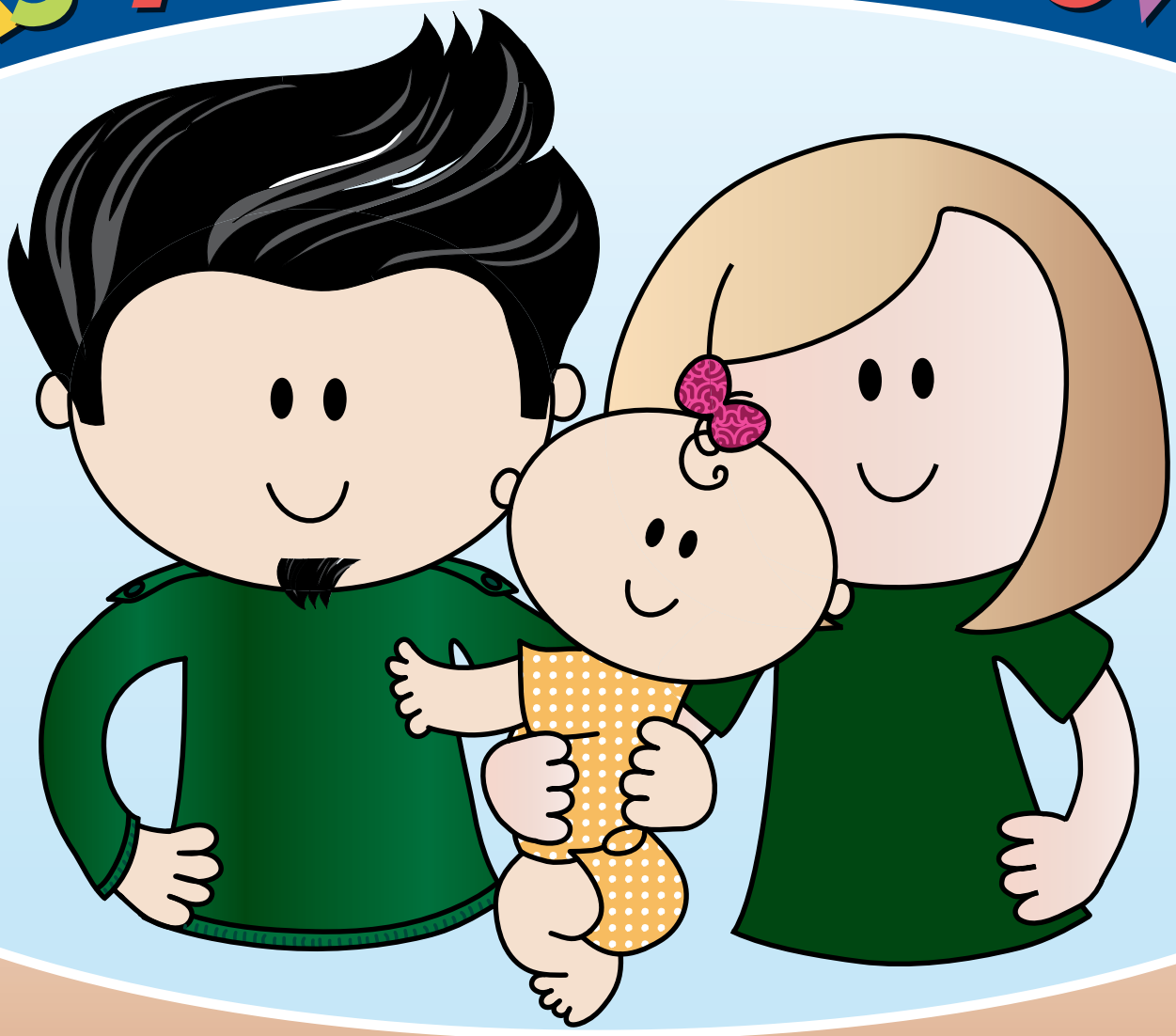
Build Your Skills
Shape Your Future
Kingston Literacy & Skills

As Your Child Grows



Family & Early Literacy

123 ABC

As Your Child Grows

This edition by
Anne Jackson et al

New illustrations by
Stephanie Coville

Build Your Skills
Shape Your Future
Kingston Literacy & Skills

First edition by Anne Jackson, Susie Ralph and Donna Stoness.

