

WINTER 2027

Parenting NEWS & VIEWS

EARLY LEARNING AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

What's Inside

Communication Counts 2
Ten-Minute Veggie Soup 2
Building a Healthy Lifestyle 3

Moving and Learning

The development of fine, gross, and perceptual-motor skills supports children's physical and cognitive development. Fine motor skills, also referred to as small motor skills, involve children using their hands and fingers to grasp an object, tear paper, button shirts, lace shoes, hold a pencil, cut with scissors, and eat with utensils. Gross, or large, motor skills involve children moving their arms, legs, and whole bodies by rolling, walking, running, jumping, bending, and twisting. Some activities, such as writing, require both fine and gross motor skills. The child's hands and fingers grasp the pencil, and they are also using the muscles in their wrist and arm.



Perceptual-motor skills involve children gathering information from their senses and then using that information to decide how to move. It also includes body awareness and spatial awareness, or being aware of how their body can fit and move through different spaces. For example, when a child is going through an obstacle course, they have to use their eyes to estimate the distance, height, and width of obstacles, and then maneuver themselves through them. These activities also help children develop critical thinking skills.

Encouraging children to move and be active stimulates their motor development and promotes healthy growth. Movement activities can be practiced both indoors and outdoors throughout the day. *continued on back*

EXPLORING MUSIC

Children learn about language, math, science, and creativity when they experiment with music. They also build social skills and physical development by dancing and playing music with others. Listening and singing along to music builds language. The beats and rhythms teach children basic math skills like counting and patterning. Through music, children explore the science of sound and use creativity to make new sounds or songs.

Try listening to different music styles or spending time dancing together after dinner. Maybe you have a friend or family member who can play or teach about an instrument. Giving your child opportunities to explore music supports their learning, and it also allows them to relax and enjoy time as a family.

CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY OF CALIFORNIA
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Communication Counts

Conversations with children help us appreciate their imagination, curiosity, and intelligence. How often have a child's words made us laugh or cry? How often have they simply left us amazed? Those special moments of shared ideas and emotions can bring joy into our lives and encourage a child's learning. During conversations, children practice speaking, listening, taking turns, using new vocabulary, expressing their own thoughts or feelings, building confidence, and reflecting on ideas or concepts they are learning.

Learning to communicate clearly and listen to others is an important life skill. Take the opportunity to talk during meal times, after reading a book, or while taking a walk. To help strengthen communication skills, make eye contact during conversations and indicate you are listening by turning your body towards the child or nodding your head to indicate you understand. Consider the following ideas for strengthening communication skills.

- **Allow for spontaneous conversation.** Participate in conversations initiated by children when they are playing or during mealtimes.
- **Let the environment inspire discussions.** Each day, ask children to look around the room and yard. Ask them to tell you something about what they see. This is a great way to build vocabulary and observation skills. It is also an opportunity to see what children find interesting.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** Avoid questions that require a simple "yes" or "no" answer and choose questions that encourage children to respond with complete sentences.
- **Stop and listen.** After asking a question, be patient and give the child time to stop, think, and respond in their own words.
- **Let your language be intentional.** Use language with a purpose, such as to comfort, describe, explain, or expand children's thinking about their current interests and activities.
- **Encourage oral storytelling.** Tell children stories and listen to theirs. Remember that stories can be real events or imaginative tales.
- **Engage in active empathetic listening.** Listen to children respectfully and without judgment. Let them know it is safe for them to express their feelings and ideas.

Source: "The Nature of Teacher Talk During Small Group Activities" by Julie Dangel and Tonia Durden (NAEYC, January 2010).

RECIPES

Ten-Minute **Veggie Soup**

This healthy bowl of soup serves six (6) people.

Ingredients

- 2 twenty-nine (29) ounce cans of low-sodium chicken broth or vegetable broth
- 1 fourteen and a half (14.5) ounce can of diced tomatoes; no added salt
- 1 teaspoon of dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon of onion powder
- 3/4 cup of dry macaroni
- 3 cups of frozen mixed vegetables
- 1/8 teaspoon of salt
- 1/8 teaspoon of pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon of garlic powder

Directions

Combine the broth, diced tomatoes, basil, and onion powder in a pot. Place the pot on the stove and bring it to a simmer. Add the pasta and frozen mixed vegetables. Cook for six minutes and turn off the stove. The pasta will not be cooked all the way through yet. Let the soup sit for five minutes, until the pasta softens and the soup is ready to serve. Serve the soup with low-sodium crackers, or a slice of bread with butter.

