



Early

Learning & Education PROGRAMS

Strengthening Children's Communication Skills

What's Inside

- Practicing STEM Skills with Play 2
- Developing Personal Safety 3
- Communicating with Families 4
- Southwestern Chopped Salad 4
- Activities to Inspire Wonder 5

*Tomás is coming to child care for the first time. Ms. Lucy greets him with a smile as he approaches and points to a poster saying, "How shall we say hello today?" The greeting poster on the wall displays a fist bump, a waving hand, a handshake, and a hug. Tomás smiles shyly, holding his father's hand with one hand, and points to the fist bump with the other hand. Tomás comes inside and sees that the other children are already playing. Tomás continues to hold his father's hand as Ms. Lucy shows them around the room, and Tomás starts to relax as he hears some of the other children speaking Spanish. A group of children building a tower with blocks smile and invite him to play.*



*A little later, Ms. Lucy calls time to clean up and sings a song about cleaning in both English and Spanish. The other children show Tomás how there are words and pictures of the different block shapes on the shelves to show them where the blocks go. Tomás then follows the other children to the carpet area, where he sees a row of photos with words on the wall. Ms. Lucy points to the photo of children playing and moves a clip down to the next photo that shows her reading to children. Ms. Lucy puts her hands together and opens them like a book while she says in English and Spanish that it is reading time. Ms. Lucy talks about the book for a couple of minutes in Spanish and then begins to read the story in*

*continued on page 4*

CREATING A PARENT LIBRARY

Build relationships with parents and offer support by creating a parent library. Set aside an area for parents and create a sign inviting them to take a copy of the resources they need or check out books. Use a file box and folders to divide information and resources by topics such as nutrition, biting, toilet learning, or behavior guidance. Place multiple copies of each resource in the folders so parents can easily take what they need. Ask friends or relatives to donate parenting books they no longer need, which can also be added to your library and checked out.



## Practicing STEM Skills with Play

Children learn about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) when they engage in play. A thoughtfully and intentionally designed learning environment offers materials that are open-ended and interesting, extends learning through quality interactions, and stimulates children's curiosity.

Support science learning by organizing a table with natural objects, plants, or animals (like a fish tank) that children can investigate with magnifying glasses. Include nonfiction books, pictures, or posters. Extend science into other areas by placing plants around the room, planting a garden, placing toy medical kits and lab coats in the dramatic play area, using musical instruments that are made from natural materials, and hanging wind chimes, prisms, or bird feeders in windows.

Give children the opportunity to experiment with technology by including materials such as rulers, calculators, toy cash registers, and microscopes. Add old keyboards or laptops, plastic phones, microphones, tablets with educational videos, and digital cameras. Make sure to verify that used laptops and phones do not contain toxic materials harmful to children. These materials can be used for dramatic play, science exploration, math experiences, and documentation of class projects.

Equip the environment with materials that allow children to experiment with engineering skills by building structures and exploring and manipulating the physical properties of objects.

Choose items such as wooden blocks, boxes, tubes, plastic pipes, plastic funnels and cups, buckets, yarn, rulers, measuring tape, and balls of different sizes and weights. Use real construction tools such as hammers, nails, wood, nuts, bolts, screw drivers, and wrenches. Real construction tools must be closely supervised, and children should wear protective eyewear.

Children use math skills such as measurement, classification, sequencing, counting, and estimation whenever they engage in STEM activities. Plan activities that allow children to make predictions, experiment, evaluate outcomes, and make corrections. Enrich their learning experience by asking them questions about their work and, when appropriate, offer suggestions for how they can go further with their projects.

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 3* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2013).



# Developing Personal Safety

Personal safety is learned through experience and guidance. Educators can help young children be aware of safety by identifying unsafe situations and encouraging conversations about how to be safe. For example, if children are engaged in an unsafe behavior, the adult can ask, "Is this safe?" or "How can you do this safely?" This encourages children to practice evaluating situations and identify what is safe or unsafe.