The original booklet was funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the National Literacy Secretariat.

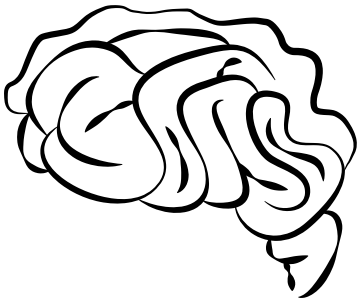
© Kingston Literacy 2004

This edition has been redesigned and printed for the project *Building Family Literacy and Essential Skills.* This project was funded by the Government of Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills.

Canada

Cover design and general layout by The Right Type, Steve Knowles.

About the Brain



A baby's brain has already started to develop before they are born. We used to think that a child inherited their potential from their family genes. Now we know that there is a lot more to brain development than family genes. In fact, genes have influenced only the basic wiring.

Research has proven that every experience a baby has affects the way the baby's brain will develop.

Amazingly, at birth the brain is already made up of millions of neurons and the baby's brain is **still** developing.

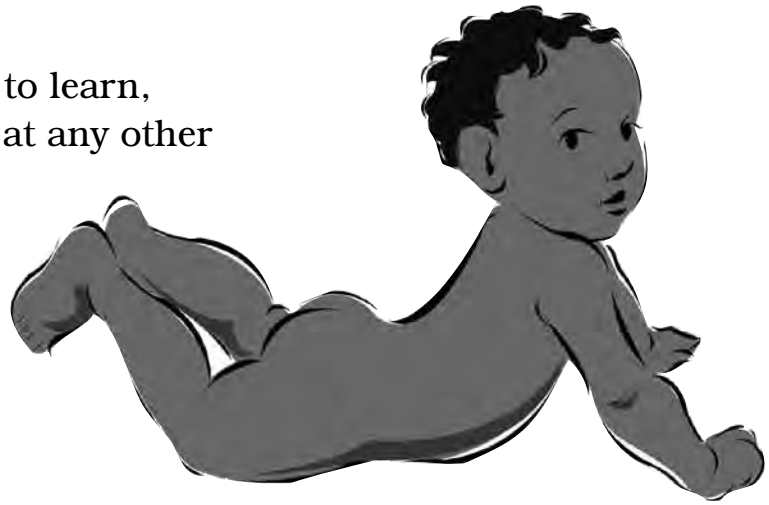
Neurons are like wires or pathways. To remember something that is being learned, the neuron has to be opened and a pathway created.

When a person experiences something new, a temporary pathway is created along the neuron. In other words, the wire is temporarily connected. If the experience is repeated a few times, the pathway stays open and the learning becomes permanent. If the experience is not repeated, the pathway closes or the wire is disconnected.

At birth, pathways already exist in the brain that make the heart beat and the lungs breathe. During the first few months, many millions of new pathways are formed by the experiences the baby has every day. The more an experience is repeated, the stronger the pathways become.

A baby is born with a natural need to learn. They are like a sponge that fills with water. They will soak up new skills as long as we give them plenty to choose from.

A baby's brain is ready to learn, probably more so than at any other time in their life.



Did you know?

A baby animal will usually form an attachment or bond to the first thing it sees. A human baby is quite different: they start to recognize the voices of those who are close to them while they are still in the womb.

