

Early Learning Parents' Pages

March 2017



What behaviors should you look for in your toddler?

March marks Nutrition Month, Read Aloud Month, Children's Week and St. Patrick's Day.

Your child's social development timeline – toddlers 2–3 years old

Your baby has become a young child or a toddler.

Now that she is more mobile, she can play in different areas but still wants you or her caregiver within sight much of the time. She may have one or two "favorite" friends her age or even an imaginary friend with whom she talks or plays.



Sharing toys, food and attention is still difficult for her, but it is getting better. She may have a hard time taking turns but needs lots of encouragement to wait for her turn for any length of time. A toddler may become aggressive if others try to take her toys or get in her space. She may even hit or bite to keep others from taking her toys or getting in her play space. Model ways to share and take turns and soon she will become much better at sharing. If you feel your

child's aggressiveness is interfering with her making friends or socializing with others, be sure to talk with her pediatrician about your concerns. She is beginning to know when others are happy, sad or scared, but is still self-centered and not able to see things from another's point of view. When she sees another child crying or laughing, talk with her about what makes **her** laugh or cry. Soon she will begin to understand how her feelings are like the other children she sees.



Check out the social and emotional [milestones for 2-year-olds](#) and [3-year-olds](#) at Learn the Signs Act Early to learn more about your child's social and emotional milestones. There are pictures and videos for some of the milestones.



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2017 National Nutrition Month

March is [National Nutrition Month](#).

Making healthy food choices for you and your family and finding ways to exercise as a family is the focus. This year's theme is "Put Your Best Fork Forward" to remind us that every bite counts. Eating healthy means eating food from all food groups and eating fewer foods high in sugar or fat content.

This does not mean your family cannot have desserts or treats. Plan meals with a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, fish, lean meats and poultry. Serve your children milk and water at meals.

Offer fruits and vegetables for snacks. PBS Parents has information about [healthy snacks for children](#).

Start teaching your child early to make wise food choices. Zero to Three has a downloadable booklet [Healthy from the Start](#) with tips to help toddlers learn to eat healthy.



Involve your child in planning meals and snacks. Offer him a couple of options to choose from and have him help you prepare the food if possible. Keep healthy snacks in kid-sized portions within his reach during the day so he can select his own snack. Read books to your child about fitness and good nutrition. PBS has a list of [suggestions](#) by age level that your child will enjoy as well as activities and ideas for parents to use to [encourage healthy eating habits](#).

St. Patrick's Day

March 17 is [St. Patrick's Day](#), a cultural and religious holiday celebrated in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and in other countries around the world. Many families enjoy celebrating St. Patrick's Day. Children enjoy the symbols associated with the holidays such as leprechauns, shamrocks, rainbows and pots of gold. Plan a few activities that your child will enjoy and make it a special day for him. Have your child help you select "leprechaun food" at the grocery store so you can make special snacks. Green apples, celery, green grapes and honeydew melon are healthy snacks that make great St. Patrick's Day snacks.



For lunch, serve green macaroni and cheese. Use white cheddar cheese and mix green peas, fresh spinach and chopped broccoli florets into cooked pasta. Let your child choose several of his favorite green vegetables to have for dinner with mint ice cream or lime sherbert for dessert.

You can make "magic lemonade" for your child to drink by adding a little yellow food coloring to the lemonade in a pitcher. Put a small drop of blue food coloring in the bottom of a plastic cup and pour in the lemonade. Ask him to stir the lemonade and it will "magically" turn green. Talk about the change in color due to mixing yellow and blue. Take your child outside to look for "shamrocks" (green cloverleaves) and try to find a lucky four-leaf clover. If you cannot find a lucky clover, trace around his hand four times and cut out the handprints to make a four-leaf clover. He can draw a green stem and color the handprints green. Glue his handprints around the stem to make a four-leaf clover.

For other fun St. Patrick's Day activities, check the [Office of Early Learning's Pinterest Board](#) or [PBS Parents' website](#).

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Children's Week

Mar. 26-31, 2017, is [Children's Week in Florida](#)—a week of events dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of Florida's children. Many child care providers have children in their programs create hand art to send to Tallahassee to be hung in the rotunda of Florida's Capitol Sunday, Mar. 26. During the following week, tens of thousands of children's handprints hang in the Capitol as a reminder of the importance of early education and support for Florida's children.

Children's Day at the Capitol is Tuesday, Mar. 28, in Tallahassee. Families, children and the public are invited to visit the event on the Capitol grounds. There are booths throughout the grounds with information and resources for families. There is a "Storybook Village" with interactive reading booths where children explore featured stories and children's books through activities or songs. There is a "Storybook Stage" where local authors and others read stories to the children. Every child receives a free book donated by the Early Learning Coalition of the Big Bend. Many of the early learning coalitions and their partners have local events that are similar to the statewide events. Contact your local early learning coalition or visit their website to find information on Children's Week in your community.



Read Aloud Month

March is **Read Aloud Month** and serves as a reminder of the importance of reading aloud to children. As a parent, you can start reading to your child at birth and continue even when she can read herself. When she learns to read, continue to read together taking turns reading every other page or reading the dialogue of certain characters. Reading to your child helps you bond with her and shows that you value reading. Hearing books read is one of the best ways for your child to learn new words and increase her vocabulary as well as learn early literacy skills.



Make reading with you part of her bedtime routine. Snuggling together while you read to her is a relaxing way to calm down and fall asleep. When running errands or waiting for appointments, have several books you can read to her while waiting or riding on a bus. Use audio stories to play in the car while driving or just tell her one of her favorite stories as you drive. Read street signs and business signs that you pass and ask her which signs she may be able to read (recognize) such as fast food restaurants or stores you frequent.



In the grocery store, read posted signs and food labels as you shop. In restaurants, read the menu or kid-friendly activities on the kids' menu to her. When cooking, read labels or recipes to her. While doing laundry, read labels on the detergent and other laundry supplies. This shows your child reading is important in all areas of life and exposes her to different types of words.

Integrating reading into your daily routines and having a special reading time each day, will help your child learn early literacy skills and make for many enjoyable memories as she gets older.

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Earned Income Tax Credit

April 15 is Tax Day. It's time to start preparing your taxes. If your child is enrolled in child care or you have home care for a child under the age of 13 and you work or are looking for work, you may qualify for the **Earned Income Tax Credit** (EITC). EITC is a benefit for working parents with low to moderate income. If you are paying for child care while working or looking for work, you can claim the Credit for Child and Dependent Care Expenses on your tax return. In order to qualify, you must file a tax return even if you are not required to file or do not owe any taxes. The Internal Revenue Service offers [nine points](#) to consider when filing your tax returns that will help you when filing for EITC.

For more information, see [Publication 503, Child and Dependent Care Expenses](#).

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KVAYyGsrL5d72B1v_fOKf20D5yIla5aUYHFHy2L7p1Y/edit

Child and Dependent Care Expenses
<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p503.pdf>



Build Your Child's Brain

Your child's brain grows more in his first five years than in any other time in his life. His brain is making new connections all the time. You can help build his brain with a free app called **vroom**. You'll get daily easy tips to help your child learn.



Upcoming in April

- #3 Preschool Parenting Problem? Meltdowns!
- Week of the Young Child
- Celebrate Poetry Month
- Safe Kids Day
- Your Child's Social Development Timeline – Years Three and Four



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