Planning activities such as safety checks of the room or yard can provide children with the opportunity to discover what "safe" looks like. They can wear hats and carry clipboards to do inspections. Children can also learn about safety by studying community helpers. Try changing the dramatic play area into a doll hospital, animal hospital, fire station, or police station. Invite children to reflect on how they keep us safe.

Encourage parents to teach their children which neighbors they can go to in an emergency, and to practice looking for

helpers when they are out in the community. Help children entering kindergarten learn their first and last name, address, and phone number. They should know how to call their family from any phone. Ask parents to help children decide what their personal boundaries are for being greeted or touched, and to practice telling people their boundaries.

As children begin using media tools such as smartphones, tablets, and computers, it is important to monitor their internet access, set parental controls to block inappropriate websites, and teach children what information can and cannot be shared digitally. Teaching children to take responsibility for their own safety will prepare them for those moments when adult guidance is not readily available.

Source: Information for this article was accessed from <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/preschool/Pages/Growing-Independence-Tips-for-Parents-of-Young-Children.aspx> in January 2026.



## Strengthening Children's Communication Skills

*English. Tomás does not understand all the English words, but as Ms. Lucy says a word, she points to a picture in the book, and he can tell what is happening in the story because Ms. Lucy is changing her voice and moving her body to act things out.*

This teacher created an environment that helps strengthen communication. There are pictures with word labels to show children where materials go, a daily schedule that includes a photo and the name of the activity, and a poster for greetings. The photos help children make connections with what is happening and where things go, while the words labeling the photos introduce literacy and are helpful for the parents visiting the program. The teacher also learned Spanish, which allows her to speak to all the children in the program. To reinforce understanding, the teacher is also using some American Sign Language (ASL), speaking slowly and clearly, and using the tone of her voice and gestures to enhance communication.

The environment includes activities that invite children to work together and talk to each other. During play, children can also use the physical materials around them to demonstrate what they are thinking (“stack the blocks like this”). Educators can model clear communication by asking children to describe or demonstrate what they want. For example, “Can you show us what we need to do?” Educators can also model active listening and asking questions or restating information to improve understanding. These strategies can help children develop and strengthen their communication skills and language comprehension.

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

## COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

Maintaining clear and open communication with families helps prevent misunderstandings and makes everyone feel included and knowledgeable about what is happening in the child care program. Consider designing an area where parents can sign in, read information about the day, learn about upcoming events, and observe the room. This gives parents an opportunity to transition between their workday and spending time with their child.

Keep communication clear, concise, and professional. Use multiple methods of communication to make sure information is understood. Take the time to review written materials for spelling or grammar errors before distributing them. Information that is organized, well-written, and easy to understand demonstrates professionalism. Consider using email, text messages, or apps and websites as additional methods of communication.

Now think about how you communicate with families. Does your written communication look professional? What could you do to make conversations productive and positive?

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

## Southwestern Chopped Salad

Enjoy vegetables with beans for protein in this satisfying salad. The recipe makes four meal servings, or six to eight side salads.

### Cilantro-Lime Dressing Ingredients

- 1/2 cup water
- 1 cup fresh cilantro
- 1/2 medium avocado
- 1/4 cup yogurt, plain and unsweetened
- 2-3 Tbsp. fresh lime juice
- 1-2 tsp. pure maple syrup
- 1 1/2 tsp. white wine vinegar
- 1/2 tsp. ground cumin
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/4 tsp. salt

### Directions

To make the dressing, chop the cilantro and discard the large stems. Add the water to a blender first, then add the rest of the dressing ingredients and blend for ten to fifteen seconds. Add more water if needed until it is the preferred consistency. Taste and adjust seasoning if needed. Blend until smooth.

To make the salad, chop the romaine lettuce, bell pepper, tomatoes, and green onions. Cook the corn if needed and set it aside. Rinse and drain the black beans. Place all salad ingredients in a large bowl. Pour the desired amount of dressing onto the salad, mix the salad well, and serve.

