

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Skill-Building Activities

for Groups of Parents and Caregivers



**The
Basics™**

Fun, Simple, and Powerful!



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PARENT AND CAREGIVER WORKSHOP: ONE-HOUR VIDEO DISCUSSION

The Basics Principles are five fun, simple, and powerful ways to help all our children get a great start in life. Each Basic principle is the focus of an introductory video featuring real families with infants and toddlers. In this one-hour workshop, the videos serve as springboards for discussions of ways to turn everyday moments into learning moments.

This guide is flexible. It covers one of the five principles (you choose which one). It can also be used to deliver a series of workshops covering all five. Consider the best times and places for offering sessions. In particular, how might you capitalize on occasions when families already gather at your organization or in your community?

During this one-hour session, participants will:

- Watch one of the Basics videos twice
- Discuss their observations from the video
- Identify at least one way they will use the Basic practice during the upcoming week

Before the Session:

- ✓ Choose which Basic principle you will cover and review its associated video and tip sheet (available online in the [Basics Community Toolkit](#)).
- ✓ Read through the workshop agenda on the following pages.
- ✓ Test your video player and speakers.
- ✓ Write the Group Guidelines (see the following page) on chart paper. Display where they can be easily seen.

Materials:

- ✓ One of the core Basics videos (accessed at TheBasics.org or your community's local Basics website)
- ✓ Video screen or blank wall, and working speakers
- ✓ Chart paper and markers
- ✓ Scrap paper and pens for notetaking
- ✓ Handouts:
 - Tip sheets, accessed from the Basics Community Toolkit
 - My ABC Plan (included at the end of this document in English and Spanish)

Introductions and Group Guidelines (15 minutes)

Introductions

- Have each participant share their name and the age/s of their child/ren. If you have time, do an icebreaker, for example, "One word that describes how you feel right now," or "An activity you enjoy with your child."

Group Guidelines

- Your role is to create a safe, supportive learning environment. Review the Group Guidelines, referring to the chart that you prepared ahead of time.
- *There is a lot of wisdom and experience in this room. One of the biggest benefits of meeting as a group is the opportunity to learn from one another. Our group guidelines are designed to help us make the most of this time together.*
 - ✓ *Respect other participants*
 - ✓ *Listen to one another*
 - ✓ *Be open to new ideas*
 - ✓ *Make this a safe place to learn*

Why The Basics Principles Matter

- Set the stage by introducing The Basics Principles. Use the sample language below to explain, in your own words, why The Basics Principles are important.
 - *Science shows that a huge amount of brain growth—around 80%—happens by age three. Beginning from birth, young brains develop like little muscles, getting bigger and stronger the more you and your family interact with your infant or toddler.*
 - *This early development lays a foundation for learning and wellbeing that lasts a lifetime.*
 - *That means we have a **big opportunity** to give all our kids a strong foundation for school and life right from the start.*
 - *The Basics Principles are **five simple and powerful ways to boost children's brain development and learning** that are based on the latest science.*
 - *Doing The Basics Principles is free. It does not require any fancy toys or adding hours to your day. It's all about the way you interact **during the time you already spend together.***
 - *When **everyone in a child's life** uses The Basics Principles from the very beginning, the child arrives at school ready to succeed and thrive.*

Tip: If you have time, play the Basics overview video (3 minutes, 18 seconds) to give the big picture and introduce all five Basics Principles. If pressed for time, skip the video and list all five principles for the group.

Today's Goals

- Share the specific goals for the workshop. Today we will: watch the video for (whichever Basic Principle you have chosen), share experiences about ways we (use that principle) with our children, and identify new things to try at home.

Video and Discussion (30 minutes)

Watch the Video Twice

12 minutes

- Introduce the video you've chosen and which Basics Principle it covers. Let participants know that they will watch the video twice—first for general impressions, and a second time for closer observation. (If you are pressed for time, only watch the video once.)
- Play the video.
- When the video is over, have participants spend a minute or two thinking about what struck them the most. While they are thinking, pass out paper and pens. Offer the following instructions: *Now we are going to re-watch the video. This time, pay close attention and notice as many specific caregiving strategies as you can. You might find it helpful to write them down. Try to come up with at least five. Once we're done, we will discuss what we observed.*
- Re-play the video.

Partner Share

8 minutes

- Have participants find a partner and describe their list of caregiving strategies from the video (if the group is small, skip this step and move into the Full Group Discussion below).

Full Group Discussion

10 minutes

- Have participants share strategies in a “popcorn style” (short comments, with no one person dominating the discussion). Capture comments as bullet points on chart paper. Put check marks next to ideas that come up repeatedly.
- After you've recorded at least 6-8 strategies, discuss the following questions as a group:
 - *Which of these strategies do you already use? When and how do you do them?*
 - *What is your child learning in such moments? How can you tell?*
 - *Which strategies would you like to try? Which would you like to use more frequently?*

Tip: Encourage participants to be specific when describing moments from the video or ways they interact with their children. It can be helpful to say “Tell me more about that,” or “What did that look like?”

Take it Home (15 minutes)

Make a Plan

- Have participants think about their upcoming week, picturing all the routine activities they will do with their child (e.g., mealtimes, taking the bus, grocery shopping, laundry). Then ask them to reflect on the strategies that have been discussed, and choose one that they do not do as much as they would like, or a new activity they would like to try. Encourage them to picture the precise times and places that they will commit to use that strategy. The more specific they can be the better.
- Pass out the **tip sheet** corresponding to the video the video the group watched.
- Give everyone a minute or two of “think” time. Then distribute copies of **My ABC Plan** (see following pages for versions in English and Spanish) and have participants record their plans.
- Go around the room and invite each person to share 1) The Basics action that they chose, 2) the next time and place they expect to do it, and 3) how they or their child will benefit.
- Wrap up with a discussion of obstacles and challenges that may need to be managed for them to follow through. Encourage participants to help each other identify solutions to these challenges. Keep the conversation positive and solution-oriented. The goal is for every person to feel supported, confident, and inspired.

Tip: If the group will be meeting again, start the next session by having participants share their experiences with their ABC Plans.

For additional hands-on activities to reinforce The Basics Principles, visit the online Basics Community Toolkit where you will find the following two activity guides (the first is for adult-only groups; the second is for caregiver-child groups):

- *Skill-Building Activities for Groups of Parents and Caregivers*
- *Skill Building Activities for Groups of Caregivers and Their Infants/Toddlers*

My ABC Plan

It's great to want to do The Basics Principles! But sometimes, good intentions are not enough to follow through on our plans.

Research has shown people are more likely to accomplish their goals when they think through the

Action, Benefits, and Challenges of any new practice.

Please complete this form as an example of what you can do with all five of The Basics Principles (or any other goal in your life).

Action

- ✓ Picture yourself doing a Basics action that you don't usually do.
- ✓ When and where will you do it next?

Action:

When:

Where:

Benefits

- ✓ How will the activity benefit you and your child? How will it make you feel?

Benefits:

My Feelings:

Challenges

- ✓ What challenges could get in the way of following through?
- ✓ What steps could you take to overcome these challenges?

Challenges:

Solution Steps:

Pledge to Myself: I, _____ agree to be a part of The Basics Community of parents and caregivers who do The Basics Principles and seek opportunities to share them with others.

Mi Plan ABC

¡Es genial poner en práctica "The Basics Principles"! Aunque a veces las buenas intenciones no son suficientes para llevar a cabo nuestros planes.

Los estudios demuestran que las personas tienden a cumplir sus objetivos cuando analizan la Acción, los Beneficios y las Complikaciones de un nuevo ejercicio.

Completa este formulario como ejemplo de lo que puedes hacer con los cinco principios "The Basics" (o cualquier otro objetivo en tu vida).

Acción

- ✓ Imagínate implementando una de las acciones de los Basics que normalmente no realizas.
- ✓ ¿Cuándo y dónde la volverás a realizar?

Acción:

Cuándo:

Dónde:

Beneficios

- ✓ ¿Cómo se beneficiarán ambos, tú y tu hijo, con esta actividad? ¿Cómo te hará sentir?

Beneficios:

Mis sentimientos:

Complikaciones

- ✓ ¿Qué complicaciones podrían surgir?
- ✓ ¿Qué pasos puedes tomar para superar estas complicaciones?

Complicaciones

Pasos para superar las complicaciones:

Asumo el compromiso: Yo, _____, me comprometo a formar parte de la Comunidad Basics compuesta de padres y cuidadores que implementan "The Basics Principles" y buscan la oportunidad de compartirlos con los demás.



