



## 5 Secrets to a Smarter Baby: School Readiness Can Start Now

As parents, we all want happy, healthy babies. Not only that, we want them to be smart.

Growing research in early brain development shows there are some basic things you can do right now to start raising a child who is curious about the world and ready to learn. These early education activities we're talking about are simple—and screen free!



The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends (<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/3/e20162293>) parents talk with their pediatrician about how to create a supportive, stimulating environment for their baby—starting at birth—that promotes healthy brain development and builds the social and emotional skills necessary for school readiness.

### Use the "5 Rs of Early Education" in your daily activities right from birth:

#### 1. READ together as a daily, fun, family activity.

- The AAP recommends (<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/134/2/404>) this to build language, literacy, and social-emotional skills that last a lifetime. It's never too young to start reading with your baby. Reading to your child, research (<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/136/3/466>) suggests, boosts activity in parts of the brain that form the building blocks of language, literacy skills and imagination.

#### 2. RHYME, play, talk, sing, and cuddle together often throughout the day.

- The AAP encourages parents to use play to help meet their child's health and developmental milestones, beginning from birth. Need ideas? Here (</English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Caution-Children-at-Play.aspx>) are some great ways to do this based on your child's age. Talk with them about things they see around them, at home, at the store, or while traveling. Enroll in quality early education programs and activities (</English/family-life/work-play/Pages/Why-Quality-Matters-in-Early-Child-Care.aspx>), take time to visit a children's museum or local library, and enjoy story time.

#### 3. Build ROUTINES for meals, play, and sleep.

- This helps children know what to expect and what is expected of them. Brush, Book, Bed (</English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Brush-Book-Bed.aspx>), for example, is a great way to structure your child's nighttime routine. Eating at least three family meals (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/Mealtime-as-Family-Time.aspx>) together each week is associated with healthier kids, according to a study (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/04/27/peds.2010-1440.short>) published in *Pediatrics*.

## 4. REWARD everyday successes (especially for effort toward goals like helping others).

- Catch your child doing something good and praise them for it! Praise from those closest to a child is a very powerful reward. Talk with your pediatrician about how to shape and manage your child's behavior (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/How-to-Shape-Manage-Young-Child-Behavior.aspx>), model the good behavior, and reinforce it by using positive discipline (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Disciplining-Your-Child.aspx>) techniques that build a child's self-regulation skills. Your child's social, emotional, and behavior skills are equally critical to school success (</English/ages-stages/preschool/Pages/Is-Your-Child-Ready-for-School.aspx>).

## 5. Develop RELATIONSHIPS that are nurturing, respectful, and consistent.

- A strong parent-child relationship helps protect against the lasting effects of adverse childhood experiences (</English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/ACEs-Adverse-Childhood-Experiences.aspx>) (ACEs), traumatic situations that can lower a child's chance of doing well in school (<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2019/07/04/peds.2018-2945>). As you strive to teach your child about healthy relationships and choosing friends (</English/family-life/work-play/Pages/what-parents-can-do-to-support-friendships.aspx>) wisely, don't forget to model them in your own life. Demonstrating good relationships skills with your spouse or partner, and taking time to nurture close friendships with others, is as important as simply talking about these skills--if not more so.

## You are your baby's best teacher.

A certain toy is not necessary for your child to reach his or her next developmental milestone. There is no one app that will teach your child to read. While it's easy to fall victim to the marketing, YOU are what your child needs to start on the path toward school readiness with daily reading, rhyming, routines, rewards, and relationship building.

## Additional Information:

- Is Your Preschooler Ready for Kindergarten? (</English/ages-stages/preschool/Pages/Is-Your-Child-Ready-for-School.aspx>)
- The Power of Play - How Fun and Games Help Children Thrive (</English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Caution-Children-at-Play.aspx>)
- Toy Buying Tips for Babies & Young Children: AAP Report Explained (</English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/What-to-Look-for-in-a-Toy.aspx>)
- Toy Buying Tips for Children with Special Needs (</English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Toy-Buying-Tips-for-Children-with-Special-Needs.aspx>)
- Healthy Digital Media Use Habits for Babies, Toddlers & Preschoolers (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/healthy-digital-media-use-habits-for-babies-toddlers-preschoolers.aspx>)
- School Readiness (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2019-1766>) (AAP Technical Report)

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