

Early Learning Foundations Guide

Practical ways to nurture curiosity, independence, problem-solving, and whole-child development through play and everyday family routines.

Why it matters

Young children build foundational skills through play, exploration, repetition, secure relationships, and hands-on experiences. Everyday moments can support thinking, language, movement, self-regulation, creativity, and social development.

Six Ways to Support Early Learning

1. Follow your child's interests Notice what captures your child's attention and extend it with questions, books, materials, or outdoor exploration.	2. Make time for play Blocks, pretend play, art, music, puzzles, sensory experiences, and outdoor play support creativity, coordination, social skills, and problem-solving.
3. Encourage independence Offer age-appropriate choices and responsibilities, such as putting away toys, washing hands, helping set the table, or choosing between two activities.	4. Ask thinking questions Use open-ended prompts such as "What do you notice?" "What could we try next?" "How did you figure that out?"
5. Use predictable routines Consistent routines help children feel secure, anticipate what comes next, and gradually manage transitions and responsibilities.	6. Praise effort and persistence Recognize concentration, problem-solving, creativity, and trying again instead of focusing only on whether the final result is correct.

Questions That Encourage Thinking

• What do you notice?	• What do you think will happen next?	• How could we build it another way?
• What did you try when it did not work?	• How are these two objects the same or different?	• What would you like to learn more about?

Easy Learning Activities at Home

Sort and Count	Sort buttons, socks, blocks, or natural objects by color, size, shape, or use. Count each group and compare more or fewer.
Build and Test	Use blocks, boxes, or cups to build a tower or bridge. Ask what makes it stable and invite your child to revise the design.
Nature Investigation	Collect leaves, rocks, or sticks. Observe details, compare features, make patterns, and discuss where each item came from.
Pretend Play	Create a store, restaurant, doctor's office, or bus station. Pretend play supports planning, vocabulary, cooperation, and flexible thinking.
Kitchen Learning	Measure, pour, mix, count, and follow simple steps while preparing food together. Discuss changes in texture, shape, temperature, or color.
Art Exploration	Provide paper, crayons, paint, recycled materials, tape, and child-safe scissors. Focus on experimentation and the child's ideas.

Supporting Development Without Pressure

Children develop at different rates. Look for progress over time and provide opportunities appropriate for your child's age, interests, and current abilities. Avoid turning play into a test. When you have concerns, talk with your child's teacher and healthcare provider.

Trusted Online Resources

<u>NAEYC - Articles for Families on Play</u>	Research-informed ideas about play, learning, creativity, and family connection.
<u>NAEYC - 10 Things Every Parent Should Know About Play</u>	A concise overview of how play supports whole-child development.
<u>Harvard - A Guide to Serve and Return</u>	How responsive back-and-forth interactions support relationships and brain development.
<u>Head Start - Fun and Learning Activities Handbook</u>	Simple activities for home, outdoors, and everyday routines.
<u>CDC - Positive Parenting Tips: Ages 3-5</u>	Guidance for learning, independence, behavior, health, and safety.

Family reminder: Young children learn best when they feel safe, connected, curious, and free to explore.