About the Newborn

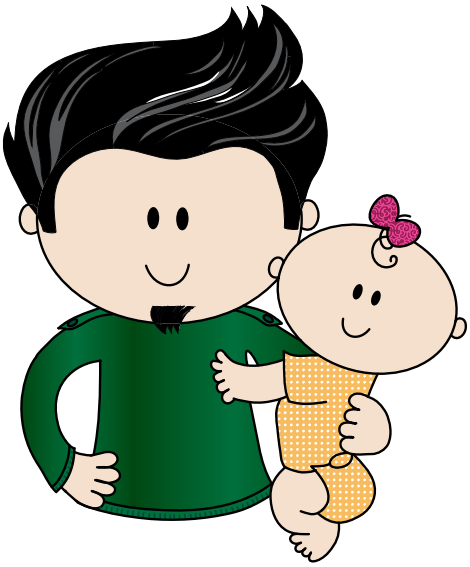
A newborn baby is one of the most incredible wonders. The newborn comes into the world equipped to respond to its surroundings.

A baby is born with reflexes that are automatic reactions. We have no control over our reflexes. For example, we shiver when we are cold and that is a reflex. Reflexes are necessary to the survival of the newborn. The following are the most common reflexes and examples of what the reflexes make the baby do:

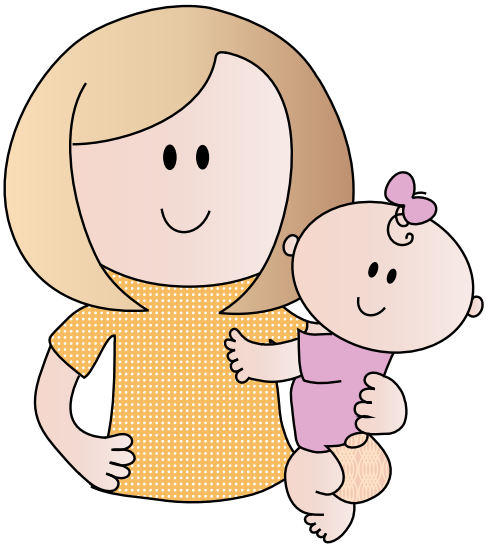
Blink	closes eyes if there is movement near the face
Swallow	knows how to breathe while swallowing
Gag	coughs if milk goes down the wrong way
Rooting	turns to find nipple
Sucking	makes sucking movements when awake
Stepping	makes walking movements when held
Startle	throws out legs and arms if there is a sudden noise
Grasp	toes curl when foot is pressed; hands grasp around a finger

A baby is born with the ability to see. The following are the ways they can use their eyes:

- can see things move
- can see light and dark
- look mostly at the edges of faces and things
- see best from 20–30 cm (8–12 inches) away
- can make eye-to-eye contact
- have difficulty making the eyes work well together



A baby is born with the ability to hear. The following are things they can hear:



- can make out a human voice
- know mother's voice in the first week
- hear high sounds best
- cannot hear soft sounds

A baby is born with the ability to taste and smell. The following are things they can taste and smell:

- know the smell of their own mother's breast milk
- like sweet smells best
- like sweet tastes more than sour

The World of the Newborn

Newborns are totally dependent on adults when they are born. Therefore, babies need to be looked after by caring people who will do their best to provide a loving and safe environment. Adults canhelp newborns develop by:

- holding and touching the baby
- speaking to the baby
- singing to the baby
- reading to the baby
- providing soft music near the baby

Did you know?

- *Babies like to look at things that move.*
- *Faces are babies' favourite playthings.*
- *Babies will follow a person with their eyes.*
- *A baby can tell the difference between adults as early as three weeks.*

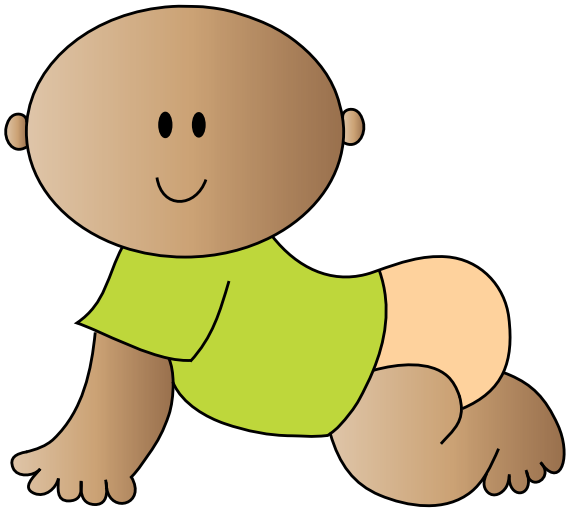
About the Infant

(1 month – 18 months)

The infant goes through definite stages of development of motor skills. Motor skills are skills to do with muscles and movement. The large movements such as walking are called "gross motor skills."

