

Parenting NEWS & VIEWS

EARLY LEARNING AND
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Being Present with Children

Martha and her dad Jorge hold hands as they walk to the preschool a few blocks from their apartment building. As they walk, they talk about preschool.

"I'm going to ask my teacher to read *Carmela Full of Wishes*. I like it because it's about birthdays and my birthday is coming soon." Jorge smiles and asks, "How would you like to celebrate?"

"I want pancakes for breakfast, just like *Carmela*. Then I want to play with you in the park and have a piñata."

Jorge says, "I like that idea! We can invite your friend Amy and your cousins too." Martha smiles and hugs Jorge's arm. "Yes! Please!" Jorge stops to smile and hug Martha, and then they continue walking.

"What else will you do today, Martha?" "I will build a rocket with blocks and paint stars."

In this story, Martha and Jorge have a conversation about preschool and make

plans for Martha's birthday. Taking advantage of routines to engage in conversations is one way to check in with children about how they are feeling and learn about their interests. Talking with children also shows them that they are important. Look for ways to take advantage of daily routines to enjoy meaningful

conversations. Turn off the radio while driving and talk instead. Remove earbuds or headphones to show children you are available to listen. Talk while cooking and eating dinner, or take an evening walk to talk about the day. Use open-ended sentences that require your child to say more than "yes" or "no" so that you can expand conversations. Some examples are, "Tell me about the best thing that happened today" or "Describe a story you read with your teacher today."

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READING TO BUILD CREATIVITY

Here are some children's books that encourage critical thinking, curiosity, and creativity:

- *Discovering Nature's Alphabet* by Krystina Castella
- *Exactly the Opposite* by Tana Hoban
- *Harold and The Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson
- *If You Give a Pig a Pancake* by Laura Joffe Numeroff
- *Is It Larger? Is It Smaller?* by Tana Hoban
- *Look Book* by Tana Hoban
- *Not a Box* by Antoinette Portis
- *Over, Under and Through* by Tana Hoban
- *Shapes, Shapes, Shapes* by Tana Hoban
- *The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds
- *What Do You Do with A Tail Like This?* by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page
- *Who Is the Beast?* by Keith Baker



Let's Talk!

Engaging in daily conversations with children strengthens your relationship, promotes their development of expressive language, and builds social and emotional skills. Conversations also encourage children to reflect on new knowledge, ideas, or experiences they have encountered. When you talk to your infant, use descriptive words and complete sentences. For example, "Here is your fuzzy, brown bear with soft fur and two black eyes, one nose, two arms, and two legs just like you!" This sentence is rich with new words and encourages your child to compare the bear's appearance with their own.

Infants will wiggle, smile, babble, and make eye contact when you speak to them. Using descriptive words about the textures and toys they touch helps them associate the objects with words. Include numbers and counting in your conversations to introduce math concepts. For example,



gently touch each toe or finger and say, "One little toe, two little toes," and so on. Smile and make eye contact with your infant, so they know you are focused on them.

Toddlers love to clap and sing songs. Clap and call out each letter of your child's name, or count as you clap. Sing songs with predictable patterns like the *Itsy-Bitsy Spider*, or *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* to introduce your toddler to new vocabulary. Choose books with pictures of real objects to read together. Describe the location of the real objects and encourage your toddler to search for them. For example, "There is a red ball in your room by the closet. Let's look for it together!"

Children three to five years old enjoy talking about the books they have read and the many things they have done and seen. When you take walks, ask them to describe the things they see, or challenge each other to look for certain shapes, numbers, or colors. Invite children to draw pictures and tell stories about what they have drawn. Write their stories down exactly as they tell them. This shows children that spoken words can be written, and that the stories they tell are important and valued enough to be saved.

