

Early Learning Parents' Pages

February 2018



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OFFICE OF
Early Learning

LEARN EARLY. LEARN FOR LIFE.

Children and pets...

Pets fascinate young children. If you have a pet in your home or you take your child to a dog park, an animal shelter or pet store, you see the way your child interacts with pets. Young children who haven't been around animals may be frightened at first, but will quickly lose their fear around friendly pets.



If you already have a pet when your child is born, the pet will

need time to adjust to the baby. Start training your pet to accept the changes that happen when a baby is living in the house. Since you will be focusing more of your time on the baby, start spending less time on walks and playing with your pet before bringing your baby home. Focus on the quality of the time you spend with your pet, not the quantity. If you have a nursery set up or a place where your new baby will sleep, allow your pet to go into the room and sniff around the furnishings. Close the door or use a pet gate to keep the pet out of the room when you are not at home. When the baby comes home, a pet gate will allow the pet to get used to the baby's cries and other sounds and smells without being in the room and makes it easier for the pet to adjust to the baby and the

baby to begin to recognize the pet's sounds and smell. If you have a cat, you need to close the door to the room because cats will jump over the pet gate. Take a small blanket to the hospital and wrap it around your baby to get the baby's scent on the blanket. Have a family member or friend take it home and put it where your pet sleeps. This allows the pet to get acquainted with your baby's smell before you bring the baby home.

As your baby gets older, hold the baby securely as you allow

the baby to touch the pet and allow the pet to sniff the baby. Talk to your baby about your pet, tell her the pet's name and describe the pet, "This is Trixie. She is our dog. She has soft fur and barks to tell us how she feels like you make noises to tell us how you feel." Loud noises or barks may frighten your new baby, but she will soon adjust to the noises your pet makes and your pet will get used to the noises your baby makes.



If you do not have a pet and do have young children, consider

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It's 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 your teeth with fluoride toothpaste and clean between your teeth for a healthy smile." This is a perfect time to talk to your child about his teeth and gums. You can show him how to floss and brush his teeth. Help him 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](#) is a program that helps connect children in need with free dental services. In fact, the first Friday in February has become known as Give Kids A Smile Day, where thousands of volunteers donate their time and knowledge to provide free oral health education, screenings and treatment to children who are underserved. If you have questions about local Give Kids A Smile Day events, you can call the toll-free GKAS number at 1-844-490-GKAS (4527).

You can have this poster, too! Click here to download it in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).



Have a heart for kids!

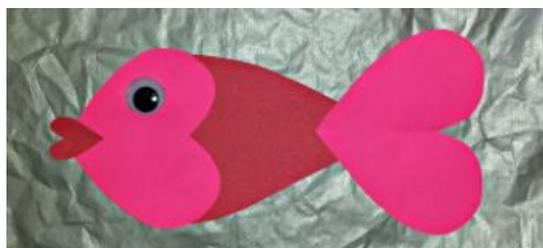
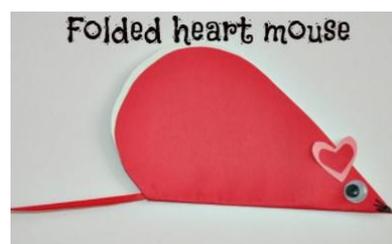
Most young children love Valentine's Day. The colors, the cards and the treats make it special for them. Getting cards and treats from family and friends or making cards and treats for family and friends is exciting for children and helps them to begin learning ways to show kindness to others.

If you have a young child, there are many fun activities that you can do to celebrate Valentine's Day.

Start with a heart: a paper heart, a wooden heart, a salt dough heart, a tissue paper heart, a cardboard heart, a construction paper heart, a waxed paper heart, a felt heart, a foam board heart, a plastic heart, heart stickers or heart stamps. If you give your child one heart or several different types of hearts she can create her own Valentine's Day cards or gifts. If she is a toddler or a preschooler, with your help she can color, paint, glue pictures, tissue paper or string or put glitter on a precut heart and make it a card to give to a family member or friend. She can glue two or more hearts together to make animals or insects or flowers.

You can have your child help you make a special Valentine's Day lunch or snack. Use a large heart-shaped cookie cutter and cut bread slices in the shape of hearts to make peanut butter and strawberry jam sandwiches. Slice strawberries from the top down to have heart-shaped slices of strawberries. Use a small heart-shaped cookie cutter and cut cheese slices into hearts. Make Rice Krispie Treats or brownies and cut into heart shapes. Put strawberries or raspberries in a blender with milk or yogurt to make special Valentine's Day milk to drink.