On the other hand, small movements are mostly hand movements, such as the ones you use for picking up objects or drawing. These are called "fine motor skills."

The following are examples of the motor skills that develop at specific ages during infancy:



At 2 months
- holding and waving toys

At 3–4 months
- lifting the whole head

At 4–6 months
- grabbing toys, etc.

At 5 months
- turning the whole body over

At 6–7 months
- sitting up
- reaching out for things

At 7–9 months
- crawling

At 8 months
- standing if hands are held

At 8–10 months

- picking up and passing a toy from hand to hand
- dropping toys

At 10 months

- pulling themselves up alone
- walking if both hands are held

At 12–15 months

- walking alone

At 12–18 months

- starting to feed themselves
- going up and down stairs

At 18 months

- stacking blocks to make a tower
- knocking tower over
- grasping a crayon and making scribbles

Babies are all different so these movements may happen any time within the ages listed above.

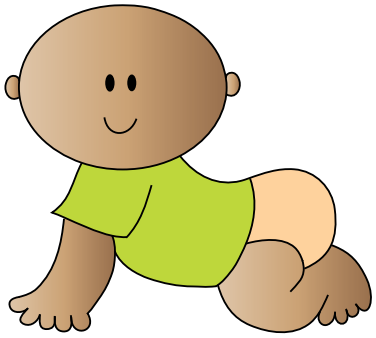
Did you know?

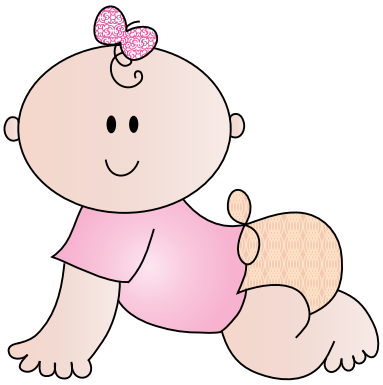
The two most important skills that children learn in the first 18 months are:

1. *To be able to move from place to place*
2. *To be able to reach and pick up objects*

The World of the Infant

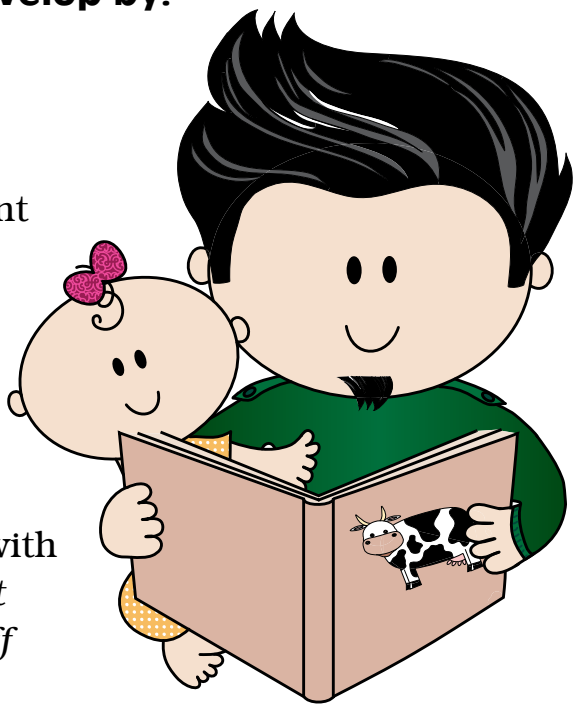
At this stage of development, the infant wants to move around and interact with their world.





