone else's eyes to understand their experiences. Other words to describe empathy are caring, compassion, understanding, and kindness.

## Tips

**Model.** Your child watches how you behave with others. Being kind and thoughtful towards your child, family, friends, and strangers are ways to model or show good social skills (e.g., say hello, hold doors, say please and thank you).

**Show empathy.** For example, if your child is upset during a thunderstorm, you could say, "The thunder is really loud. Are you feeling scared? Would you like me to stay with you until the thunder stops?"

**Practice taking turns.** Turn-taking is an important social skill for children to learn. Try different ways to practice taking turns with your child (e.g., games, serving food, talking with a friend or sibling).

**Socialize.** Go to places where there will be other children to play with. For younger children, if things start to go wrong (e.g., your child wants the same toy as another child) help them problem solve.

**Guide your child.** Help your child learn to consider what other children are feeling (e.g., "Mason is feeling sad because you took his toy truck. Please give it back. You can play with this truck until it's your turn.>").

**Notice kind acts.** When your child shows kindness, comment on it (e.g., they bring a stuffy to a friend or sibling who is upset, say: "You gave Eli a stuffy when he was sad. That was a nice thing to do.>").



For tips on teaching problem solving go to page 18.

# Activities Starting at Age 2

## Feelings, Feelings, Everywhere

When you're reading with your child name the book character's feeling (e.g., happy, sad, angry, frustrated, scared). Make the feeling with your face and have your child do the same.

For example, in the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, you might say: "Look baby bear's chair is broken! How do you think he's feeling?" or "The bears just found Goldilocks in the bed! Look how fast she's running out the door. How do you think she's feeling?" Help your child name the feeling (e.g., sad, scared).

You can also point out emotions in real-life situations. For example, "Mateo can't find his ball. He feels sad."

## Helping Hands

Children who help out around the house learn a sense of responsibility and are more likely to show concern for others. Here are a few ideas:

Things they can do mostly on their own:

- put dirty clothes in the hamper
- put toys away in a bin

Things they might need help to do:

- feed the family pet
- water the plants
- put cups on the table for a meal
- add ingredients to a bowl while you're baking or cooking
- put clothes in the washing machine



# Activities Starting at Age 3

## Let's Play Pretend

Many children begin to play pretend around age 3 (e.g., being a parent, doctor, super hero, store clerk). Let them take to lead and join in when they ask.

## Memory Matching

Practice turn taking with simple memory matching card games. You can purchase these or make your own by cutting out 10 pieces of thick paper into cards. Draw 5 pairs (e.g., colours, letters, shapes, emotion faces) on one side of the cards. Mix them up and lay them face-down on a flat surface. Take turns turning over 2 cards at a time, trying to find a match. When you find a match, remove that pair from the game until all pairs are matched.



## Make a Friend Book

Take photos of your child's friends (make sure it's okay with their parents). Help your child glue the photos to pieces of paper. Write the friend's name and list things about them (e.g., favourite toy, colour, food, stuffy). Make a cover page and staple it together. Read the book with your child and talk about their friends.

# Activities Starting at Age 4

## Invent a Story

Make up a silly story with your child and practice taking turns by adding sentences or parts to the story. Add to the fun by making up a funny voice for the characters. Use stuffies or other favourite toys in the story.

## Playhouse Puppets

Have fun acting with puppets behind a table, chair, or in a cardboard box puppet theatre. Get creative and make your own puppets (e.g., socks, fingers, paper bags). You can also cut out the faces on page 28 and turn them into puppets by gluing or taping a popsicle stick to the back of each one.





# Problem Solving Skills

As a parent or caregiver, you can't solve every problem for your child. In fact, your goal is to help them learn to solve their own problems so they can become confident and independent. Children learn this best through play but you can help by encouraging their efforts, teaching them new skills and letting them help out and make decisions. This helps your child build confidence in their abilities, supports their brain development, and fosters their resilience.

## Tips

**Encourage a 'growth mindset'.** Children learn by trying, failing, and trying again. Help your child take on a growth mindset or a belief that they can learn skills by practicing and trying hard rather than just being good or bad at something. Encourage them to keep trying and finish things even if they are difficult. Start with something small (e.g., matching shapes, doing a puzzle) and build on that success.

**Model and talk about problem solving.** Talk about how you solve your own problems (e.g., "Oops, I spilled the water! Let's get a cloth and wipe it up.").

**Notice efforts.** Notice your child's efforts by being specific about what they have tried to do even if they don't succeed (e.g., "You worked hard on colouring that picture.").

**Give choices.** When possible, offer two choices. This gives your child a sense of independence (e.g., "Do you want to wear the red shirt or the blue shirt?").