You can find many Valentine's Day activities and crafts for young children at [Hands on as We Grow](#) and [PBS Parents](#). [Pinterest](#) has many Valentine's Day activities for young children. Check out the activities on the [Office of Early Learning's Pinterest](#) page on the February Upcoming Events board.



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Social-emotional

You take your child to a birthday party for one of his friends and see a child who is disrupting other children as they play, grabbing food off the table before it is time for refreshments and complaining about the games, toys and treats the host is providing. You are thankful that it is not your child who is acting rude and uncooperative and vow that your child will never behave like this in public. How can you be confident your child will develop healthy, positive social-emotional skills and use good manners even when you are not with him?



As a parent, your relationship with your child is the foundation for his social-emotional health. By building a trusting and safe environment in your home, you make it easy for your child to learn and explore. When you [model appropriate healthy, social-emotional skills](#), he learns to interact with others in a positive way. When you are driving and someone turns in front of you, instead of yelling say, "I am angry with that person because he did something that was not safe and I want to keep all of us safe from danger." If you are upset because you can't find your car keys say, "I am upset because I need to drive you to grandma's house and I can't find my keys. Use your eyes to help me look for the keys so we can go to grandma's house." When your child is an infant, begin talking to him about what you are doing and why you are doing or



learning in the home

saying something. When he falls down as he tries to walk, pick him up and comfort him by saying, "Learning to walk is hard." When he is upset because he can't find his favorite toy, comfort him and say, "I know you are sad because you wanted your truck, but I will help you find your car to play with until we find the truck."



Offer encouragement and guidance when he is struggling with a task or situation like learning to dress himself or learning to ride a tricycle. Praise his efforts and positive behaviors, "I am so proud of you for helping your friend clean up the toys" or "It was so nice of you to tell your teacher that you had a good time making valentines in school today." Model good manners by saying "Thank you" when he hands you something or helps you in some way. Teach him to say "Hello" or "Good morning" when he arrives at school or meets someone and to ask for things he wants by saying, "May I please have the red block?" or "May I have some milk, please?" Find ways to help him [control his emotions](#) such as a calming breathing exercise or [close your eyes and count to 5](#). Practice these together. [Self-regulation](#)—being able to calm yourself when you are upset—is difficult for young children and your child will need your support while learning this skill.

The importance of positive social-emotional development has been well documented by research. School readiness and future relationships in life depend on healthy social-emotional skills. If your child is in child care, talk to the child care provider or teacher to find out the types of social-emotional skills he is learning in the child care setting. Ask for suggestions of social-emotional skills you can emphasize at home.



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Children and pets...

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the [time and effort](#) it will take to care for a pet and your child. If you decide to get a pet, [find out about pets](#) that are gentle and patient with young children. Read [books](#) about [different pets](#) or watch [videos](#) about pets. Visit friends with pets or your [local animal shelter](#) and watch your child interacting with them. Weigh your family's [resources and time](#) before getting a pet to make sure you have time to care for a pet and resources for a veterinarian for immunizations. Consider the age and temperament of your child and the type of pet that is best for your family. Involve your child in selecting and caring for the pet. You cannot expect young children to take care of a pet without [support and guidance](#) from you. But you can teach your child how to treat pets and help you feed and take care of your pet. PBS Kids has an app [Wild Kratts Baby Buddies](#) that helps children learn what is involved in feeding, washing and protecting baby animals. Children are usually trusting and loving with pets, but may treat them more like toys than animals. Teach your child how to touch and show love for pets and how to protect herself from a pet who may be injured or upset. Talk with her about how to treat her pet when she is upset or angry. Caring for a pet can help children develop [empathy and responsibility](#). Your child can learn a lot from having a pet and find a trusting, loving friend in the right pet for her.

A child's best friend...



Pets often serve as a trustworthy confidant for a child's feelings of loneliness, sadness or fear. When adults and friends don't seem to have time to play, a child can usually count on a pet to be a partner in a game. When a child is sad, a pet can usually be counted on to "listen." When a child has been scolded and feels bad, a pet will still wag its tail nonjudgmentally and remind the child that he or she is still loved."

Fred Rogers

Coming in March

- National Read Aloud Month
- Family-Friendly Places to Learn: Libraries and Museums
- National Nutrition Month
- Earned Income Tax Credit



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