### Salad Ingredients

- 1 large head romaine lettuce
- 15 ounce can black beans
- 1 orange bell pepper
- 1 pint (10-12 ounces) grape tomatoes
- 2 cups sweet corn, cooked
- 5 green onions

# Activities to Inspire Wonder

Make the projects below and use them to support the development of children's cognitive skills.

**Activity:** Blow the Wind

**Age group:** Infants

**What you need:** Your voice, a straw, and cotton balls.

**What you do:** Show infants the cotton balls. Supervise them closely! Place a cotton ball on your hand and blow it towards them. Use the straw to blow on the infant's legs and move the cotton balls. Sing this song to the tune of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." *Blow, blow, blow, the wind; gently through the trees. Blow, and blow, and blow, and blow; how I like a breeze! Blow, blow, blow the clouds; blow them through the sky. Blow, and blow, and blow, and blow; watch the clouds roll by!*

**What they learn:** Infants observe how air moves things, and experience how wind feels. Extend the activity by showing them clouds outside and hanging wind chimes where infants can observe them.

**Activity:** Noticing Nature

**Age group:** Toddlers

**What you need:** Palm-sized clear plastic containers with lids (such as empty and washed large spice containers), scissors, a variety of nature items with a strong scent (flowers, pine needles, pine cones, soil, herbs), and a plastic dish tub.

**What you do:** Place a nature item in each container, put the lids on, and use scissors to poke holes in each lid (spice containers should already have the holes, but you may need to secure that piece with tape). Arrange the containers on a low table or a basket on the floor. Invite toddlers to smell them. After a few days, sit down on the floor and invite toddlers to join you as you pass around a container, open it, and dump it in a tub. Once all the containers have been emptied into the tub, ask toddlers to observe the color, shape, and texture of each item.

**What they learn:** Toddlers study nature with all their senses. As the teacher describes the materials, children can connect new vocabulary words to real objects. Using containers for smelling nature helps toddlers focus on the scent of each item without accidentally inhaling or swallowing them. Extend the activity by using the nature materials in art projects or adding them to clay or play dough.

**Activity:** Endless Nature Art

**Age group:** Preschool

**What you need:** A plastic divided vegetable tray, wooden frames (different sizes with the glass and cardboard backing removed), felt (cut to match the sizes of the frames), a camera, and various natural materials (sticks, sea shells, small stones, flowers, feathers, and leaves).

**What you do:** Lay out the nature materials and ask children to help sort everything into the vegetable tray. Next, lay out a piece of felt, place a frame on top, and ask each child to place a nature item inside the frame to make a picture. Afterwards, use the camera to take a picture of the finished art. Explain to the children that once there is a picture of their art, it can be taken apart to create something new. Set up the materials at a table. Display pictures of their art near the table.

**What they learn:** Children build their knowledge of nature, experiment with three-dimensional art, practice sorting and patterning, learn to document their work, and repurpose materials.



# Activities to Inspire Wonder

**Activity:** Bee Hummer

**Age group:** School Age

**What you need:** One popsicle stick, two eraser caps, one index card, scissors, a strong stapler, string, and a wide rubber band (about 1/4 inch wide) for each child.

**What you do:** Put the erasers on each end of the popsicle stick. Place the index card between the two erasers on the stick (trim if necessary). Staple the card to the stick (it should stick out about two inches). Cut about 2 feet of string. Tie the string next to one eraser and make several knots so that it is secure. Stretch the rubber band around the stick from the tip of one eraser to the tip of the other. Use the string to swing the bee hummer in a circle. It should sound like bees humming. Children can decorate their index cards if they wish.

**What they learn:** Children practice engineering skills, mimic a sound from nature, and explore ways to alter sound by changing the size of the rubber band, index card, or adjusting the rate of speed when they swing it.

Source: Adapted from <https://www.exploratorium.edu/snacks/bee-hummerchildren.aspx> in January 2026.

## ABOUT CHS

For 134 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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