Adults can help the infant to develop by:

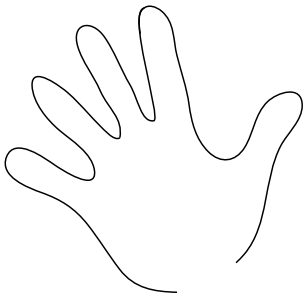
- singing to the infant
- speaking to the infant
- holding and touching the infant
- reading to the infant
- providing music in the infant's environment
- playing with the infant
- giving them safe toys to play with
  Example: *ones with eyes that cannot be pulled off*



There is a great deal of development throughout a child's infancy. The activities that encourage this development differ depending upon the age and the stage of the infant.

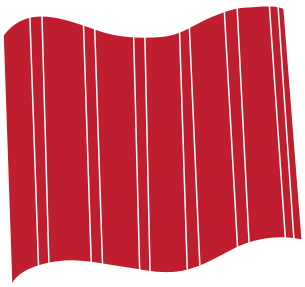
The following are some appropriate activities:

- letting the baby grasp your fingers



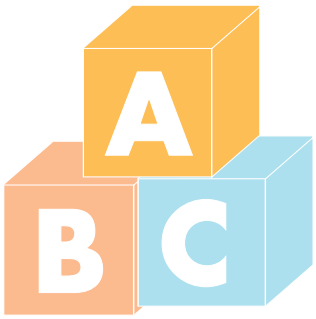
- giving the baby rattles and small teething rings to grasp and suck

- letting the baby lie on a soft rug to kick and move and turn around on



- letting the baby sit on a soft rug with toys all around

- placing the toys out of reach so the baby has to move to get to them



- helping them to walk

- giving them a spoon and letting them feed themselves

- taking them for walks in a stroller from which they can see the world

- playing clapping and other rhythm games
- creating a colourful, stimulating environment

- providing a variety of safe toys
- providing opportunities for them to interact with other caring adults
  Example: *grandparents, aunts and uncles*

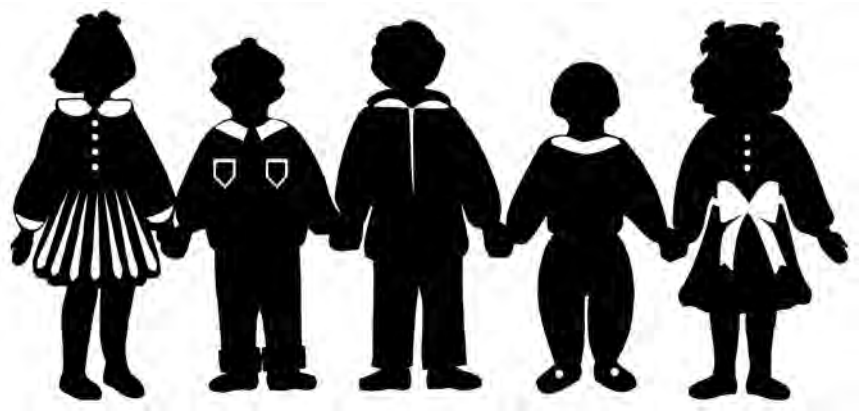
Did you know?

* *Most of the newborn reflexes stop at 3–4 months.*

About the Toddler

(18 months – 3 years)

In this next stage of the child's development, motor skills are fine-tuned. It is the beginning of the growth of the imagination and this is when they start to assert their independence. This is also a stage of socialization outside of the family.