**Stand back.** Let your child try things and solve problems on their own. Offer your help, change activities, or have them take a break if they're getting frustrated.

**Let them lead.** Encourage your child to lead their play activities so they can explore and solve problems any way they want.

## Tips for Teaching Problem Solving

- Acknowledge your child's feelings (e.g., "You look mad.").
- Accept the feelings but limit the actions (e.g., "It's OK to be mad. It's not OK to hit. Hitting hurts people.").
- Define the problem (e.g., "I see you both want to play with the same toy.").
- Invite the child to suggest solutions (e.g., "What can we do so everyone will be happy?"). Help with ideas, if needed.
- Together, decide on a solution and try it out.
- See if it works. If not, try out another solution.
- Offer encouragement for problem solving efforts and positive behaviour.

If you repeat this process often, your child will have lots of chances to practice the problem solving steps. As your child gets older, they'll be able to problem solve more on their own.

# Activities Starting at Age 2

## Wall of Fame

Create a space in your home to show your child's unique efforts and build their confidence (e.g., artwork, crafts, photographs). This can be a bulletin board, the side of your fridge, or anywhere that works for you. Notice and encourage your child's efforts (e.g., the colours they chose, the time they spent colouring, the detail of something) rather than general comments such as "good" or "nice". Your child wants your attention and approval. This encourages them to keep trying.

## Child-Led Play

Child-led play is about letting children play freely, without any direction. It helps build their confidence and a belief in themselves as thinkers and learners.

Let your child choose what to play, what to play with, who to play with, and what the rules are. Let them show you what to do (e.g., instead of showing your child how to use a toy 'properly' let them play with it how they want). Follow along and have fun as they lead.

## Hide and Seek

Hide a toy in a room. Ask your child to look for the toy as you give clues along the way (e.g., "Is it behind the chair? Is it under the blanket?"). For two-year olds, make finding the objects easy (e.g., let them watch). As they get older ask them to hide their eyes. Playing hide and seek is a great way to practice counting, solving problems, and taking turns.

## Getting Dressed

Practice getting dressed when you're not rushed. Put on pretend play clothes (e.g., doctor, firefighter, super hero). Help them learn to zip zippers, put on pants, and do up buttons.

# Activities Starting at Age 3

## Four Seasons of Fun

Bring the fun outside to build your child's problem solving skills and confidence.

### Spring

- take a walk and jump in puddles
- plant some seeds
- ride a tricycle or balance bike (wear a helmet for safety)
- fly a kite (a little extra help may be needed)



### Fall

- rake leaves and jump in them
- find different coloured leaves and put them in a scrapbook
- go for a walk and step on leaves
- colour with sidewalk chalk



### Summer

- run through the sprinkler or visit a community spray park
- climb on things (with parent supervision)
- build a sandcastle
- help out in the garden
- have a picnic in the park or your yard



### Winter

- sled, skate, ski (wear a helmet for safety)
- shovel snow together
- build a snowman
- jump in snow banks
- make snow angels



## Little Shopper

Flip through your local grocery store flyer and help your child cut out items you need to buy (e.g., bananas, carrots, apples). Help your child paste these items onto a blank sheet of paper. Later, at the grocery store, have your child find these items and put them in the cart. Encourage your child while they're finding items and focus on their effort (e.g., "I can see you're looking hard, keep trying.").

## Pieces of the Puzzle

Cut out the front of an empty box (e.g., cereal) and then cut the picture on the box into five or six large puzzle pieces. Ask your child to put the picture back together. If needed, you can give clues to your child by pointing out which pieces go where.



# Activities Starting at Age 4

## Play Games

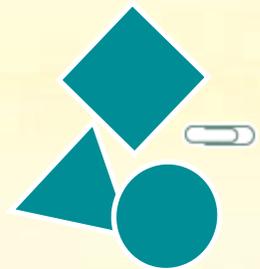
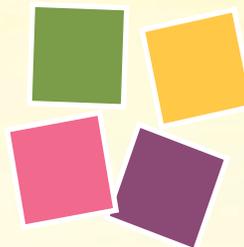
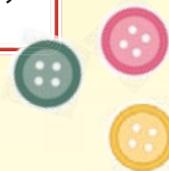
Play games that are age appropriate and will interest your child (e.g., Sequence for Kids™, Sorry!™, Scrabble Junior™, Go Fish). Playing games teaches your child how to take turns, problem solve, and how to win and lose. Sometimes, your child may give up when they're frustrated. Take a break if needed. Encourage your child to keep trying even if things don't go how they want.

