

# Give Your Child a Helping Hand

Help prepare your child for learning  
(suitable for children aged 0-4)

Top  
Tips for Parents



Health and  
Social Care



Department of  
**Education**

[www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)



*Talking and listening with your child*



*Playing with your child*



*Counting with your child*



*Reading with your child*



*Encouraging positive behaviour*



*Emotional well-being*



*Physical well-being*










*Using digital devices sensibly*



*Useful links*

## **Talking and listening with your child - It's good to talk!**

Talk with your child from birth and listen to them as much as possible, the more you talk to your child, the more words they will learn.

-  Use real names of objects.
-  Develop sentences by adding words to what they say. If your child says "lorry" you might say "yes a big, red lorry".
-  Sing nursery rhymes and songs or make up stories together.
-  Encourage your child to ask questions - developing curiosity and a desire to learn is important.
-  If you ask a question, give them time to think and respond.
-  If your child is telling you a story - turn off your phone, look at them and ask questions.
-  Point things out and talk about how they look, feel, smell, taste or sound - "I wonder how...what...why...or...did you notice?"











If you have a concern about your child's speech, language or understanding, you can discuss this with your GP or health visitor, teacher or playgroup leader.

***For more information go to:***

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand)

## ***Playing with your child - Play matters!***

Make time to laugh and play together. Playing is how young children learn best. Let them take the lead when playing and trying out their own ideas.











-  Playing outside in the fresh air is important to their health and well-being.
-  Encourage running, climbing and energetic play outside.
-  Have fun using their senses to investigate and experiment... pouring water in the bath, using play dough in the kitchen or a sand-pit outdoors.
-  Develop hand-eye co-ordination by throwing and catching a ball, playing with building blocks, threading beads.
-  Encourage scribbling, drawing and painting - it improves hand control.
-  Encourage responsibility - let your child get games and toys out and tidy away afterwards.
-  “Pretend” play to encourage their imagination.
-  Simple board games teach about taking turns, following rules, counting and being a good sport.
-  Sorting games using things like socks or shoes as well as jigsaws, blocks, buttons and beads can help improve language and create a foundation for maths skills.
-  Early education is play based. Ask about the activities your child enjoys at pre-school and build on them at home.

***For more information go to:***

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand)

## **Counting with your child - Count for success!**

Remember that, like all learning, numbers should be fun and connected to real life. Many children learn better by counting things like stones on a beach or apples in a grocery bag.








-  Count fingers and toes, stairs and toys.
-  Sort and match cutlery, plates and cups.
-  At the shops - weigh fruit and vegetables.
-  On car journeys - count the different coloured cars.
-  Collect objects and sort them by colour, size and shape.
-  Sort the washing by colours - pair the socks or count and match the clothes pegs.
-  Talk about time to get up or go to bed, time for breakfast or dinner or time to play outdoors.
-  Make models together.
-  Measure their height - talk about how much they have grown.
-  Use language like heavy, light, longer than, shorter than and behind, in front, under, on top, below or above.

***For more information go to:***

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand)

## ***Reading with your child - It's never too early to start reading with your baby!***

Reading is essential for your child's success. Children who read outside class are 5 times more likely to read above the expected level for their age.

-  Set aside some time - find somewhere quiet - turn off the screen and put your own phone away.
-  Ask your child to choose a book - sharing books they have chosen shows you care what they think.
-  Sit close together - encourage your child to hold the book themselves and/or turn the pages.
-  Encourage them to tell you the story by looking at the pictures - it is an excellent way for you to get to know each other or discuss difficult issues.
-  Give your child plenty of time to respond - ask them what they think will happen next, how a character might be feeling or how the book makes them feel.
-  Make your own scrapbook to "read" together with pictures of special family events.
-  Let your child see you reading a book, newspaper or magazine.










And lastly, above all - make it fun! It doesn't matter how you read with a child, as long as you both enjoy the time together. Don't be afraid to use funny voices - children love this!

***For more information go to:***

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand)

## ***Encouraging positive behaviour***

Getting along with both children and adults in a group environment is a very important part of helping your child get ready for learning/school.

-  Praise your child when they make good choices, eg taking turns and waiting patiently for their turn.
-  Address inappropriate behaviour immediately and calmly.
-  Get down to their level - it helps them to focus on what you are saying.
-  Set basic rules and stick to them. It is most helpful if all carers in their life have the same expectations.
-  Setting regular times to go to bed and rise in the morning helps children get the rest they need and feel secure.
-  Consider why your child is misbehaving and respond appropriately. Are they tired, hungry, bored, wanting your attention or unwell?
-  Help cope with tantrums by discussing afterwards, what helps your child feel better when experiencing frustration or anger.
-  Attending pre-school or toddler groups gives children the opportunity to learn and socialise with others from an early age.
-  Make sure your child attends nursery/pre-school every day to ensure consistency and familiarity.