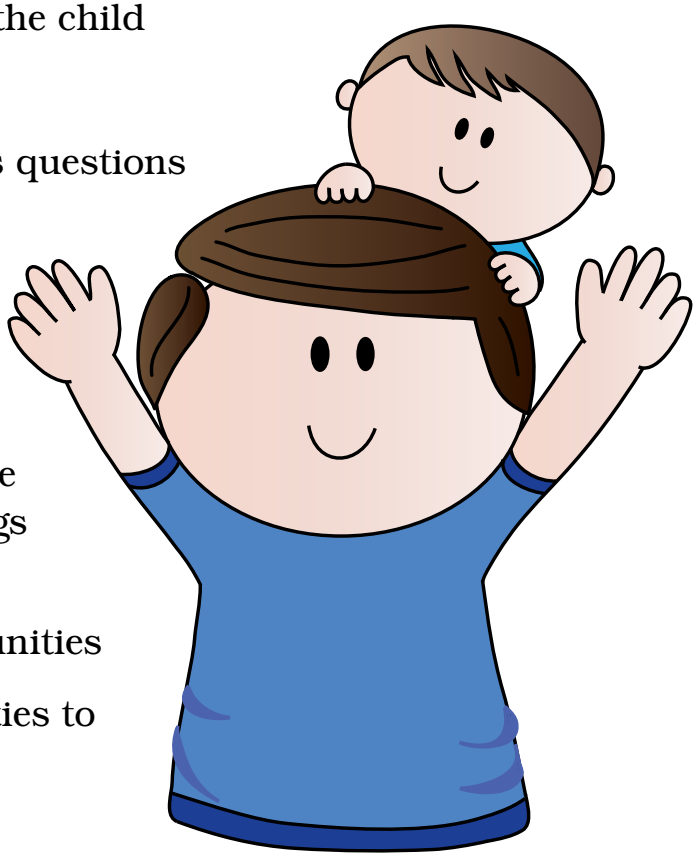
The following are examples of motor skills that are fine-tuned throughout the toddler stage:

- running
- kicking
- jumping
- throwing
- catching
- balancing
- putting things together
- stacking
- scribbling

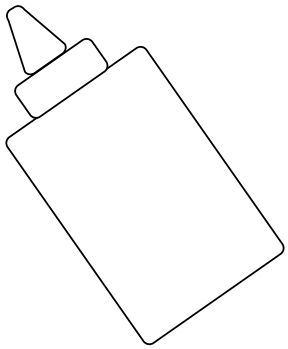
The World of the Toddler

At this stage of development the toddler wants to play, pretend, copy, move faster, socialize and be independent. Adults can help the toddler to develop by:

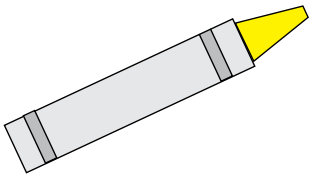
- holding and touching the child
- reading to the child
- singing to the child
- providing music for the child
- speaking to the child
- answering the child's questions
- asking questions
- explaining how things work
- taking the child to different places to see new people and things
- providing positive socialization opportunities
- providing opportunities to play



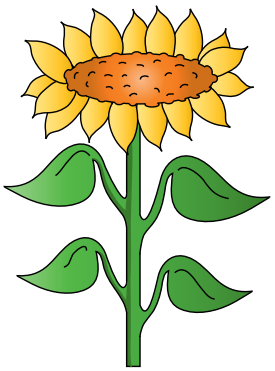
At this stage, play is most important. Children learn through play. An adult can help nurture play by:



- Being a playmate for the child
- Being a role model for the child to copy
- Nurturing their curiosity
- Providing a dress-up box



- Providing art materials
  Example: *crayons*
- Providing toys that encourage creativity
  Example: *LEGO and blocks*



- Providing an opportunity to play outdoors and interact with nature
- Providing supervised opportunities to be with other toddlers

Did you know?

- *Toys do not have to be expensive —*
  Example: *children love to play with water, sand, cardboard boxes, and wooden spoons.*
- *During this stage, toddlers like to pretend they are doing what their parents do.*

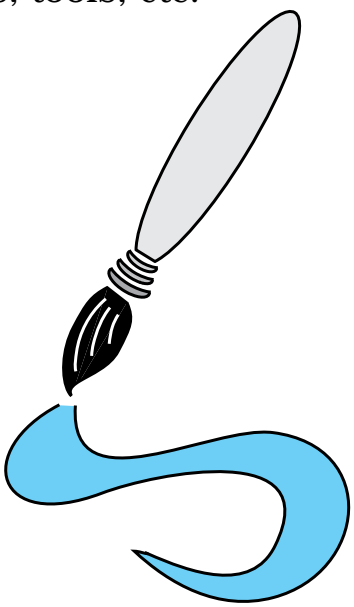
About the Child

(3–7 years)

At this stage of the child's development, fine motor skills are fine tuned. The imagination continues to grow, and because children have developed a larger vocabulary, they are able to verbally express their individuality. With the combination of the more developed fine motor skills and the child's new level of vocabulary, we see the beginning of playing writing. The child also continues to socialize in a more expanded circle.