## Grouping and Sorting

Gather things from around the house such as paper clips, buttons, or crayons. Ask your child to sort them (e.g., by colour, size, number of holes, order). This game can also be played outside. Use items like pebbles, sticks, or leaves. Sort these by type, size, colour, or smoothness.



If you're playing this activity with younger children nearby, be sure to choose larger objects (e.g., blocks, stuffies, playing cards) that can't be easily swallowed. If an object can fit through a toilet paper roll, a baby or young child can choke on it.





# Community Connections

Relationships and interactions with others play a big role in developing resilience by building a sense of identity, belonging, and responsibility. Being with others helps children feel valued, loved, and that they matter.

## Tips

**Connect with family and friends.** Encourage and find ways for your child to spend time with family and friends. If they aren't nearby, keep in contact through letters, phone, email, or video messaging.

**Share family traditions and history.** Include your child in your family and cultural traditions.

**Get out and about.** Involve your child in community activities and groups to help connect with other children and families.

**Model care for community.** Your child learns best by watching you. Do things for others in your community (e.g., shovel snow, volunteer).



# Activities Starting at Age 2

## Storytime

Stories about your family and traditions help to create a sense of identity for your child. Print some photos of your child, family, and family friends during your cultural celebrations and make a photo album. Look at the photos together and talk about the people, your traditions, and the things that they're doing.



More than one language? Talk to your child in the language that feels most fluent and natural to you. By learning at least one language well, children can more easily learn another language outside of their home like at daycare, school, and community programs.



## My Family

As you sing the song below, start by wiggling your child's thumb and naming a family member then move to the next finger, until you reach the little finger. Finish by kissing each fingertip.

This is my mother.  
This is my father.  
This is my brother tall.  
This is my sister.  
This is my baby.  
Oh, how I love them all!



Use the names of your family or friends (e.g., grandma, grandpa, uncle, auntie, cousin, neighbours). This will help them build a sense of identity.

# Activities Starting at Age 3

## Volunteer in Your Community

Look for opportunities to volunteer with your child. Explain what you need them to do and why (e.g., “We’re going to rake leaves for our neighbour. It’s nice to help other people.”). Volunteer activities that your child can help with could be as simple as picking out items for food donations or passing on toys or clothes they’ve outgrown to others. Your child will begin to understand how for care of the needs of others and meet new people.

## Playtime

Help your child connect to other children. Join community activities or drop into your local Parent Link Centre.



To find the Parent Link Centre closest to you go to:  
[www.alberta.ca/parent-link-centres.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/parent-link-centres.aspx)



## Sing a Song

Play or sing children’s songs that are unique to your family, culture, or community.

### The More We Get Together

The more we get together, together, together,  
The more we get together, the happier we will be.  
Because your friends are my friends,  
And my friends are your friends.  
The more we get together, the happier we will be.

There’s <child’s name> and <child’s name>,  
And <parent’s name> and <pet’s name>,  
There’s <friend’s name> and <friend’s name>,  
And <friend’s name> and <friend’s name>.

The more we get together,  
The happier we’ll be.



Use the names of your family, friends, pets, or people around your community (e.g., swim teacher, store clerk). This will help them build a sense of community.

# Activities Starting at Age 4

## Acts of Kindness

Ask your child to tell you about something nice that they did for someone else, how they think it made the other person feel, and how it made your child feel. Help your child think of other acts of kindness that they can do (e.g., say hello, hold the door for someone).

## Saying Thank You

When you share your appreciation and gratitude with others, your child sees your tone, actions, and words. They'll see what being kind, generous, and grateful looks like. Help your child make and then mail their artwork or small crafts to family, friends, babysitters, or neighbours to stay in touch or as a thank you.



# How do you feel?



Worried



Sad



Excited



Happy



Angry



Scared



# Resources

## Social and Emotional Development

The following chart provides you with examples of typical social and emotional development for children aged 2, 3, and 4 years old. Every child develops at their own pace, some may develop more quickly or slowly than others.

If you are concerned about your child's development, talk with your healthcare provider. Early support can make a big difference for you and your child.