S RECIPES Veggie Enchiladas

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup mushrooms, diced
- 1/2 cup carrots, diced
- 1/2 cup red bell pepper, diced
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 green onions, diced
- 1/2 cup edamame, shelled
- 1/2 cup corn, canned
- 1/2 cup black beans, canned and drained
- 1/2 cup diced red tomatoes, canned
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 6 medium corn tortillas
- 1/2 cup enchilada sauce
- 1/2 cup Mexican blend shredded cheese
- 1 avocado, sliced
- 1/2 cup cilantro, chopped

Instructions

Mix together the mushrooms, carrots, bell pepper, and green onions. In a large skillet, add the olive oil and sauté the vegetables over medium heat with the edamame, corn, black beans, tomato, and garlic powder. Cook until the vegetables soften.

Place the filling in each tortilla and roll it up. Place the rolled tortillas in a baking dish, drizzle with enchilada sauce, and top with cheese. Bake at 375° for 5 minutes. Top with avocado and cilantro before serving.



Source: Recipe adapted from <https://www.superhealthykids.com/dinner-idea> in August 2022.



Playing Outside

Growing up, it was common for children to hear adults say, “Go play outside.” Before technology advanced to provide entertainment for children, children usually found their entertainment outside riding bikes, building forts, pretending to be superheroes, and inventing their own games. Children developed social skills and curiosity, became inventors, and practiced critical thinking and decision-making while they played outside.

During the 1990s, researchers began to notice that children were shifting from playing outdoors to playing indoors. Studies show that children today spend half as much time playing outdoors as they did in previous generations. In fact, the Kaiser Family Foundation reported that children ages eight to eighteen spend an average of seven hours and thirty-eight minutes a day using entertainment media (computer games, television, smartphones, tablets, etc.). We also know that children today suffer from higher levels of obesity, stress, diabetes, and other health concerns.

The American Academy of Pediatrics states that “sixty minutes of unstructured free play is essential to children’s physical and mental health.” Health benefits from spending time outside include: increased physical activity, raised levels of Vitamin D, and improved distance vision. When children play outside, they run, skip, climb, balance, hop, and jump. They also invent games, learn to cooperate, take turns, solve problems, build friendships, engage in pretend play, and enjoy being part of a community.

Releasing energy with outside play also benefits the mind. Laughing and playing outside reduces stress levels, improves children’s ability to focus, helps them sleep better, and provides them with a beautiful space where they can sit and reflect. Time to reflect on the day helps children process what they have learned and experienced. Research has also shown that time outdoors improves academic performance in school-aged children during standardized tests in math, reading, writing, listening, and critical thinking. School-age children enrolled in an outdoor school program also show significant learning gains in science.

As a result of this research, there has been an increase in community nature groups, nature-based play programs for preschoolers, and outdoor science programs for school-aged children. You can find parks in your area by visiting your state or city’s website and searching for the Department of Parks and Recreation. Families and educators can find information about nature clubs, nature challenges, research, and resources by visiting <http://childrenandnature.org>. Remember that it is not only children who benefit from time spent outdoors; it is good for your health too!

Source: The website <http://childrenandnature.org> was referenced in August 2022.



It is easy to become busy with commitments to work, school, friends, or family members and forget to simply be present. Being present means giving your full attention to that moment. Listening to children and having conversations with them allows them to express themselves, problem solve, share ideas, and make connections. Children learn how to have conversations, listen, and talk from practicing with adults. By making eye contact and turning your body toward children when you talk, you show them that what they have to say is important, and that you are there to listen. You also role-model critical thinking skills when you answer a child's questions and openly discuss ideas.

Margaret J. Wheatley once said, "There are many benefits to this process of listening. The first is that good listeners are created as people feel listened to. Listening is a reciprocal process, we become more attentive to others if they have attended to us." In other words, if you want children to listen to you, then you need to listen to them. Besides, children have creative ideas and are experts at finding humor in almost everything. If you don't take the time to be

present, you might miss out on the fun! Listening to the ideas and stories of children can inspire humor, creativity, and open-mindedness in adults.

When reading books with children, encourage them to share opinions about what will happen next, or reason out why something happened. The story will be more meaningful to children if they feel like they are a part of it. Encourage children to tell stories. Make sure you share your stories too. Children will feel more connected to you when they see you have things in common. The most important thing is to find opportunities to give children the gift of your presence, and allow them to share the gift of theirs.

Source: California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume I 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.

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