

# Parenting NEWS & VIEWS

EARLY LEARNING AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

## Better Together

When children are given opportunities to interact with each other through play, they naturally develop the social and emotional skills they need to learn and grow. Consider this story about a grandfather taking his four-year-old granddaughter Maya to the park.

Maya walks into the park holding her grandfather's hand. There are several other children Maya's age playing on a climbing structure. Maya's grandpa walks toward the structure and says, "Will you use the rope or the stairs to go up?" Maya says, "The stairs. They're faster." Two other children are standing on the stairs talking and laughing. Maya says, "Excuse me," and the children shuffle to the side so Maya can squeeze

past them. Maya smiles and waves at her grandpa as she stands in line for the slide.

Maya goes down the slide, grabs her grandfather's hand and says, "I want to try the ladder."

They walk to the rope ladder. "Remember to take your time and go slowly, Maya. I know you can do it." After climbing about halfway up, Maya's left foot slips on one of the ropes and her leg goes through the square hole. "Oh no! My leg is stuck!" As Maya begins to cry her Grandfather says, "I'm here. You can do this. Take a deep breath. Now hold on tight with your hands and pull your leg back out." An older child climbing next to Maya stops and says, "You have to put the middle of your foot on the rope. Like this." The child waits for Maya to get

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### FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Encourage children to practice fine motor skills with these activities:

- Children can pinch, poke, squeeze, pat, pull, pound, press, and roll play dough.
- Draw with crayons, markers, and pencils. Use rulers when drawing.
- String beads on shoelaces, or cut a hole in plastic lids and use thick yarn to string the lids.
- Make lacing cards by cutting shapes out of cardboard, hole-punching around the edges, and tying a shoelace to one hole. Children can move the yarn through the holes with their fingers.
- Children can tear or cut paper for art projects. Toddlers can tear paper into small pieces, and children who are three and older can use safety scissors to cut.



# The Power of Curiosity

One of the greatest gifts we can give children is the gift of curiosity. Curiosity fuels a desire to learn, engages children in critical thinking, and builds resilience. Take the time to explore, observe, and reflect with children. Instead of providing answers, give children the time they need to think through their ideas, experiment, and develop their own solutions. Show children that learning can be exciting and valuable by modeling curiosity and sharing your interests and hobbies. Critical thinking skills are important for solving problems, making plans, predicting, estimating, evaluating, analyzing, and understanding new concepts. The curiosity to know and understand drives children to engage in critical thinking.

Support children in recognizing that mistakes are opportunities for learning. If your child becomes frustrated



while working on a problem, you can help by asking questions that lead them to find a solution. For example, "What is happening," "How can this be fixed," and "Is there another solution we can try?" Continue talking it through until you reach a solution together. When your child has the chance to complete a task, solve a problem, make a discovery, or learn a new concept on their own, they build their critical thinking skills. As they overcome challenges and persevere, they also develop resilience and gain confidence in their own abilities.

Share your own interests and express a passion for learning. Think about the things you enjoy. Perhaps you like to read, play a sport, cook, craft, or sing. Let your child see you enjoy your interests. This will inspire them to discover their own interests. You can also use nature to inspire curiosity. Encourage children to be nature detectives. They can collect rocks, fallen leaves, sticks, or flowers to explore with a magnifying glass. Children can also draw pictures of their discoveries, make a map of the park or neighborhood, and observe animals and plants. Promote curiosity by having conversations about what you see. This helps children notice details and express wonder about the world. Encourage and inspire your child to explore the world around us and appreciate its beauty.

## RECIPES Lunch Time Wraps

Make these healthy wraps ahead of time and store them in parchment paper or plastic wrap for the next day. Children can help wash vegetables, place ingredients on the tortillas, and roll them up. Each recipe serves four.

### Chicken Wrap:

- 4 medium whole wheat tortillas
- 4 tablespoons whipped cream cheese
- 1 medium red tomato, sliced
- 4 medium carrots, grated
- 10 ounces cooked chicken, drained and diced
- 1 cup lettuce, shredded

### Veggie Wrap:

- 4 medium whole wheat tortillas
- 4 tablespoons hummus
- 1 medium carrot, grated
- 1 medium cucumber, thinly sliced
- 1 medium bell pepper, sliced
- 1 cup baby spinach, chopped



### Instructions:

Spread one tablespoon of cream cheese or hummus onto each tortilla, leaving a half inch border around the edge. Add the ingredients to the center of each tortilla, and roll them up tightly. To store for up to one day, place them in plastic wrap to hold their shape, and keep them in the refrigerator.