Content for lesson plans

and

Resources

WHAT ARE THE BASICS PRINCIPLES?

Science shows that 80% of brain growth happens by the age of three! Beginning from birth, young brains develop like little muscles, getting bigger and stronger the more you and your family interact with your child.

The Basics Principles are five fun, simple, and powerful ways to help all our children aged 0-3 grow to be happy and smart.

Do all five principles every day to help your child become the amazing person you know they can be.



Maximize Love, Manage Stress

Babies and toddlers thrive when their world feels loving, safe, and predictable. Respond with smiles, words, and touch to help them see, hear, and feel your love. You will help them develop a sense of security and self-control.



Talk, Sing, and Point

Babies learn language from the moment they are born. Respond to their sounds, and later, their words. Connect with eye contact and a loving tone of voice, while pointing to help them know what you are talking about.



Count, Group, and Compare

Every child's brain is wired for math. Talk about numbers, shapes, patterns, and comparisons as you go about your routines together. Watch your child learn to love math.



Explore Through Movement and Play

Babies are like scientists who love making discoveries. Watch to see what interests your child, then encourage their curiosity and help them learn when they play and explore.



Read and Discuss Stories

Reading turns kids into confident thinkers. Make books a regular part of your relationship from the very beginning. With infants, point at the pictures and speak with excitement. With toddlers, just make it fun.

Who Is Involved?

Lots of people! Partners include hospitals, health centers, schools, community centers, childcare providers, churches, family members, and others.

What If I'm Not a Parent?

You still care about children! Learn about The Basics principles. Encourage parents and caregivers to make sure their children experience all five with everyone who cares for them.

How Can I Learn More?

Visit TheBasics.org or connect with us on social media for information on the campaign, opportunities in your community, tips, and videos.

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Hands-On Skill-Building

The Basics Principles are five fun, simple, and powerful ways to help all our children get a strong start in life. The activities in this guide extend The Basics Principles through hands-on skill building. The guide is designed for individuals who facilitate workshops and group sessions for parents and caregivers of infants and toddlers (it is also relevant for those with older children). After you have introduced participants to the five principles and shared why they matter, use activities from this guide to foster peer-to-peer learning and hands-on practice. If your group will include caregivers along with their children, see *Skill-Building Activities for Groups of Caregivers and Their Infants/Toddlers* in [The Basics Community Toolkit](#).

A Menu of Activities

For each of the five Basics Principles, you will find one icebreaker and three group activities. Think of this document as a menu: you can choose icebreakers and activities to suit your own goals, the size and location of your group, and your timeframe. Modify the activities as needed; and please share your ideas with us at info@thebasics.org.

Tips

- **Settings.** Consider a variety of settings where you could integrate these activities, particularly times and places where parents and caregivers already come together, such as parent breakfasts, workshops, or other family engagement events.
- **Introducing The Basics Principles.** Give some thought to how you will introduce The Basics Principles before diving into the activities. Make sure participants know what the principles are and why they matter. Refer to the general talking points on the following page, as well as the sample introductory remarks provided for each principle. Showing one or more videos from TheBasics.org or your community's local Basics website is also a good way to set the stage.
- **Adapting activities for participants with children of different ages.** The activities in this document are designed to model practices that parents and caregivers can use at home with their children from birth to age three. Some are geared more for infants, some for toddlers. All caregivers can benefit from practicing the core principles addressed in each activity, regardless of their children's ages. However, when you debrief following an activity, spend some time helping participants consider ways they might adapt the activities for use with their children.
- **Resources for families.** Look in The Basics Community Toolkit for handouts that participants can take home to reinforce the activities, such as downloadable tip sheets for each Basics Principle.

General Talking Points

Use the sample language below to explain, in your own words, why The Basics Principles are important.

- **Science shows that a huge amount of brain growth—around 80%—happens by age three.**
Beginning from birth, young brains develop like little muscles, getting bigger and stronger the more you and your family interact with your infant or toddler.
- *This early development lays a **foundation for learning and wellbeing that lasts a lifetime.***
- *That means we have a **big opportunity** to give all our kids a strong foundation for school and life right from the start.*
- *The Basics Principles are **five simple and powerful ways to boost children’s brain development and learning** that are based on the latest science.*
- *Doing The Basics Principles is free. It does not require any fancy toys or adding hours to your day. It’s all about the way you interact **during the time you already spend together.***
- *When **everyone in a child’s life** uses The Basics Principles from the very beginning, the child arrives at school ready to succeed and thrive.*

1. MAXIMIZE LOVE, MANAGE STRESS



Infants and toddlers thrive when their world feels loving, safe, and predictable. When you express your love and respond to their needs, you teach them that they can count on you. Over time, showing love and responding to your child helps them learn to manage their feelings and behavior. As they grow, feeling secure in their relationships gives them the confidence they need to explore, learn, and take on life's challenges.

Young children are affected by your emotions, whether you are happy or upset. So, it's important to find practical ways that help you cope with stress. Caring for yourself helps you care for your child.

Ice Breaker: Stand Up! Sit Down!

5 minutes

Begin with all participants sitting down. Give the following instructions (or create others) to help participants get to know each other and discover what they have in common.

- ✓ If you have a child under the age of three, stand up.
- ✓ If you have more than one child, sit down.
- ✓ If it was hard to get here today, stand up.
- ✓ If you speak a language other than English, sit down.
- ✓ If you felt stressed out today, stand up.
- ✓ If you gave someone a kiss today, sit down.

1a. Activity: What's the Weather Like Inside of You?¹

10 minutes

- **Introduce:** *The first step in managing stress—for both adults and children—is to name and understand how we are feeling in the moment. We're going to do an exercise to explore how we are feeling right now.*
- **Visualize:** Ask participants to close their eyes. Offer prompts to help them paint a mental picture of how they feel. *How are you feeling inside? Are you feeling sunny? Cloudy? Stormy? Breezy? Rainy? Warm? Hot? Cold? Imagine you are painting a picture of how you feel. What colors will you use? What details will you include?* Give participants time to relax, tune-in to their feelings, and visualize their weather pictures.
- **Turn and Talk:** Invite participants to turn to a person sitting next to them and share what they noticed. Have them describe, in detail, the weather picture they imagined.
- **Share Out:** Invite volunteers to share their feelings and their weather pictures with the group.
- **Debrief:**
 - Explain that the goal of this activity is to recognize and accept the way we feel, *not* to change the way we feel. The way we feel can affect our children. Even young infants are affected by our emotions.
 - Encourage participants to pause during the day to do a “weather check” to recognize how they are feeling. *When would be a good time to do a “weather check”? How might this benefit you or your child?* Participants may want to try this exercise with their school-age children, too.
- ⇒ **Try This—Before and After:** Do a “weather check” at the beginning of your group session and then again at the end, so participants have an opportunity to compare their feelings at two points in time.

¹ This activity is adapted from *Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and Their Parents)* by Eline Snel. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2013.

Note: *Italics* are used to indicate sample comments. Feel free to use your own words to adapt them.

1b. Activity: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5: Breathe

10 minutes

Materials: Chart paper, markers

- **Introduce:** *What can we do when we are feeling stressed, when the storm clouds are building inside of us? Science tells us that pausing to belly breathe is an effective way to calm down and reduce stress and anxiety.*
- **Count Breaths:**
 - Have participants sit with their backs straight. Let them know that during the breathing exercise, they might find it helpful to rest their hands on their belly so they can feel it expand when they inhale and deflate when they exhale. You can demonstrate for a round or two of inhales and exhales.
 - *Take a slow, deep breath through your nose. Expand your belly as you inhale, and hold it for a few seconds.*
 - *Exhale slowly through your mouth and count “one” silently to yourself.*
 - *Take another deep breath. Hold it in your belly. Exhale slowly through your mouth and count “two.”*
 - Repeat up to five deep breaths (on the third breath, count “three,” etc.).
 - Repeat the cycle together one or two more times.
- **Debrief:**
 - Ask participants to sit for a moment and just notice how they feel. Then ask: *Do you notice any difference in the way you feel? What else do you notice?*
 - *What times of day would it be helpful to do this breathing exercise?* Emphasize that pausing to breathe can help us cope with stressful moments. And it can be done anywhere! You may want to share how you use this strategy during your day.
 - *What other strategies can you use to keep calm in stressful situations?* Use the chart paper to record participants’ responses. Emphasize that *our goal is not to be stress-free. That’s impossible! Our goal is to find ways to cope with and get through stressful times.*