The activities in this booklet are meant for children 2 to 4 years old. Some children may do things sooner or later than others. For more information about your child's development go to: [www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca](http://www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca)

### Starting at age 2

Emotional Development	Social Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need adults they know nearby to feel safe to explore and play.</li> <li>• May feel emotions very strongly and show them with their bodies (e.g., temper tantrum, hitting, over excitement).</li> <li>• Are starting to learn how emotions make their body feel.</li> <li>• Are starting to name feelings that they understand (e.g., emotions that they feel in themselves and see in others).</li> <li>• May use blankets or stuffies to help them cope with new situations and strong emotions.</li> <li>• May get upset when they're asked to do something they don't want to do (e.g., stop something fun) or if their routine changes.</li> <li>• Want to do things on their own but get upset if they can't because they don't have the skills.</li> <li>• Need help learning how to talk about the way they feel.</li> <li>• May be afraid of some real or imaginary things (e.g., other people, the dark).</li> <li>• Have not developed impulse control (e.g., may hit a playmate who picks up their favourite toy).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Like playing next to other children, rather than with each other.</li> <li>• May start to pretend play alone or with other children.</li> <li>• May start to play with other children (e.g., chase games).</li> <li>• Like to be with other children.</li> <li>• Like to copy you and help with everyday chores.</li> <li>• Like to please others.</li> <li>• Want and need to do things on their own.</li> <li>• May dawdle or take their time doing things.</li> <li>• May start to show an interest in other people's feelings.</li> <li>• Need a familiar or usual routine (e.g., going to bed, saying good-bye to parents).</li> <li>• Need you to set reasonable and consistent limits to keep them safe.</li> <li>• Need you to teach appropriate behaviours (e.g., sharing, taking turns).</li> <li>• Test limits that you set.</li> </ul>

## Starting at age 3

### Emotional Development

- Still need adults they know nearby to feel safe to explore and play.
- Are better able to know what they're feeling and name their own emotions (e.g., jealousy, excitement, fear, happiness, anger).
- May still feel emotions very strongly and show them with their bodies (e.g., temper tantrum, hitting, over excitement) especially if tired or hungry.
- Are starting to understand what causes different feelings (e.g., if a toy is taken away, feel upset).
- May be afraid of real and imaginary things (e.g., thunderstorms, monsters).
- Show affection towards you and other familiar people.
- May feel uneasy or anxious with major changes in routine.
- Often can't tell what's real and what's imaginary.

### Social Development

- Like playing with other children.
- Start to develop first real friendships with other children.
- May have an imaginary friend.
- If there is a problem with other children, they will go to adults for help.
- May show concern for a friend who is sad or upset (e.g., give a hug).
- Use imagination and themes (e.g., house, police) in pretend play.
- Follow simple rules in games, but will always want to win.
- Understand the idea of "mine" and "his" or "hers".
- Share toys, takes turns—with help.
- Begin to use words to say what they mean and may name call instead of screaming, hitting, or crying.
- Want to do more things by themselves (e.g. get dressed, go to the bathroom).
- Still need familiar routines.

## Starting at age 4

### Emotional Development

- Are better able to know and name their own feelings.
- Are better able to manage strong emotions and may have ways to cope (e.g., talking about it, some problem solving skills).
- Start to understand that others may not feel the same way they do.
- May still have tantrums.
- May describe something as bigger or better than it really is.
- Start to tell the difference between real and imaginary.
- Sometimes want only what they want, sometimes will easily cooperate.
- Continue to need structure and routines.
- Will work on a difficult task for longer time (e.g., cope with frustration better).

### Social Development

- Enjoy doing new things and activities.
- Enjoy imaginative play with other children (e.g., dress-up).
- Would rather play with other children than alone.
- Have deeper friendships and maybe even a best friend.
- Are getting better following rules, sharing, and taking turns.
- Are getting better at understanding right and wrong.
- Listen better while others are speaking.
- Talk about what they like and are interested in.
- Show more awareness of other people's feelings.
- Enjoy group activities and games.

## Recommended Books

Most of these books will be available to borrow for free from your local public library. If the book is not at your local library, ask the librarian about inter-library loans.