## Learning about Personal Safety

Personal safety is learned through experience and guidance. For example, when cooking with a toddler in the kitchen, you might explain that the stove and oven are hot and harmful if we are not careful. You can gently hold your child's hand at a safe distance from the oven so they can feel a small amount of heat without the risk of being burned. The toddler can now feel the heat and connect it with the word "hot." Explain that only adults can handle hot things, and demonstrate how you use a pot holder or oven mitt to keep your hands safe from hot surfaces. Experiences such as this help young children develop trust that it is an adult's job to keep them safe.

Children become increasingly aware of their own abilities and personal safety as they grow. They learn to cross the street, walk with scissors pointed down, prepare simple meals, and avoid dangerous situations. Talking about safe and unsafe situations with children from an early age helps them develop the critical thinking skills they will need in order to manage their own safety as they grow. These conversations can be done as situations arise. You can avoid making it a fearful topic by reassuring children and keeping explanations simple. For example, "I am here to keep you safe, and you can help me with that by holding my hand when we cross the street. That way if, there is an emergency, I know where you are."

Planning activities such as using a notebook to do safety checks of your home or yard can provide children with the opportunity to decide what "safe" looks like. Children can also learn about safety by studying community helpers. Go for walks in your community and point out hospitals and fire or police stations.

Talk about the jobs of the people inside and how they keep us safe. As children begin using smartphones, tablets, and computers, it is important to set parental controls to block inappropriate websites and teach children how to use technology responsibly. The website [www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org) offers guidance on digital safety and citizenship, as well as age ratings for many social media sites and apps. Teaching children to take responsibility for their own safety will prepare them for those moments when adult guidance is not readily available. Learn more about teaching children personal safety by visiting our website at [www.chs-ca.org](http://www.chs-ca.org) and reading our blog *Stranger Danger and Personal Safety*.



both feet back on the rope and they continue climbing. At the top Maya says, "Hi. I'm Maya." The other child smiles and says, "I'm Riley. Do you want to pretend this is a boat?" Maya smiles and says, "Okay. The sand can be the water." Maya's grandfather soon hears shouts of "I'm the captain!" and "I see another boat coming!"

This story shows how meaningful relationships are for a child's social and emotional development. The children in this story demonstrate a variety of skills, including: knowledge of social rules, ability to negotiate and collaborate, skills to manage emotions, confidence to make friends, capacity to express empathy, resilience to solve problems, and understanding that a trusted adult can offer guidance and support.

Consider the adult's role in this story. Maya's grandfather took her to the park so she would have the opportunity to play with other children. The grandfather stood close enough to help when needed, but allowed Maya to decide how to play and who to play with. When Maya's leg fell through the hole, the grandfather was there to reassure Maya that she was safe and offer guidance.

Parents and caregivers can promote the social and emotional development of children through loving and positive relationships. They can promote collaboration and the exploration of social roles by giving children opportunities to play with others. Activities such as serving family style meals, dancing, singing, exploring the neighborhood, reading books out loud, using manners, and attending community events also help children develop social and emotional skills.

As children play together, they assign each other tasks; rely on each other for information, ideas, or advice; take initiative; negotiate; practice managing their emotions; and learn perspective-taking, which builds empathy. Using a balance of both structured and unstructured play allows children to interact with each other and adults naturally. These meaningful interactions build the development of children's social and emotional skills.

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2010).

## ABOUT CHS

For over 130 years, Children's Home Society of California (CHS) has adapted to the changing needs of children and families. Since 1891, CHS has worked diligently to protect our community's children and strengthen their families through diverse programs and services.

At CHS, we view a child not in isolation, but in the context of each family's health, stability, and resources. We believe that families are fundamentally strong and resilient. The mission of CHS is to reach out to children and families at risk with a range of services to ensure every child the opportunity to develop within a safe, healthy, and secure environment.

Therefore, CHS provides a variety of services to children and families in California and nationwide, working to improve their quality of life by offering vital information, education and resource services, and child care assistance.

CHS also serves as an expert resource for child care providers, other social service agencies, and government agencies at the local, state, and national level. To learn more about CHS and resources available to you, please visit our website at [www.chs-ca.org](http://www.chs-ca.org).

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