1c. Activity: Sharing Routines

20 minutes

Materials: Chart paper, markers, picture book that models a loving routine such as [*Kiss Good Night*](#) by Amy Hest or [*Peekaboo Bedtime*](#) by Rachel Isadora (optional)

- **Introduce:** *Daily routines help young children feel safe and know what to expect. Consistent daily routines and schedules also help parents and caregivers manage stress by giving a predictable structure to our day. Are there particular times of day when you think it would be helpful to have a routine? Why? We are going to tap the wisdom in this room and share daily routines that have helped our children feel safe and loved.*
- **Model:** Begin by sharing a favorite daily routine that has worked for you (or a family you serve). Be sure to include when and where you did the routine and details about each step. After the demonstration, ask: *How do you think a child would benefit from this routine? What steps show love? What steps help a child feel safe? How do you think caregivers would benefit from this routine?* You may also want to share how you modified the routine in response to the child's reactions. What worked? What didn't work?
- **Turn and Talk:** Have participants turn to a person sitting next to them and share a favorite daily routine. Pairs should designate one person to be the speaker and one to be the listener. Have the speaking partner share answers to the following questions: *Where and at what time do you do this routine? What are the steps of the routine?* Ask the listening partner to identify how the child might benefit from the routine and how the parent or caregiver might benefit. Then have partners switch roles.
- **Share Out:** Invite volunteers to share their routines and the time of day they use them with the whole group. Chart the responses. *Does anyone see a routine they want to try at home?*
- **Debrief:**
 - Talk about how the steps of a good daily routine show children how much we love them (e.g., a goodnight hug or kiss), and help them feel safe and secure (e.g., reading a book or telling a story before turning off the lights).
 - Routines also help children learn about sequence—what comes first, next, and last.
 - Emphasize the importance of sticking with a routine once you find one that works. *As your baby or toddler grows, modify the routine to fit his or her developing skills and needs.*
- ⇒ **Take It Further—Bedtime Read Alouds:** Read aloud a favorite picture book that models a loving routine (e.g., bedtime routine or making dinner). As you read, ask participants to notice and name each step of the routine and how the child in the book responds to it. *What steps show love for the child? What steps help the child feel safe and secure? How might the caregiver benefit?*

2. TALK, SING, AND POINT



Babies are learning language from the very beginning (starting before they are even born!). They begin by listening to the sounds when family members and caregivers talk to them. So, connect with eye contact and a loving tone of voice and talk to your child as you go about your day together. Go back and forth, responding to their facial expressions, coos, babbles, and eventually, words. Every time you talk, sing, or point to what you are talking about, you provide clues to the meaning of what you are saying. As your child gets older, talking to them and answering their questions teaches them about the world, and helps you get to know the fascinating person they are becoming!

Ice Breaker: Sing a Round

5 minutes

Singing a round is a great way to build community and make beautiful sounds together. The classic “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” works very well for rounds.

Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream

- Organize participants in small groups. Each group will sing the song two full times.
- Instruct the first group to start singing.
- After the first group sings the first line (“Row, row, row your boat...”), signal the second group to start in while the first group moves onto the second line (“Gently down the stream...”).
- Continue to have the groups join in until everyone is singing.
- Each group should stop singing after they have completed the song for the second time.

2a. Activity: Share Fingerplays, Songs, and Lullabies

15 minutes

- **Introduce:** *Children love to sing and listen to music and rhymes. When you sing and recite rhymes to your baby or with your toddler, you are bonding with them and helping them develop attention, language, and social skills. In this activity, we are going to share and teach each other our favorite songs, fingerplays, and lullabies.*
- **Model:** Choose a favorite song, fingerplay, or lullaby. Explain why it's a favorite. Share what time of day you sing or recite it (e.g., bedtime, mealtime, bath time, changing diapers, etc.). Then teach the song, lullaby, or fingerplay to the group. Explain how the fingerplay, song, or lullaby benefits young children.
- **Partner Share:** Organize the group into partners. Have each partner teach a favorite song, fingerplay, or lullaby. Encourage participants to use the language they feel most comfortable with. Participants should explain what time of day they sing the song or do the fingerplay and how it benefits them and their child.
- **Debrief:**
 - Ask participants to notice and share how they feel when they are singing to and with their child. *How does your child respond when you sing?* Emphasize that singing songs and reciting rhymes are fun ways to connect with young children, and to help them hear the sounds in words and to learn new words.
 - The joy of singing and music also helps us manage stress. *Did you ever hum while you were doing a tedious task? Or smile when you heard your favorite song on the radio? Make singing and music a part of your day!*

Note: *Italics* are used to indicate sample comments. Feel free to use your own words to adapt them.

2b. Activity: Rhymes for Important Times

20 minutes

Materials: Chart paper, markers

- **Introduce:** Suggest to participants that they can make up their own rhymes and chants to help with transitions, and to teach their children important daily routines. *Putting words to actions is a great way to help children build language and understand sequence—what comes first, next, and last. And babies and toddlers naturally like and pay attention to rhymes.*
- **Model:** Lead the group in making up a bath time rhyme. Chant a first line, such as *Soapy Samantha in the tub*. Invite participants to add a second line that rhymes with the first (e.g., *Rub-a-dub-rub-a-dub-rub-a-dub-dub*). Or try a mealtime chant. *Eat, eat, eat your lunch. Eat it up today. /After you eat your lunch, we'll go out and play.*
- **Create a Rhyme:** Organize participants in small groups of three or four. Give each group one or two sheets of chart paper and some colored markers. Have each group create at least one short rhyming chant for a transition time or daily routine. Ask groups to write their chants on chart paper and post their charts on a wall. If there is time, some groups may want to illustrate their charts.
- **Gallery Walk:** Invite groups to travel around the room, silently reading all the charts. Then ask groups, one by one, to stand by their chart and recite their rhyming chant together. When they are done, ask: *What time of day would you recite this rhyming chant with your child? How do you think this chant could benefit you and your child?*
- **Debrief:** Congratulate participants on their creativity! Ask if participants want to try any of the rhyming chants at home with their infants or toddlers. You could ask:
 - *How do you think these chants would help with daily routines?*
 - *Would using these chants affect your relationship with your child?*
 - *What will your child learn from rhymes and chants?*

2c. Activity: Which Would You Rather Be?

15 minutes

Materials: Chart paper (optional), markers (optional)

- **Introduce:** *Asking questions and having conversations with your toddler are terrific ways to build language and thinking skills. In fact, science shows that having back-and-forth conversations with babies and toddlers is one of the most important factors for language development. And talking with your child is a great way to find out fascinating, and sometimes hilarious, information about them!*
- **Model:** *Raise your hand to answer this question: Which would you rather be: a dog or a cat? Call on a volunteer. Repeat his or her answer. So, you'd rather be a dog than a cat. Encourage the participant to elaborate on the answer. Why would you rather be a dog? What kind of dog would you like to be? What would you do if you were a dog?*
- **Partner Share:** Organize participants into pairs. Have each participant think of a "Which would you rather be?" question they would like to ask their child. Then have partners pose their questions to each other. Encourage the asking partner to repeat their partner's answers and to ask follow-up questions that encourage elaboration. Partners should ask each other at least three follow-up questions.
- **Share Out:** If there's time, invite partners to share some of their "Which Would You Rather Be" questions with the group. You may want to record the questions on chart paper.
- **Debrief:** Ask questions such as:
 - *What did you notice about this activity? Was it fun? What did you learn about your partner?*
 - *What time of day do you think you might do this activity with your child? (It's a great way to pass time on the bus or when you're waiting for an appointment.) How do you think it would benefit your child?*
 - *How can you have back-and-forth exchanges with babies or toddlers who don't talk yet or who only say a few words? How do they communicate with you? How do they answer questions? How can you respond to keep the back-and-forth going? Remember, children typically understand many more words than they are able to say. You might want to record responses on chart paper.*
 - Encourage participants to think of other ways they could enhance the activity. For example, parents and caregivers can **point** to pictures, animals, or objects to clarify the meaning of their questions. Emphasize that pointing helps babies interpret words that represent objects.

3. COUNT, GROUP, AND COMPARE

1
2 3

Becoming good at math begins long before a child enters school. Each one of us is born to be a “math person.” Even babies can do simple math, such as noticing amounts and patterns. Toddlers love learning math concepts and games, such as comparing sizes and shapes. These concepts help them make sense of the world. You can help your child learn math as you play and talk together during everyday moments. By building on their natural skills and interests, you will be boosting their brain development and preparing them to do well in school.