Source: Adapted from the website **https://fruitsandveggies.org/recipes/10-minute-veggie-soup** in September 2026.



Building a Healthy Lifestyle

Research has shown that living a healthy lifestyle can lower the risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure, and other health problems. Children learn how to eat healthy foods and live an active life by watching adults. What you show your children now about being healthy will stay with them for a lifetime.

Start by getting enough sleep. Infants need anywhere between fourteen and twenty hours of sleep (that includes naps), and preschoolers need between eleven and thirteen hours of sleep. Older children need ten or more hours of sleep. Create a bedtime routine that is consistent. For example, brushing teeth, reading books, and going to bed. A consistent routine makes good sleep a habit.

Teach your child's taste buds to crave healthy food by serving fruits, vegetables, and meals that are high in protein, fiber, and vitamins. When preparing meals, half of the plate should be fruits and vegetables, and the other half should be whole grains and protein (lean meats, beans, or tofu). Switch to low-fat milk or non-fat milk, and drink water instead of sugary drinks. Children can check food supplies, help make a grocery list, organize coupons, gather items at the grocery store, wash fruits and vegetables, prepare salads, and set the table for family-style eating.

Children need to be active for at least sixty minutes a day. Active play supports brain development and helps develop the heart and lungs. Try dancing to music after dinner, going for a walk, kicking a ball around outside, or doing some stretches. On the weekends, spend the day at a local park, beach, or nature preserve. Visit your city's web page to find parks near your home. On rainy days, try walking around a museum or inside a shopping mall.

Eating well, exercising, and getting enough sleep support your and your child's overall health, but sometimes there are extra stressors in life that affect mental health. Make sure your child knows that they have your support by asking about their day and showing an interest in the things they like. Plan activities that allow you to have fun as a family, like board game night, craft night, or movie night, and encourage your child to explore hobbies or interests that can help relieve stress. Practicing some of these ideas will help you and your child be more physically and mentally healthy.

Source: The website **https://calfreshhealthyliving.cdph.ca.gov** was accessed in September 2026.



continued from page 1

Outdoor activities have the added benefit of helping our bodies produce vitamin D, which supports the body in absorbing calcium for bone health, and assists in strengthening the immune system. Children usually have more space to play outside and opportunities to observe and explore nature.

Teach children some outdoor games and then invite them to choose an activity. For example, children can learn how to play tag, hopscotch, jump rope, handclapping games, Simon Says, or throw a frisbee, catch and throw a ball, and use an obstacle course. Children can also create their own games using toys, nature items, or a mix of both. When children visit a park, they have access to climbing equipment, swings, and slides. Parks also offer opportunities to spend time in nature exploring trees and flowers.

Outdoor play often revolves around building large motor skills as children run, climb, hop, jump, and throw or kick balls. But some of those activities also require children to use their hands and fingers, such as grasping a climber bar, turning a jump rope, drawing with sidewalk chalk, or catching a ball. During these activities, children develop all their muscles and learn to coordinate their body movements to complete tasks.

There are also a variety of movement activities children can do indoors. Children can use large muscles to do stretching exercises or yoga inside. They can also play music games that develop muscles and build self-regulation (self-control), like musical chairs or dancing to music and freezing (stopping) when the music stops. Try tossing bean bags, sponges, or soft balls into a box, making an indoor obstacle course, or building a fort with a large sheet, chairs, and pillows. Children can strengthen motor skills and coordination by working on puzzles and stringing beads on yarn and chenille stems, or by using pencils, crayons, safety scissors, tracing stencils, rulers, stickers, and playdough to create art.

Any activity that gets kids moving supports their development. Include a mix of both indoor and outdoor activities that children can do alone or with others to support physical development and make learning fun. Movement activities are good for adults too! They contribute to a healthy lifestyle and reduce stress, so have fun moving and learning with children today!

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 2* by the California Department of Education (2011).

ABOUT CHS

For 135 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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