***For more information go to:***

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand)

## ***Emotional well-being***

Physical and mental health are key to your child's wellbeing. Small changes can make a big difference in helping your child stay healthy and make positive choices in life.

- ★ Talk to your child about how they are feeling and how you are feeling.
- ★ Listen and accept your child's concerns - this is not the same as giving into their demands.
- ★ Give your child the words to describe feelings like "happy" or "sad", "disappointed", "frustrated", "excited" or "surprised".
- ★ Talk about feelings and what might cause them: "You are feeling happy - is it because we're going to the park?".
- ★ Talk about positive experiences of siblings, family or friends.
- ★ Reassure and comfort with a cuddle, showing the love that you have for your child.










If you have concerns or would like further advice on your child expressing their emotions or their physical well-being, you can contact your GP or local health visitor for support.

***For more information go to:***

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand)



## ***Physical well-being***









-  Physical activity/play is important no matter what your age. Make time for play whenever you can.
-  Get your child to try to dress/undress to develop their independence.
-  Encourage your child to put out their own cereal/butter their own toast.
-  Choose tooth friendly snacks, eg fresh fruit, bread, water in place of sugary drinks/snacks.
-  Encourage your child to make healthy choices in their diet.
-  Letting them choose which vegetables will be served with their meal, or using the colour and shape of fruit and vegetables to make a meal look more attractive will encourage them to eat healthily.
-  Encourage your child to get involved with preparing food. Setting the table or washing some vegetables helps them feel involved and teaches key skills.
-  Make sure your child brushes their teeth regularly.
-  Wash hands before every meal and after using the toilet - encourage your child to do this independently.

***For more information go to:***

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand)

## Using digital devices sensibly

Digital technology has become a major influence in our lives. Managing technology well can help to ensure that it has a positive impact on your child, and can help avoid potential problems. Give your child your full attention and don't let your phone interrupt your interactions with your child.

-  Adopt a routine and stick to it, eg no devices at mealtimes or after 6 pm as they can disrupt conversation and your child's sleep patterns.
-  Limit screen time and remove all devices from the bedroom at night - *balance, supervision and moderation* are key.
-  Be selective about what they watch and what you watch in front of them.
-  Play with your child on their devices to avoid it becoming a solitary activity.
-  Ensure the necessary filters and protection are updated - they keep your child safe.
-  Work as a TEAM - *Talk Explore Agree Manage* what your family does online.
-  Always log out of your own online accounts and clear your browsing history as even news reports can cause distress to young children.
-  Limit the time you spend on digital devices around your children.

***For more information go to:***

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand)

## **Useful Links**

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand)

[www.gettingreadytolearn.co.uk](http://www.gettingreadytolearn.co.uk)

[www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/healthy-child-healthy-future-speech-and-language-therapy-children](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/healthy-child-healthy-future-speech-and-language-therapy-children)

Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) development:  
<http://talkingpoint.org.uk>

Digital Technology:

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/go-on-ni](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/go-on-ni)

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/play-matters](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/play-matters)

<https://www.librariesni.org.uk/sites/radh/Pages/default.aspx>

For advice and support on all parenting issues - call Parenting NI on 0808 8010 722 or visit:

[www.parentingni.org](http://www.parentingni.org) or [www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk)

See also:

[http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/steps\\_for\\_stress\\_leaflet\\_02\\_2016.pdf](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/steps_for_stress_leaflet_02_2016.pdf)

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/dealing-with-difficult-behaviour/>

***For more information go to:***

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/helping-hand)

Don't overshare information and images of your child. See <http://www.westerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/Sharenting%20Booklet.pdf>

Use safe search engines such as Swiggle, Kiddle or Safe Search Kids. Safe search settings can also be applied on YouTube.

Ensure you are aware of the safeguarding issues around online playing. See <https://parentzone.org.uk/>

Visit the NSPCC website for more information about setting family agreements ([www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk))

Parental controls should always be used to block inappropriate content. For help with these on all devices, no matter who the service provider is, contact the NSPCC & 02 helpline on 0808 800 5002.

Credit to colleagues in the Health and Social Care Board, Western Health and Social Care Trust and the Public Health Agency for their help and advice with the development of this leaflet: <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/playing-parents-number-one-three-posters>

***For more information go to:***

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Please note: This is a general leaflet which provides advice, in each section, across a wide range of child development. Children develop the skills outlined in this leaflet at different ages and stages. If you have particular concerns about your child's development and want to speak to someone, always ask a relevant professional for advice.