Ice Breaker: Concentric Circles

10 minutes

- Have participants arrange themselves in an inside circle and an outside circle, with the inside circle facing out, to form face-to-face pairs.
- Pose a question, such as, *How many children (or siblings) do you have?* Ask the face-to-face pairs to discuss their answers.
- Then ask the **inside circle** to move clockwise, forming new pairs. Pose another question for the new pairs to discuss, such as, *How do you feel about math?*
- Repeat the process. Ask a few more questions that help participants see how they are the same or different. Here are some examples:
 - *How far did you travel to get here today? Which of you traveled farther to get here today?*
 - *When is your birthday? Whose birthday is coming up first?*
 - *What time do you start your day? Are you a morning person or a night owl?*

3a. Activity: Counting Songs and Games

15 minutes

Materials: Phone, mp3 player, or other device for playing music (optional)

- **Introduce:** *Singing to or with your child is a great way to introduce numbers, even before your child understands what numbers mean or knows how to count. Songs and rhymes that count a baby's fingers and toes are a great place to start. In addition to teaching numbers, they help babies become aware of their bodies. It's also a great opportunity to look into their eyes and connect face-to-face.*
- **Ten Little Fingers:** *Let's start with a favorite song called "Ten Little Fingers."* See lyrics below in both English and Spanish.

Don't know the tune? To watch José-Luis Orozco sing this counting song in Spanish and English, visit: <http://bit.ly/2FCOdSV>.

Ten Little Fingers

Two little hands, ten little fingers, (wave your two hands back and forth)

Two little hands, ten little fingers,

Two little hands, ten little fingers.

Count them all with me. (make a fist with each hand)

One, two, three little fingers, (hold up 1, then 2, then 3 fingers)

Four, five, six little fingers (hold up 4, then 5, then 6 fingers)

Seven, eight, nine little fingers, (hold up 6, then 7, then 8 fingers)

And one more makes ten. (hold up all 10 fingers and wave both hands back and forth)

Diez Deditos

Dos manitas, diez deditos,

dos manitas, diez deditos,

dos manitas, diez deditos,

cuéntalos conmigo.

Uno, dos, tres deditos,

cuatro, cinco, seis deditos,

siete, ocho, nueve deditos,

y uno más son diez.

3a. Activity: Counting Songs and Games (cont'd)

- **This Little Piggy:** *Have you ever played the finger game, "This Little Piggy," with your child? Let's do it together, and turn it into a counting game! Everyone, hold up your right hand with your palm facing in toward your face. Watch as I demonstrate. Then do it with me.*

This little piggy went to market.	(softly squeeze pinky and say "That's one!")
This little piggy stayed home.	(softly squeeze a 2nd finger say "That's two!")
This little piggy had roast beef (or substitute another favorite food).	(softly squeeze a 3rd finger and say "That's three!")
This little piggy had none.	(softly squeeze a 4th finger and say "That's four!")
This little piggy cried "Wee, wee, wee,"	(gently move pointer finger down side of finger and up side of thumb)
all the way home!	(softly squeeze thumb and say "That's five!")

When you do this at home with your toddlers, have them recite the rhyme with you. Pause when you get to the number and encourage your child to chime in "That's one"!

- **Five Little Monkeys:** *Do you know the action song, "Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed?" Watch as I demonstrate. Then let's do it together.*

Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed

Five little monkeys jumping on the bed	(hold up hand with palm facing away from you)
One fell off and bumped his head	(hold up one finger and rub your head with other hand)
Mama called the doctor and the doctor said	(hold hand up to ear to mimic talking on the phone)
NO MORE MONKEYS JUMPING ON THE BED.	(wag pointer finger from side to side)

Four little monkeys jumping on the bed	(hold up hand with thumb down)
One fell off and bumped his head	(hold up one finger and rub your head with other hand)
Mama called the doctor and the doctor said	(hold hand up to ear to mimic talking on the phone)
NO MORE MONKEYS JUMPING ON THE BED.	(hold hand up to ear to mimic talking on the phone)

(Repeat with three little monkeys, two little monkeys, and one little monkey.)

- **Debrief:**
 - *These are just three of many counting games and songs. What other counting games and songs do you sing and play with your children?*
 - *What time of day do you think you might do these with your child? How do you think counting games and songs benefit your child?*
 - *How is "Five Little Monkeys" different from "Diez Deditos" and "This Little Piggy?" What math skills does "Five Little Monkeys" teach (counting backward, subtraction)?*

3b. Activity: Mystery Bag—Sort It Out

20 minutes

Materials:

Paper, pens/pencils, chart paper, markers

Materials for Mystery Bags

- Paper lunch bags (one for each small group of two, three, or four participants, depending on total size of group)
- An assortment of small objects to sort by shape, size, color, etc. for each bag, such as Legos, magic markers, crayons, toy cars and other vehicles, buttons, plastic spoons, pencils, paper clips, cotton balls, etc.

- **Prepare:** Fill each Mystery Bag with an assortment of objects. You can put the same objects in each bag or vary the contents depending on what you have on-hand.
- **Introduce:** *There's so much more to math than numbers and counting. Sorting is an important early math skill. When children sort, they understand that things are alike and different and that objects can be organized into groups. In other words, they **group** and **compare**. Sorting helps children make sense of their world. Let's do a fun sorting activity that shows how many ways there are to sort.*
- **Get Ready:** Distribute Mystery Bags to pairs or small groups. Pass out paper and pencils or pens.
- **Dump and Sort:** Have participants dump out their bags. Then have them work together to sort the objects in different ways, such as color, shape, size, texture, things we use to write, things that have wheels, etc. Ask participants to describe and record all their different sorts on the paper.
- **Share Out—Many Ways to Sort:** Call on each group to share all the different ways they sorted the objects. Record responses on chart paper. If a sort category (e.g., color) is repeated, put a checkmark next to it.
- **Debrief:**
 - Together, review the chart. *How many different ways did we find to sort the objects? What were the most common ways to sort? What kinds of words did we use when sorting (for example, words to describe the features of the objects, spatial words)?*
 - Point out that this is a good activity to do with toddlers as well as school-age children. *What types of sorting activities could you do using everyday objects?* Record ideas on chart paper. Emphasize that toddlers can sort blocks, Legos, toys, and other household objects by color, size, and shape.
 - *How could you use these same objects to talk about math ideas with younger children?* Babies will enjoy touching and examining objects of different sizes, shapes, colors, and textures. While they concentrate on and explore an object, you can describe its features and compare it to other objects. Use words like “soft,” “hard,” “smooth,” “rough,” “big,” “small,” etc.

3c. Activity: Math Talk All Day Long

30 minutes

Materials: Chart paper, markers

- **Introduce:** *You can help your child become a problem-solver by using “math talk” during your day. Your normal routine is full of fun opportunities to talk math. You use “math talk” when you count the steps as you climb the stairs, tap and count the beats in a song, measure how many cups of flour you use to make cookies, compare things that are big and little, and sort laundry. We are going to work in small groups (or pairs) to create role plays of daily scenarios where we can use “math talk” with our kids.*
- **Assign Activities:** Organize participants into small groups or pairs. Assign each group one of the following everyday activities.
 - ✓ Mealtime
 - ✓ Bath time
 - ✓ Laundry
 - ✓ Grocery shopping
 - ✓ A walk around the neighborhood
- **Brainstorm Scenarios:** Provide chart paper and markers to each group or pair. Have each group spend a few minutes brainstorming different ways to use “math talk” during their assigned everyday activity. Then have them choose one scenario and work together to create a role play that shows how to incorporate “math talk.” Have one participant play the parent or caregiver and another play the child. Groups with three or four participants can add another adult or child to the scenario.
- **Act It Out:** Invite small groups or pairs to enact their “math talk” scenarios. Ask them to begin by identifying the setting and time of day. After the role play, have the audience identify the different types of math they observed (e.g., counting, measuring, comparing, grouping, sorting, patterns, shapes, etc.).
- **Debrief:** Invite participants to reflect on what they learned from creating and observing the role plays. What other ideas do they have for weaving “math talk” into their everyday activities? Emphasize that “math talk” doesn’t take any extra time and does not require any materials. It’s simply adding talk that helps children describe what they see and do using math.
- ⇒ **Try This—Math Talk Posters:** If participants are hesitant to role play, have small groups or partners brainstorm different ways to use “math talk” during the assigned activity or time of day. Groups can create posters of specific examples of math talk in order to encourage and remind parents and caregivers to use math talk with their children during the day. Display the posters and invite participants to walk around the room and read each poster. Convene the group and ask questions to prompt discussion: *What did you notice about the posters? What different types of math activities did you see? Did you see an idea you would like to try at home with your child?*

4. EXPLORE THROUGH MOVEMENT AND PLAY



There are many different kinds of play: imaginative and pretend play, creative activities such as drawing, all sorts of games, and physical play, such as rolling a ball or dancing. Movement and play are good for children's bodies and brains. Movement and play keep children healthy and build their coordination and strength. Children also explore and learn about the world through movement and play. Each stage of development comes with new opportunities for learning. An infant might explore by touching, grasping, banging something, or crawling. A toddler might explore by walking or climbing. Young children are like scientists—curious and excited to learn about their surroundings. See where your child's curiosity takes them, and build on their interests.