The following are examples of fine motor skills that are fine-tuned throughout this stage:

- holding pencils, crayons, paint brushes, tools, etc.
- holding knives, forks, spoons
- pouring
- holding cups and glasses
- working with a toothbrush and comb
- tying laces, ribbons and string
- working with a keyboard
- dialing a phone
- doing up buttons, zippers and snaps
- performing personal hygiene
- doing puzzles



At this stage as well, children want to be much more independent. The following are some of the ways that children experiment with expressing this independence:

- wanting to dress themselves
- choosing their own clothes
- grooming themselves
- helping around the house
- playing more complicated games
- reading aloud
- creating artwork
- making decisions around food
- printing and writing
- creating stories
- demonstrating how they use their memory

As the child gets older, their large motor skills get better. Therefore, they want to go faster, farther and in more imaginative ways. They use up more energy while climbing, dancing, leaping, twisting, rolling, tumbling and exploring. This can be a time of increased appetite because of this increased activity. They need plenty of time to be active because they are sitting quietly in school more often.

Throughout this stage, children continue to develop their balance, strength and timing. They may start to want to learn how to improve special skills, such as roller skating, riding a bike, hockey, ballet, batting and catching.

Parents of children from three to seven years of age will notice many more obvious physical changes. The child may lose baby fat and grow into a slimmer child with stronger muscles, bones and more developed brain power.

The child now has all of their first teeth. At six years old, some children begin to get their second or permanent teeth. The child should be visiting a dentist regularly for check-ups at this stage. It is also a good time to visit a doctor to check eyes and ears for any problems.

The World of the Child

At this stage, the child wants to be active and creative. Parents and adults can help the child to develop by:

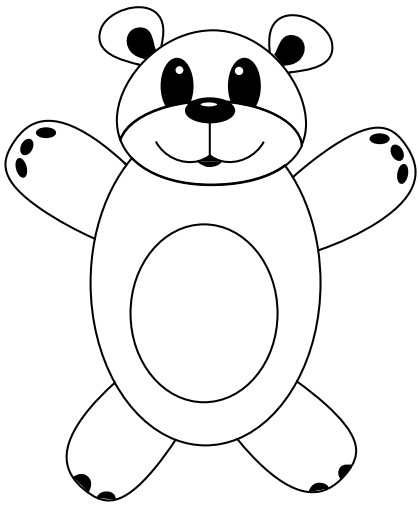
- providing opportunities to play indoors and outdoors
- playing with the child
- providing toys that encourage safety and activity
  Example: *balls*
- walking daily with the child
- providing opportunities to participate in sports
- providing safe opportunities to climb, swing and slide
- maintaining a well-rounded exercise program
- providing opportunities to ride a bike
- providing opportunities to socialize and play

At this stage as well, the child wants to explore their personal self-expression. Parents and adults can help the child to develop and to feel free to develop in this area by:

- providing art materials
  Example: *crayons, paints, coloured paper*
- keeping a dress-up box
- encouraging the child to print and draw
- reading to the child
- playing with the child
- displaying the child's work on the fridge, etc.
- providing opportunities to explore crafts
  Example: *beadwork*
- providing play dough

At this stage, it is important to promote and encourage writing. The parent can help the child to develop their writing by:

- showing the child different kinds of writing
  Example: *shopping lists, letters, etc.*
- letting them create cards for different occasions
- reading to the child
- encouraging them to write their name
- allowing writing to be messy
- accepting creative spelling
- letting the child write lists for household chores
- setting aside time daily for writing

Did you know?

- *At this stage dolls and teddy bears are very special. A teddy bear can be a good friend and he is always there.*
- *A broom can become a horse or a box can become a garage.*
- *This is a good time to work on sharing with others.*
- *Team games are beginning to be great fun!*