Title	Author	Year	What is the book about?
Be Kind	Pat Zietlow Miller & Jen Hill	2018	Understanding different ways to show kindness.
Ben Says Goodbye	Sarah Ellis	2015	Coping with sadness and loss of a friend who has moved.
Families, Families, Families	Suzanne Lang & Max Lang	2015	Understanding the uniqueness of each family and that love is what matters most.
Fill a Bucket	Carol McCloud, Karen Martin & David Messing	2008	Understanding how unique each person is and how giving and receiving kindness can make us feel good.
Giraffe and Bird	Rebecca Bender	2010	Coping with difficult relationships and learning ways to work together.
Grumpy Bird	Jeremy Tankard	2007	A fun look at coping with feeling grumpy by getting some help from friends.
Hands are Not for Hitting	Martine Agassi	2006	Coping with strong emotions and expressing them without hitting.
How Do Dinosaurs Say I'm Mad	Jane Yolen	2013	A fun look at how dinosaurs show and say they are angry and how they calm down.
I Know Here	Laurel Croza	2010	Coping with fear of moving to a new place.
I Love You Daddy	Jillian Harker & Christina Stephenson	1999	Coping with feeling afraid with support and encouragement from a father.
Little You	Richard van Camp & Julie Flett.	2013	A look at unconditional parental love.
Love You Forever	Robert Munsch	1986	Understanding the love a mother feels for her child throughout their lives.
My Heart Fills With Happiness	Monique Gray Smith & Julie Flett	2018	A look at happiness and things that can make us feel happy.
My Many Coloured Days	Dr. Seuss	1996	Understanding emotions, how we act, and things we might do when we experience them.
No Matter What	Debi Glio	2008	Coping with worry about being loved, a mother shows her child she will love him no matter what.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>What is the book about?</b>
Oh, The Places You'll Go	Dr. Seuss	1990	Coping with the ups and downs of life by believing in yourself.
Penguin and Pinecone	Salina Yoon	2012	Understanding friendship, how it grows, and stays strong even when you're not together.
Pete the Cat and His Four Groovy Buttons	Eric Litwin	2012	Coping with little problems by having fun and staying positive.
Someday	Alison McGhee	2007	Understanding the love a mother feels for her child.
Sometimes I'm Bombaloo	Rachel Vail	2005	Coping with anger and calming down when someone does something we don't like.
Stuck	Oliver Jeffers	2011	A fun look at a silly way to solve a problem.
Swimmy	Leo Lionni	1963	Coping with fear of danger by being smart and working together with friends.
The Dressing Up Dad	Maudie Smith & Paul Howard	2017	A look at a special relationship between a father and his child.
The Family Book	Todd Parr	2006	Understanding that all families are unique yet share love, care, and kindness.
The Invisible String	Patrice Karst	2018	Coping with feeling lonely when separated from family.
The Most Magnificent Thing	Ashley Spires	2014	Coping with feeling mad when something is hard to do. Learning to take a break and try again.
The Way I Feel	Janan Cain	2005	Understanding emotions, how we act, and things we might do when we experience them.
Today I Feel Silly & Other Moods That Make My Day	Jamie Lee Curtis	2007	Understanding emotions, how we act, and things we might do when we experience them.
We're all Wonders	R.J. Palacio	2017	Understanding there are differences in people and the importance of sharing kindness with everyone.
What's My Superpower?	Aviaq Johnston & Tim Mack	2017	Understanding and appreciating the unique abilities of others and ourselves.
When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry	Molly Bang	1999	Coping with angry feelings and understanding feelings change.
You Hold Me Up	Monique Gray Smith & Danielle Daniel	2017	A look at ways we can give kindness to others.

## Community and Online Resources

Resource	About	Website
Alberta Health Services Simple Connections, Stronger Families Toolkit	Printable activity pages, colouring sheets, puzzles, and handouts about increasing the resiliency of Albertan families.	<a href="http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page16039.aspx">www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page16039.aspx</a>
The Alberta Family Wellness Initiative	Provides information and resources about early brain development and its connection to lifelong physical and mental health, including addiction.	<a href="http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/">www.albertafamilywellness.org/</a>
Alberta Government, Parenting and Children for Newcomers	Provides information on parenting and children for anyone new to Alberta and/or Canada.	<a href="http://www.albertacanada.com/opportunity/settle/parenting-children.aspx">www.albertacanada.com/opportunity/settle/parenting-children.aspx</a>
Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association	Offers services and support to Alberta's urban Indigenous people.	<a href="http://anfca.com">anfca.com</a>
Alberta Parent Link Centres	Offers programs and services for parents and caregivers, and their children ages 0-6 years old.	<a href="http://www.alberta.ca/parent-link-centres.aspx">www.alberta.ca/parent-link-centres.aspx</a>
Healthy Parents, Healthy Children	Provides current, reliable pregnancy and parenting information.	<a href="http://www.healthyparentshealthychildren.com">www.healthyparentshealthychildren.com</a>
Heart-Mind Online	Offers information, ideas, and resources to support you in caring for your child.	<a href="http://heartmindonline.org/resources/for-families">heartmindonline.org/resources/for-families</a>
Parent Toolkit	Provides information about social and emotional development.	<a href="http://www.parenttoolkit.com">www.parenttoolkit.com</a>
Vroom	Offers activities to help your child's brain development.	<a href="http://www.vroom.org">www.vroom.org</a>

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Your opinion matters.  
To tell us what you think of this resource go to:  
<https://survey.albertahealthservices.ca/BuildingBlocks>



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Password: mh2016  
Item Number: C-002