Ice Breaker: Ball-Toss Name Game

10 minutes

Materials: Ball

- **Version 1**
 - Have participants stand in a circle. Go around the circle and have each person introduce him or herself.
 - Call someone's name and toss the ball to them. Instruct them to say, "Thank you (your name)."
 - Then have the recipient call out another person's name and toss the ball to that person. The new recipient will say, "Thank you (name)" to the person who tossed the ball to him or her.
 - Repeat the process until everyone has been tossed the ball once. Tell participants to remember the name of the person who they tossed the ball to, as well as the name of the person who tossed the ball to them.
 - Have the group toss the ball around the circle in the original order again. Make sure people throw the ball to the same person they did the first time around, continuing to state that person's name. Recipients should thank, by name, the person who tossed them the ball.
- **Version 2**
 - You may prefer a different ball-toss game. Throw a ball to a participant in the circle. Ask him or her one of the following questions:
 - ✓ What kind of sport or physical activity did you like to do as a child?
 - ✓ What kind of sport or physical activity do you like to do now?
 - ✓ What is a type of play that your child enjoys?
 - ✓ What is something that interests your child?
 - After the recipient answers the question, have him or her toss the ball to another person in the circle, who will answer the same question. Repeat until everyone has had a turn.

4a. Activity: Yoga

15 minutes

- **Introduce:** *Yoga helps build strength, flexibility, coordination, and balance. It also helps us to focus, to relax, and to de-stress. We are going to do some yoga, beginning with belly or deep breathing.*
- **Deep Breathing**
 - Have participants sit comfortably on the floor or in chairs with both feet on the ground.
 - *Place your right hand on your chest and your left hand on your belly.*
 - *Inhale through your nostrils, and feel your breath expand your chest, then your belly.*
 - *Exhale, deflating first the belly and then the chest.*
 - Repeat 3-5 times, gradually deepening the breath.
- **Left-Right Twist**
 - *Stand with your feet wide apart and parallel to each other.*
 - *Inhale as you bring your arms up and extend them to the side (at shoulder level).*
 - *Exhale as you twist your body and bring your left hand down as close to your right foot as you can.*
 - *Inhale as you un-twist your body upward again, arms extended to the sides.*
 - *Exhale as you twist your body and bring your right hand as close to your left foot as you can.*
 - Repeat one more time on each side.
 - Repeat once more on each side, this time holding the posture for a few seconds, reaching the opposite arm up toward the ceiling.
- ⇒ **Take It Further—SuperBrain Yoga:** *Doing this simple exercise for 3-5 minutes a day may help you focus and improve your concentration.*
 - Ask participants to stand straight with their hands at their side. First model, then have participants do the activity with you.
 - *Bring your left hand across your chest and grab your right ear lobe.*
 - *Bring your right hand across your chest and grab your left ear lobe.*
 - *Inhale as you bend your knees, still holding your earlobes.*
 - *Exhale as you straighten your knees and stand back up again.*
 - Repeat several times.
- **Debrief:**
 - *How do you feel after doing those movements? What did you notice about these yoga movements? Did you notice that they required you to cross your hands or feet to the other side of your body? This is called crossing the midline. Crossing the midline is a very important skill that helps children learn to crawl and to walk, and later on to read and to write.*
 - *What time of day could you do yoga with your child? In what ways do you think your child could benefit from simple yoga? How might you engage a baby in simple movement? How could you make yoga more fun for your child? (Tickle their imagination by naming yoga postures after animals and even bugs!)*

4b. Activity: Action Charades

20 minutes

Materials: One or two paper or plastic bags, strips of paper with action words

- **Prepare:** Make a list of action words you think would work well for this activity. Write each action word on a strip of paper. Put the strips in a bag. Action words can include: skip, stretch, hop, spin, tie a shoe, wash hair, etc.
 - **Introduce:** Ask participants if they have ever played charades. *Did you play with adults or with kids?* Explain that you are going to play a type of charades that is great to play with older toddlers or preschoolers.
 - **Model:** Hold up the bag with the action words inside. *I'm going to pick a word from the bag and act it out. Can you guess what I'm doing?* Pick a word from the bag and, without speaking, act it out in front of the group. Invite participants to guess what you are doing.
 - **Your Turn:** Invite a participant to pick a word from the bag and act it out. Repeat until everyone has a chance to act out a word.
 - **Debrief:**
 - Congratulate participants on a great game of charades. Ask them what all of the words have in common. *They each describe an action. How would your child benefit from playing this kind of game? How could you adapt it for younger children (e.g., show them a picture to act out or tell them a word to act out). Young children will also enjoy acting like different animals. When and where could you play this type of game? What other types of guessing games could you play with your child?*
 - Emphasize that action charades activates children's bodies **and** their minds. It not only gets them moving, it also helps them name and describe actions which is a powerful way to learn and use new words.
- ⇒ **Try This—Team Up:** If you want to add some healthy competition to the game, divide the group into two teams. Make duplicate sets of cards. Which team can correctly guess all the action words first?

4c. Activity: Musical Murals

20 minutes

Materials: Phone, mp3 player, or other device for playing music; 2-4 large sheets of mural-sized paper (e.g., chart paper); tape; markers and crayons

- **Prepare:** Select two pieces of music. One piece should be slow and soothing. Try a classical song, like *"Clair de Lune"* by Claude Debussy, or a soothing selection from the album *Marc Anthony for Babies*, such as *"Tu Amor Me Hace Bien"* or *"No Me Ames."* The other piece should be a fast, energetic song, like *"Happy"* by Pharrell Williams. Depending on the size of your group, tape two or four large, mural-sized pieces of paper to a wall or to the floor.
 - **Introduce:** *Drawing to and dancing to music are delightful ways to engage the senses, to encourage creativity, and to build coordination. Switching between slow and fast music also develops listening skills and self-control.*
 - **Get Ready:** Divide participants into small groups. Each group will create two murals, so will need two pieces of mural paper. Position groups of participants in front of their mural paper and distribute coloring supplies.
 - **Slow Music Murals:** Play the slow song you have chosen. Encourage participants to choose colors that they feel go with the music and to draw to the sound of the music. Each group will draw together on one sheet of paper to create a mural.
 - **Fast Music Murals:** Stop the music and ask participants to move to the second piece of mural paper. Change the tempo and invite participants to create a second mural to the sounds of high-energy music. Again, encourage participants to choose colors that go with the music and to draw to the sound of the music.
 - **Debrief:**
 - Display the murals and congratulate the artists on their creations. Ask questions such as: *What do you notice about the slow music murals? The fast music murals? How are they alike? How are they different?*
 - *How did you feel while you were listening and drawing to the music? What else did you notice?*
 - *Would you do this activity with your children? How do you think your children would benefit? What time of day would be a good time to do this activity with your children?* Let participants know that toddlers will scribble randomly, and that's fine. They are developing coordination and the understanding that objects can be represented on paper.
- ⇒ **Try This—Individual Drawings:** Instead of creating group murals, you can give each participant two 8.5" x 11" pieces of paper for creating their own drawings.

5. READ AND DISCUSS STORIES



It is never too early to begin reading to your child—even babies enjoy it and benefit! Reading aloud from the very beginning is one of the most important things you can do to prepare your child to do well in school. Reading and talking to your child about the story builds their language skills and sparks their imagination. Reading, looking at books, or sharing stories is also a special time to snuggle up and connect. Reading together creates bonds and cherished lasting memories for parents and children. Read aloud every single day and, as you do, talk about what you read with your child.

