

Early Learning Parents' Pages



February 2019

- How to please picky eaters
- Help develop spatial skills
- Start talking STEM early
- National Children's Dental Health Month

Pleasing *Picky* Eaters

As a parent, you are concerned when your child refuses to eat the food you have prepared for him. You know he needs healthy, nutritious food daily and you want him to develop healthy eating habits. Children's taste buds begin to mature around 9 months. Before then, their taste buds are immature making it easier to introduce new foods to them.

If your baby is younger than 9 months, give him a variety of foods at each meal. Make sure to introduce different textures and colors as well as different types of food at every meal. Just as adults need a variety of foods, he will need to eat vegetables, fruits and meats as soon as he can eat solid food. Instead of offering him the same foods at every meal, offer a variety of healthy foods. Introducing new foods early, encourages him to choose healthy foods as he gets older. Introduce new

foods at meals when you know your child is hungry, which makes it more

likely that he will taste and eat the new food. Let your child feed himself if possible so he feels in control of what he eats. Always include at least one food you know your child will eat at each meal. If your "[picky eater](#)" is a [preschooler](#),



engage him in choosing and preparing healthy food. At the market, ask him to pick at least one fruit, vegetable and meat that he would like to eat during the week. Ask him to help [you prepare or cook the food](#) he picked out. Let him rinse the food and put it in a container to cook or serve. Talk about the colors and textures of the food and where the food comes from (the ocean, a garden or a farm). Never use food as punishment and try not to talk about what he is or is not eating during the meal. Know that most children will eat if they are truly hungry and are not snacking throughout the day. Keep offering the food your child refused since it can take up to 10 or more times tasting a food before a child's taste buds accept the new taste.

When your child decides he likes a new food, introduce other foods that have a similar taste, color or texture. Nutritionists encourage parents to use "food bridges" to get their child to try new foods. If he liked the mashed sweet potatoes you served at Thanksgiving, make mashed carrots or squash for him to try. Let him help you prepare food such as mashing the carrots. He may try new foods he has helped prepare.

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Early Learning Parents' Pages

Children's books that support developing spatial skills

What are *spatial* skills?

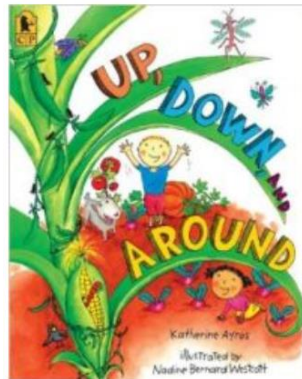
Spatial ability helps a person understand and remember the space among objects. You can look at it as a type of intelligence that is different from verbal ability, reasoning ability and memory skills.

Spatial skills are crucial for success in many fields—from science and engineering to construction and graphic design—STEM and STEAM.

The words you use and the activities you do with your child help develop strong spatial skills. Using words that describe positions or directions as well as comparisons as you talk and play with your child is a great way for them to increase the number and types of words they use. Providing toys they can build with or use to design something new increases their understanding of the concepts that these words represent. Another way you can increase your child's understanding of spatial concepts is by reading [books together that focus on spatial skills](#). By focusing on the illustrations in the book and talking with your child about the illustrations as well as the story, you help them think about directional and positional words and look at things from different perspectives.

Children's books

The Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has a list of books for young children that emphasize many different spatial concepts. <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/43092/15-picture-books-that-support-childrens-spatial-skills-development>

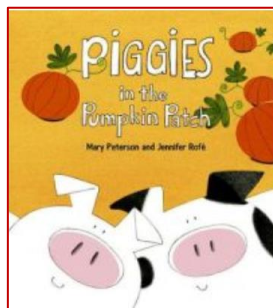
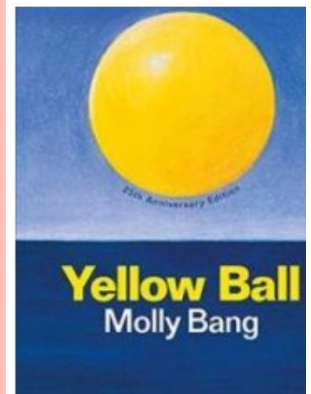


UP, DOWN, AND AROUND, by Katherine Ayers and Nadine Bernard Westcott (Ages 2-4)

Two preschoolers are digging, planting and watering a garden where “corn grows up and carrots grow down and cucumbers grow around and around.” Using the illustrations, ask your child to “grow up and grow down” like the vegetables. They can squat down and slowly stand up and put their hands underneath the book to grow down. Ask them to show you around and around and see what they can think to do.

YELLOW BALL, by Molly Bang (Ages 1-3)

Three people are playing with a yellow ball at the beach. They stop to build a sandcastle and the ball floats away on the waves. The story tells what happens to the ball as it floats over dolphins, under seagulls, beyond a bridge and through a storm. The picture of the ball gets smaller and smaller as it floats farther away from the beach. Emphasize the direction and position words and ask your child to show you what they mean by moving their body over and under something. Talk about the ball as it appears to get smaller. Is it really getting smaller?