Ice Breaker: One Word

10 minutes

- Have participants think about their experiences of reading aloud with their children. What is one word that best describes their experience? Participants can also think back on their experiences being read to when they were a child. You may want to add that the one word can range from “cozy” to “difficult.”
- Give participants time to think. Then have them share their one word with the group.
- If you have time, invite participants to talk about their one-word choices and to describe their experiences reading aloud with their children in more detail.
 - *What time of day do you read to your infant or toddler?*
 - *What do you do to make the experience warm, pleasant, and fun?*
 - *What are some challenges or barriers you encounter that we can address today?*

5a. Activity: Interactive Read Aloud

30 minutes

Materials: A book to read aloud, props (optional), chart paper, markers

- **Introduce:** *How you read aloud to your child is just as important as what you read. I'm going to read aloud one of my favorite children's books and demonstrate strategies that you can use to capture your child's interest and encourage your child to interact with the pictures and the words.*
- **Turn and Talk:** *Before I begin reading, turn to the person sitting next to you and share something you do or could do to capture your child's curiosity and interest as you read aloud.*
- **Set a Listening Focus:** *As I read, notice what I do **before, during, and after reading**. What do I do that captures your curiosity and engages you in the words, story, and pictures?*
- **Before Reading:** You may want to use props to engage your audience. For example, if you are reading *Llama, Llama, Red Pajama* by Anna Dewdney, you might dress in red or hold a stuffed animal llama. Hold up the book cover so that everyone can see it and share your enthusiasm for the book. *I just LOVE this book. I'm so excited to read it with all of you! I found out about it from the Basics Read and Discuss Stories video.* Point to the title and author as you read them aloud. Then point to something on the cover to talk about. *Look, this is a baby llama! What is Baby Llama wearing? What color are Baby Llama's pajamas? And look (pointing), what is Baby Llama holding in his arms? Do you think Baby Llama wants to go to sleep? Let's read the book and find out!*
- **As You Read:** Read slowly, with expression. If you are reading a rhyming book like *Llama, Llama, Red Pajama*, have fun reading the words with lots of rhythm.
 - ✓ **Use different voices** for each character, and **change your tone** to match the emotion of the characters.
 - ✓ **Use facial expressions and gestures** to show emotions and act out action words (e.g., *fret, whimpers, moans, pouts*). You can encourage participants to act them out, too.
 - ✓ **Use sound effects.** For example, when Baby Llama hums a tune, hum a quick tune. When the phone rings, make a ringing noise.
- **Pause, Point, and Talk:** As you read, pause to ask questions about the story and to point to and talk about the pictures. *What are Baby Llama and Mama Llama doing? They are reading a story, just like us! Do you think Mama Llama will come back soon?*
- **After Reading:** Talk about the book. Ask questions such as: *How does Baby Llama feel when Mama Llama leaves? How does Baby Llama feel when Mama Llama comes back? Does the story remind you of your child's bedtime? In what ways? Would you want to read this story with your infant or toddler? Why or why not?*
- **Turn and Talk:** *What did you notice about the way I read the story? What did I do **before, during, and after reading** to engage you and keep you interested?* Have participants turn and talk to a partner. Encourage partners to jot down their observations.

Note: Italics are used to indicate sample comments. Feel free to use your own words to adapt them.

- **Share and Chart:** Invite partners to share what they noticed. Write their observations on a chart entitled “Read-Aloud Tips.” Use the headings “Before,” “During,” and “After” reading.
- **Debrief:**
 - *Which strategies did you notice that you do when you read aloud to your child?*
 - *Which strategy would you like to try next time you read aloud to your child? What do you like about the strategy? What other strategies have you used that you didn’t notice me doing?*
 - *How might you adapt what I did to read with an infant?*
 - You can also talk about what you like about the read aloud book and why you chose it.
- ⇒ **Take It Further—Picture Walk:** *You don’t need to read all the words on the page, or even any—there is a lot to talk about in the pictures. When you do a picture walk, you flip through the pages of a book and point to the illustrations without reading the words. You can talk about colors, shapes, and what the characters are doing. Demonstrate pointing to and talking about the illustrations with the first few pages of a board book that is appropriate for infants. Emphasize that doing a picture walk is an especially good approach when reading with an infant.*

Note: *Italics* are used to indicate sample comments. Feel free to use your own words to adapt them.

5b. Activity: Read to Each Other

20 minutes

Materials: A variety of board books and picture books², Read and Discuss Stories tip sheet downloaded from [The Basics Community Toolkit](#) (optional)

- **Prepare:** This activity builds on the previous activity, “Interactive Read Aloud” (pages 21 and 22). In this activity, participants will choose a book to read to a partner, using one or more of the read-aloud strategies modeled during “Interactive Read Aloud.”
- **Introduce:** *Now we are going to practice using the read-aloud strategies we’ve talked about (this refers to the “Interactive Read Aloud” activity on the previous pages). Each of you is going to choose a book and read it to a partner, actively engaging them as if they were your child.*
- **Choose a Book:** *Choose a book that you think would interest your child.* Give participants time to make their choice. You may want to organize the group into smaller groups and give each group a selection of books to choose from. If you sense that some parents or caregivers are uncomfortable reading aloud or cannot read, you may want to create small groups, with a reader in each group. You may also want to pair or group participants who speak the same home language.
- **Ready, Set, . . .:** Before reading the book aloud, give participants time to read the book to themselves and to plan how they will read the book aloud. Encourage them to look at the Read-Aloud Tips Chart from the previous “Interactive Read Aloud” activity and choose at least one strategy they haven’t used before. Alternatively, you could have them choose a strategy from the Read and Discuss Stories tip sheet downloaded from The Basics Community Toolkit. Ask: *What read-aloud strategy or strategies will you use **before reading?** **During reading?** **After reading?*** When participants are ready, have pairs choose which partner will read aloud first. Encourage partners to find a spot where they can comfortably read aloud to each other.
- **Read:** Once participants are settled, signal the first partner to begin the read aloud. Remind them to try to use at least one new strategy before, during, or after reading. When the first partner is done reading, encourage pairs to talk about the story. Then have the partners switch roles. If time is limited, suggest that the second reading partner do a picture walk instead of reading aloud.
- **Partner Share:** Have partners discuss their read-aloud strategies with each other. Which strategies helped bring the story alive?

² Consider story books, informational books, and concept books (ABCs, numbers, colors), and books with flaps or textures. Feature diverse cultures and families. You will need at least one book per person.

Note: *Italics* are used to indicate sample comments. Feel free to use your own words to adapt them.

- **Debrief:**

- Have participants share their read-aloud experiences with the group. What new strategies did they try? Were they effective? Why or why not? Which strategies would they like to try at home when reading aloud to their infants or toddlers?
- Ask participants what times they like to read with their children. Encourage participants to keep a book or two in their bags so they can read while waiting for appointments, on the bus or train, and so on. Also encourage participants to visit to the local library and look for story time hours. Remind caregivers that reading a book is a good activity during transition times or to help kids settle down before naptime or bedtime.

Note: *Italics* are used to indicate sample comments. Feel free to use your own words to adapt them.

5c. Activity: Once Upon a Time—Group Story

15 minutes

- **Introduce:** *Not all stories come from books. We are going to work together as a group to create our own story!*
- **Once Upon a Time:** Begin a story with one sentence, such as: *Once upon a time, there was a little shaggy dog who couldn't find his way home.* Invite the person next to you to add a sentence that tells what happens next in the story, or that adds and describes characters. Keep going around the circle until the group decides that the story is over.
- **Debrief:** Ask participants how they felt about the activity.
 - *What did you notice? Would you like to do this activity at home with your family? Why or why not?*
 - *What could you do to modify the activity to make it more fun for your family? Suggest adding sound effects, hand gestures, and facial expressions. You could also start the storytelling with a prop, such as a stuffed animal!*
 - *How could you adapt it for younger children? (Make up a story to tell them; tell stories inspired by family photographs, pictures in magazines, or your own drawings.)*

TIPS TO MAXIMIZE LOVE, MANAGE STRESS

With Your Infant (0-12 months)

Hold, kiss, and cuddle. Provide lots of loving attention and touch.

Respond to them. Answer your baby in a loving voice when they make a sound or movement.

Play together. Hold your baby close, smile, and make silly sounds or faces. Play games like “peek-a-boo.” Take a break if they seem overwhelmed or look away.

Comfort them. Comfort your baby when they get fussy or cry. They might be tired, hungry, or uncomfortable. Try rocking them or singing a calming song. It will take time to learn what works best.

With Your Toddler (12-36 months)

Snuggle up. Hug and cuddle with your toddler so they feel safe and loved.

Encourage them. Encourage and support your child when they try new things.

Involve them. Invite them to help with household tasks, like handing you clothes for the laundry.

Talk about feelings. Name your child’s feelings and what caused them. Let them know that all feelings are OK, and that you are there for them when they are happy or upset.

Offer choices. Offer choices like what to wear or eat, but give a limited number of options. “It’s time for a snack. Do you want an apple or grapes?”

Set basic limits. Use simple rules consistently. Focus on things that really matter, like safety. For a younger toddler: put a calm “No” in front of the thing you don’t want your child to do and redirect them to another activity. For older toddler: give a simple explanation for the rule and what they could do instead. Praise good behavior.

With Your Preschooler (36-60 months)

Put your love into words. Tell your child something specific that you love about them. What makes them special? What do you admire or enjoy most about them?

Describe feelings. Talk to your child about their and other people’s feelings. Let them know that all feelings are OK. See if they can name their feelings in different situations.

Talk about kindness. Describe what makes a good friend, like helping others, taking turns, and sharing.

Share strategies. When your child needs help managing strong feelings or getting along with others, you can help them come up with strategies like taking a deep breath or taking turns. Praise them when they use a good strategy.

Explain rules. Help your child understand how certain rules allow everyone to work together and stay safe—like using “inside voices” or putting things away after using them.

Have a Routine

Have consistent times and ways of doing daily activities like feeding, bathing, reading, and bedtime. Routines help babies and young children feel safe and know what to expect. They also help adults manage stress.

Take Care of Yourself

When life gets stressful, it’s important to take care of yourself so you can be there for your child. Try to find time—even a few minutes—for healthy activities that help you feel calm. Be forgiving with yourself. Ask for help when you need it, and talk to your doctor if you often feel sad or stressed. All parents and caregivers need help.

TIPS TO TALK, SING, AND POINT

With Your Infant (0-12 months)

Talk to them. Include your baby in everyday routines by talking to them during activities like changing and bathing. Describe what you are doing.

Use a playful voice. Smile and look into your baby's eyes. Exaggerate the sounds of words. Notice which ways of talking keep their attention.

Follow their interests Talk about the things your baby looks at or reaches for. Name them and describe their features.

Go back and forth When your baby makes a sound, show excitement on your face and in your voice. Respond with words. See how long you can keep the "conversation" going back and forth.

Sing Your baby's favorite songs might be ones that repeat words or have rhyming sounds.

Point to objects. Point to objects and name them—especially things that interest your baby like body parts and familiar objects.

With Your Toddler (12-36 months)

Step by step. As you go about daily activities, talk about the steps involved. "First, we wash our hands with soap and water. Then we dry off with a towel."

Use your hands. Name and talk about the things your child points to. Encourage your child to point ("Where is the ball?").

Listen and respond. Show your toddler that you are interested in what they have to say. Respond to their gestures and comments. If you aren't sure what they mean, make your best guess.

Expand on what they say For example, if they point to a dog and say, "Da," you can reply, "Yes, dog. That's a dog. It's brown and soft."

Ask questions. Get your toddler to think. Ask questions that start with "Who," "What," or "Why." For example, "Why do you think the boy is sad?" Show interest in their answers.

Sing Sing songs and recite nursery rhymes from your childhood, from books, or make up new ones. Your toddler may especially enjoy the ones with rhyming sounds or hand motions. Try singing the same song whenever it's time for a special activity like bath time.

With Your Preschooler (36-60 months)

Ask questions Ask your child questions about things that interest them. Show interest in their answers and follow-up to keep the conversation going. See if you can go back and forth 2-3 times on the same topic.

Review the day. Ask your child about their "high" and "low" for the day. What moments stood out to them?

Expand on what they say When your child mentions something, expand on what they say and introduce new words related to that topic.

Fill in the blank. When you sing your child's favorite songs, leave out words for them to fill in. Or you can say the wrong word and see if they catch you.

All about me. Help your child learn their full name, address, and phone number. You can teach it to the tune of one of their favorite songs.

Use Any Language

All languages help children's development. It's great if your child grows up speaking more than one language! Speak to your child in whatever language you are most comfortable.

TIPS TO 2 3 COUNT, GROUP, AND COMPARE

With Your Infant (0-12 months)

Move to the beat. Tap your baby's tummy or clap their hands together to the rhythm of a song. Or rock them as you sing a lullaby.

Count. For example, count and wiggle each of their toes. Or count as you gently bounce them in your lap.

Compare objects. Help your baby explore things that are the same and different. Let them shake containers that make different sounds. Or give them different types of fabrics to touch (like smooth and scratchy). Talk about the differences.

Fill up and dump out. For example, use a container to scoop and dump water in the bathtub. Use words like "in," "out," "full," and "empty."

With Your Toddler (12-36 months)

Compare sizes and amounts. Your toddler may be interested which things are "big" or "little." You can also talk to them about whether they want "more" or "less."

Count sets of objects. Point to each object as you count and say how many there are in total. "One, two, three, four—there are four strawberries." Split the objects into two groups and count each.

Look for shapes. Name and describe shapes. "That window is a square with four sides." As they get older, see if your child can find and name shapes around them.

Match and sort. Match and sort objects by their features like color, shape, size, or what they do. For example, sort blocks by color as you put them away.

Build. Encourage your toddler to stack blocks or objects like plastic cups. Talk about what they're doing using position words like "below" or "above."

Clap in a pattern. See if your toddler is interested in clapping along or dancing with you.

With Your Preschooler (36-60 months)

Count around town. Count and find numbers in your community! You can count the sidewalk squares or look for numbers on signs.

Add and subtract. Count with your child using your fingers. Fold down one finger and count how many are left. Hold up a few fingers on the other hand and count how many you have now.

Grocery helper. The next time you go to the store with your child, give them a job. Use "size words" when you ask them to help you. Say, "We need three large potatoes" or "Can you find two small red onions?"

Puzzle play. Do a puzzle (you can make one by drawing a picture and cutting it into a few pieces). If your child needs help, give hints using position words like "below" or "above."

Make patterns. Make a movement pattern game. Take a step, then a hop, then a step, then a hop. Let your child choose the next movement to add.

Match and sort. Match and sort objects by their features like color, shape, size, or what they do. For example, your child can help sort the silverware when you put it away.

TIPS TO EXPLORE THROUGH MOVEMENT AND PLAY

With Your Infant (0-12 months)

Tummy time. Babies should sleep on their backs, but during the day while awake, make sure your baby gets supervised "tummy time." Place a few interesting toys in front of them to make it more fun.

Give objects to handle. Provide objects with different colors, shapes, and textures for your baby to explore. Try everyday items from your home and nature, like tissue paper or a pinecone.

Follow their interests. Notice what your baby looks at or reaches for. If you can, bring the object closer so they can explore it. Describe how it looks and feels.

Play peek-a-boo. Hide your face with your hands and then open them up to show a big smile. You can also hide objects under a towel or blanket.

Mirror play. Sit in front of a mirror together and make silly faces. Point to and label different body parts.

Let them move around. Let your baby explore their surroundings by reaching, rolling, scooting, and crawling. Make sure they are safe.

With Your Toddler (12-36 months)

Go outside. Observe your surroundings—what do you hear, see, feel, smell? When your child shows interest in something, stop to talk about it.

Roll a ball back and forth. You can say "My turn/your turn" as you roll it. Your child might enjoy throwing or kicking the ball.

Make art. Your toddler will enjoy scribbling with a crayon or chalk. They can also experiment with folding or tearing paper.

Mystery bag. Play guessing games. For example, put a few objects in a bag and have your child guess what's inside without looking. They can feel, smell, and shake the bag.

Act it out. Toddlers will start to imitate grown-up activities, like putting a doll to sleep or giving it a shot. You can play along or talk about what they're doing.

With Your Preschooler (36-60 months)

Move like animals. Invite your child to move like different animals. Can they hop like a frog? Flap like a bird? Slither like a snake? Help them burn off some energy and have fun.

Make a plan. Help your child make a plan before they play pretend. Ask them who or what they want to be and what they need to play that role. You can offer ideas but make sure your child feels in control.

Family portrait. Have your child draw a family picture using crayons, pencils, or markers. Talk about their creation.

Play a game of Simon Says. Give your child a pose or action to do. Then they have to stay still and quiet until you give them another direction. "Simon Says: pat your head...Simon Says: stomp your feet." After they get the hang of it, let them be Simon!

Think like scientists. Encourage your child to make predictions. "I wonder what will happen if you mix the red and green paint?" Then see if their prediction comes true.

Let Them Problem-Solve

If your child is concentrating on something, stand back and see what they can figure out by themselves. If they get stuck, give just enough help so they keep going and don't give up.