PIGGIES IN THE PUMPKIN PATCH, by Mary Peterson and Jennifer Rofo (Ages 3-7)

The pigs get out and run around the farm. The story has lots of spatial words such as through, back and into. The words on the pages show the spatial positions such as curving around the page for “along winding wagon tracks.” Ask your child to use a toy car to show you how it would go through a tunnel, over train tracks, into a garage or drive on a winding road.

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Start Talking “STEM” Early

Is age 3 too early for your child to prepare for a career in a STEM field? According to recent research linking success in skills related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) to spatial skills children begin to learn as a toddler and preschooler, 3 is the perfect age to begin. To teach your child spatial skills, begin by helping her learn words related to position, direction and sequence.

Talking with your child as you dress her will help her learn spatial words such as in, out, inside, start, begin, finish, right and left. “Let’s **begin** by putting on your shirt. When you put **on** your shirt, you **start** by putting your **left** arm **inside** the left sleeve and your **right** arm goes inside the right sleeve. **Next**, put your left leg inside the left pants leg and your right leg inside the right pants leg. Then, you pull **up** your pants to your waist.”

When she is playing with toys or blocks, talk to her about what you see her doing or suggest other ways she could use the toys or blocks. “I see you put the **small** blocks **on top of** the **big** blocks. The small blocks are **red** and the big blocks are **brown**. The big blocks are **under** the small blocks. Can you **stack** all of the big blocks on top of each other? Can you stack the big blocks on top of the small blocks?”



Talking “STEM”

After a few times of doing this, ask her to describe to you how she built something with the blocks and see if she uses any of the positional, directional and sequence words that you used in your descriptions.



When you play with her, show her how to use the toys and blocks in new ways and talk about what you are doing with them. “I am making a road with the big blocks by touching the **front end of one block** to the **back end of the next block**. I am **adding more** blocks. I am **finished** making the road. Get your small green truck and **drive it on** the road. How can we make the road **longer**?”

Take one of your child’s stuffed animals or dolls and play a game with her by having her place the animal or doll in different places or in different positions. “Can you put your bear **on top of** the chair? Now, put the bear **under** the table. Put the bear **in front of** the sofa. Put the bear **behind** the toy box. Make the bear **stand up**. Now, make the bear **lay down**.” Then, swap roles and have her tell you where to put the bear.

You can prepare your child for a STEM career by simply playing and talking with her throughout the day, using words she will need to understand when she begins school and is expected to understand spatial concepts.



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How to please a picky eater

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Try mixing foods he likes with new foods or use spices he likes on new foods. Adding applesauce to oatmeal may make the oatmeal taste better to your child. When you are grocery shopping, ask him to choose new foods he would like to try. Perhaps a new fruit or vegetable he chooses each week will become one of his favorite foods. Allow him to choose between two healthy **snack foods** in the grocery store and give him the food he chose for a snack when you get home. This lets him have some control over his food while encouraging him to make healthy food choices.

If you get discouraged, remember

- Don't give up when he refuses healthy food he used to eat. Keep offering the healthy food.
- Limit his snacks before meals.
- Encourage **tasting new foods** by offering a "no thank you bite" or by cutting the food into different shapes or **making the food look like animals or favorite storybook characters**.
- Keep trying new, healthy food choices.
- **Limit sugary or processed foods for snacks.**



National Children's Dental Health Month



Each February, we celebrate National Children's Dental Health Month to raise awareness about the importance of oral health.

Sponsored by the American Dental Association, this year's

campaign slogan is, "Brush and clean in between to build a healthy smile!" This is a perfect time to talk to your child about her teeth and gums. You can show her how to floss and brush her teeth. Help her learn proper dental hygiene by flossing and brushing your teeth in a way that models the proper technique for your child.

The ADA recommends children visit the dentist within six months of having their first tooth to recognize any problems that could arise. The **Give Kids A Smile program** helps connect children in need with free dental services. The first Friday in February has become known as *Give Kids A Smile Day*, where volunteers donate their time and knowledge to provide free oral health education, screenings and treatment to children who are underserved.



Special dates in

MARCH

Mar. 1 Employee Appreciation Day & Peanut Butter Lovers Day ♦ Mar. 3 Caregiver Appreciation Day & National Anthem Day ♦ Mar. 5 Mardi Gras ♦ Mar. 6 Dentist's Day ♦ Mar. 10 Daylight Savings Begins ♦ Mar. 11 Johnny Appleseed Day ♦ Mar. 12 Girl Scouts Day & Plant a Flower Day ♦ Mar. 14 Learn About Butterflies Day & National Pi Day & Popcorn Lover's Day ♦ Mar. 16 Freedom of Information Day ♦ Mar. 17 Corned Beef and Cabbage Day & St. Patrick's Day ♦ Mar. 19 Tea for Two Tuesday ♦ Mar. 20 International Earth Day & National Agriculture Day & First Day of Spring ♦ Mar. 21 Absolutely Incredible Kid Day ♦ Mar. 22 National Chip and Dip Day ♦ Mar. 23 National Puppy Day ♦ Mar. 25 Waffle Day ♦ Mar. 26 National Spinach Day ♦ Mar. 30 National Doctor's Day & Take a Walk in the Park Day



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