TIPS TO READ AND DISCUSS STORIES

With Your Infant (0-12 months)

Read regularly. Your baby won't understand for a while, but that's fine. They will hear your voice, see the pictures, and develop good feelings about books.

Baby books. Board books with hard covers and thick pages are made especially for babies. Choose books that are short and have simple, bright pictures.

Snuggle up. Hold your baby in your lap so they feel cozy and can see the pictures.

Involve them. They might want to hold the book, turn the pages, or pat the pictures. They might even chew on the book. It's all learning!

Describe the pictures. It's not important to read all—or any—of the words. Point to and talk about the pictures. Name the things your child shows interest in.

Follow their lead. When they start to lose interest, try another book, or stop. Short periods of reading will work best.

With Your Toddler (12-36 months)

Warm up. Before opening the book, check out the cover. Read the title. Look at the picture. What does your child think the story about?

Change your voice. Try different voices for different characters.

Name that. Name and talk about the things your child points to. See if they can point to objects you name. "Can you find the elephant?"

Ask questions. "What is in the box?" or "Why is the girl happy?" Respond to your child's comments and questions. Show your interest in their ideas.

Don't be too serious. Your child may want to turn the page before you finish reading it. If they can't sit still for the whole book, that's ok.

Re-read. Toddlers learn through repetition, so it is normal when they want to read a favorite book over and over. Notice how proud they feel when they master the story. But try for variety too, because new books offer new things to see and learn.

With Your Preschooler (36-60 months)

Ask questions that don't have "yes" or "no" answers. "What do you think will happen next?" "Why is he sad?" After asking, give your child time to think and respond.

Pause for new words. Pause to talk about words your child doesn't know. "That's a 'beetle.' It's a type of bug."

Talk about feelings. When you read a story together, point to a person in the book and ask, "How is he feeling?" When your child responds, ask if they have a guess about why. They can look for clues in the pictures.

Look for letters. Out in public? Find items with labels, like a TRASH CAN, and encourage your child to identify the letters they know and sound out the word.

Switch roles. Pick a book that you and your child have read several times. This time, have them "read" the story to you. They can describe what is happening in the pictures.

Make it Routine

Try to read together every day. Before bed is a great time to read, but choose a time of day that works for your family.

THE BASICS: BOOKS FOR LITTLE ONES

Science shows that 80% of brain growth happens by age three! Young brains develop like little muscles. They get stronger as you interact with your child and help them explore the world. The Basics Principles are five fun, simple, and powerful ways to help all our children aged 0-5 grow to be happy and smart.

It's never too early to start reading with your child! Even infants will enjoy touching and looking at the pictures in books. Try the books below or ask a librarian for recommendations. For more information on The Basics Principles, as well as tips for reading with little ones, visit TheBasics.org.



Booklist for Basic 1: Maximize Love, Manage Stress

A Kiss Means I Love You by Kathryn Madeline Allen
After the Fall: How Humpty Dumpty Got Back up Again
by Dan Santat
Bedtime for Sweet Creatures by Nikki Grimes
Drawn Together by Minh Lê
If You're Happy and You Know It by Jane Cabrera
It Was Supposed to Be Sunny by Samantha Cotterill
Kiss by Kiss: A Counting Book for Families by Richard Van Camp
Making Faces: A First Book of Emotions
My Heart Fills With Happiness by Monique Gray Smith
Saturday by Oge Mora
The Many Colors of Harpreet Singh by Supriya Kelkar



Booklist for Basic 2: Talk, Sing and Point

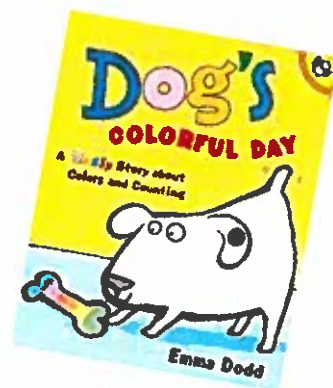
Baby Talk by Stella Blackstone
Bear & Hare: Where's Bear? by Emily Gravett
Bee-Bim Bop! by Linda Sue Park
Chicka Chicka Boom Boom by Bill Martin, Jr.
Choo Choo, Chuu Chuu by Petr Horáček
Daniel's Good Day by Micha Archer
It Looked Like Spilt Milk by Charles Green Shaw
Say Hello! by Rachel Isadora
Show Me Your Day by J. A. Barnes
Truck by Donald Crews



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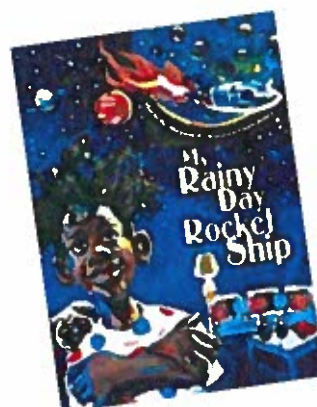
Booklist for Basic 3: Count, Group, and Compare

Circle! Sphere! by Grace Lin
City Shapes by Diana Murray
Dog's Colorful Day: A Messy Story About Colors and Counting by Emma Dodd
Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns: A Muslim Book of Colors by Hena Khan
Green Is A Chile Pepper: A Book of Colors by Roseanne Thong
Opposites by Sandra Boynton
Over in the Meadow by Jane Cabrera
This Jazz Man by Karen Ehrhardt
Where is the Green Sheep by Mem Fox



Booklist for Basic 4: Explore Through Movement and Play

Baby Play by Skye Silver
Dancing Feet! by Lindsey Craig
Dreaming Up: A Celebration of Building by Christy Hale
Kids Like Us by Carole Lexa Schaefer
My Friend Maya Loves to Dance by Cheryl Willis Hudson
My Rainy Day Rocket Ship by Markette Sheppard
Press Here by Hervé Tullet
Stretch by Doreen Cronin
We All Play - Kimêtawânaw by Julie Flett



Booklist for Basic 5: Read and Discuss Stories

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin
Llama Llama, Red Pajama by Anna Dewdney
Lola at the Library by Anna McQuinn
Maggie and Michael Get Dressed by Denise Fleming
Not A Box by Antoinette Portis
The Feelings Book by Todd Parr
We Are Family by Patricia Hegarty
Whose Knees Are These? by Jabari Asim



Book images source: Amazon.com



Thank you to Boston Public Library (BPL) for support in creating these booklists. Click [here](#) to view all five lists on BPL's website.

THE BASICS CAREGIVER'S PROMISE

BY RONALD FERGUSON

With my **heart** I will love you

And shield you from stress.

With my **mouth** I will speak what I feel.

With soft words and sweet songs every time I behold you

I'll show you that my love is real.

With my **fingers** I'll point at the objects I name

And I'll count them in groups to compare.

With my **feet** I will take you outdoors to explore

While we play and enjoy the fresh air.

With my **eyes** I will read as I show you the world

Through bright pictures and stories in books.

These are ways to make sure that your brain is prepared

For successes wherever you look.

This my promise I make from the day of your birth

That these *Basics* I'll faithfully do.

For my job is to help you grow happy and smart

Starting now when your life is brand new.

You will learn that your life is an artwork.

And that you are the artist in charge.

But before you decide what to do with your life

Listen now

To the beat

Of my heart.



THE BASICS COMMUNITY CONTRACT

BY RONALD FERGUSON

We should sign a Basics Contract
Wherein when it comes to babies
We would share an obligation
With no "ifs" or "buts" or "maybes."

Maximize Love, Manage Stress

We could guarantee that parents
Would be rescued from their stress
By supportive friends and neighbors
Helping put their cares to rest.

This includes the types of friendship where
When weary from no sleep
Every parent finds a trusted soul
Their precious child to keep.

Talk, Sing, and Point

We would help each parent come to know
The benefits of talking
And the ways that pointing helps the child
Decipher all their squawking.

Count, Group, and Compare

We would post on walls and billboards
Things that little kids could count
Near some sculptures made for grouping
To compare and climb and mount.

Explore through Movement and Play

We would donate games and puzzles
And some toys to use outside
We'd make sure that every toddler
Has a tricycle to ride.

Read and Discuss Stories

And each child would be enthralled
By all the wonders found through reading
For we'd offer to each family
Any books they might be needing.

Hereby Resolved

If we all embrace this vision
(That means friends and neighbors too)
Parents then will find the bandwidth
To do what they need to do.

Yes they'll need to do The Basics
And by doing your small part
You will help more parents seed their kids
To learn and grow up smart.

If we all resolve to do these things
We've learned will be required
Then each child our efforts benefit
Will be a life inspired.



