

# We All Have a Number Story

Your Child's First Chapters

Understanding, Preventing, and Healing  
from Adverse Childhood Experiences  
(ACEs) & Promoting the Positive Parenting  
of Children Ages 0 to 5



# About the Toolkit

This toolkit is the project of a partnership between the ACE Resource Network and American Society for the Positive Care of Children. “We All Have a Number Story: Your Child’s First Chapters” is unique in its framework around the lasting impacts our own childhood experiences may have on us as parents and caregivers - how our children may be affected, how their early years count, and how we can help provide a strong start for our kids and families even through tough times and challenging situations.

Part One of this toolkit provides information on addressing and preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), childhood adversity, and toxic stress. Part Two spans the development and positive parenting of babies and children ages 0 to 5, during the most critical stages of early development. The toolkit aims to equip parents and caregivers with valuable information to help us understand and meet our children’s needs, develop their strengths, and nurture their growth - while providing the opportunity to reflect on the potential lasting impacts of our own childhood experiences and be supported in our journeys as people and parents.

Our hope is that this foundation will help us better understand and care for ourselves and our little ones, encourage us to seek and connect with resources and community, and offer new approaches as we help create the first chapters in our children’s lives, and the next pages of our own stories.



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# We All Have a Number Story

Understanding, Preventing, and  
Healing from Adverse Childhood  
Experiences (ACEs)



# We All Have a Number Story



## Understanding, Preventing, and Healing from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Most of us experienced some adversity in our childhoods. Some of us are aware of the ways we may still be impacted. Maybe we've worked on some of our own stuff, but parenting is bringing up new issues, or issues from our past. Whatever our journey, understanding our stories—what happened to us, and how we may be impacted today—can help us improve our own well-being and better support our children.

# What Are ACEs?

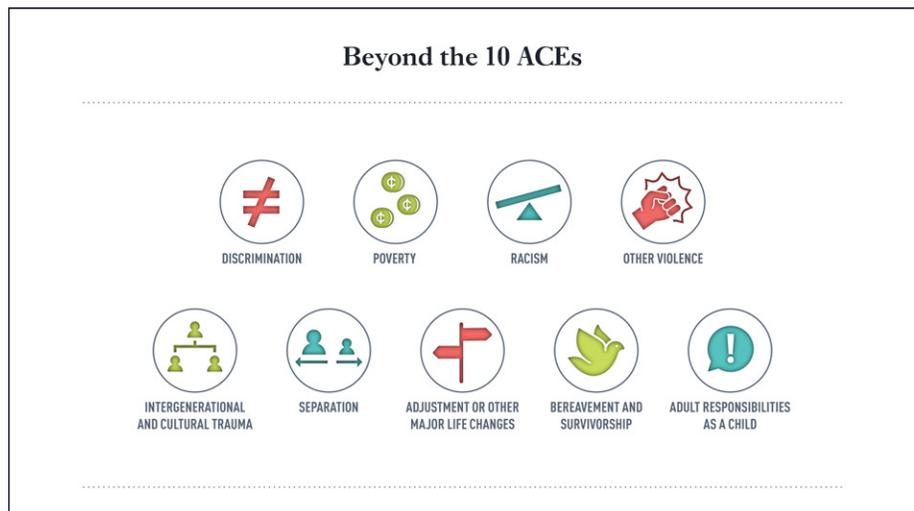
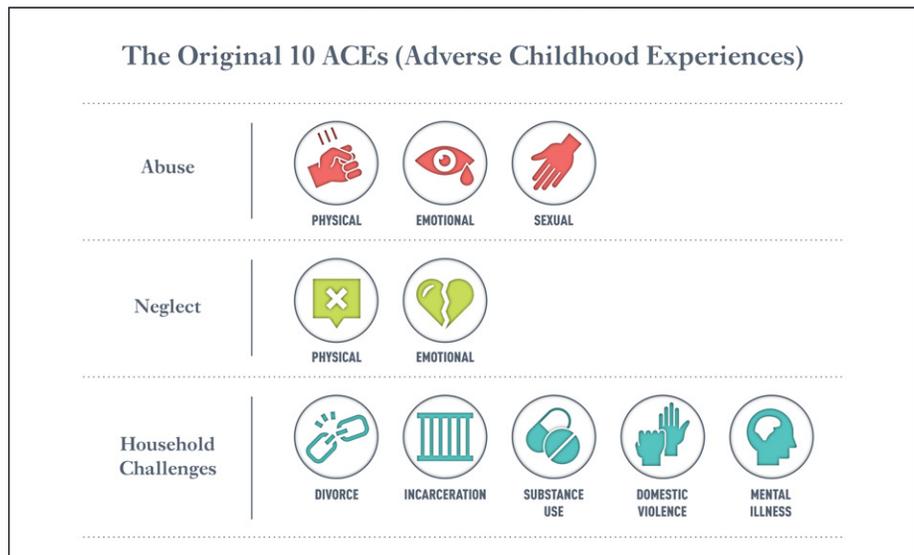
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful experiences that can happen to any of us before we turn 18. They're not our fault, and we didn't have control over when or why they happened. They can be a single event, or an ongoing struggle where our safety, security, trust, or sense of self is threatened or violated.

The ACEs study included ten types of stressful or traumatic events.

Nearly two out of three adults reported experiencing at least one type of ACE, and more than one in five adults reported experiencing three or more ACEs. The study found that ACEs can negatively impact physical, mental, behavioral, and emotional development, and can have lasting effects on health and well-being throughout life.

Check out [this infographic](#) to learn more.

These 10 ACEs are not the only kind of adversities we may face as children. Discrimination, poverty, racism and other common experiences can have similar impacts as ACEs.



# What Is Toxic Stress?

Stress on its own isn't a bad thing. Some stress is **positive**—like when taking a big test or playing an important sports game. **Tolerable** stress is more intense, like when experiencing a big loss or life change. As children, supportive adults, environments, and activities can buffer this stress and make it easier for us to process.

The stress response turns **toxic** when a challenging situation doesn't end, or we don't have enough support early in life to help us process. When our stress response stays active too long, it can hurt our body and brain and affect our behavior.

ACEs and toxic stress change how we function, not just how we feel. They are especially impactful to the brain from birth to age 3, although toxic stress can impact the brain as it continues to develop into our early 20s, and throughout our lifetime.

Toxic stress affects the way our brain and body respond to and process things. We can become more wired for protection than for connection. This can make it hard for us to steady our emotions and behaviors. It can make concentrating and learning more challenging. And it can make us feel anxious and on-guard even when we're safe.



# How ACEs and Toxic Stress Can Change Us

Science shows that the higher our ACE score, the greater the odds are that we may experience health issues like cancer, diabetes, depression, stroke, and heart disease. Most of the leading causes of death are associated with ACEs.

If we experienced significant adversity or trauma and toxic stress without interventions and positive support, there can be more barriers for us in school, work, or relationships, and we can experience more health conditions that may even impact how long we live. Despite the odds, many of us have found ways to feel better and live the lives we want for ourselves - and science tells us that healing is possible.

ACEs, childhood adversity, and the effects of toxic stress can be passed on to future generations through:

- **Biology:** Toxic stress can change how our brains develop and function. It can disrupt our immune, endocrine, and metabolic systems. It can disrupt our DNA, "tagging" certain high-risk genes as "on" or protective ones as "off."
- **Behavior:** We can learn and pass on patterns like abuse or neglect, or coping behaviors like smoking or substance use.

Healing, strength, and resilience can also be passed down from generation to generation.



# The Story of Your Number

Our ACE history doesn't represent the whole equation. Positive childhood experiences—like nurturing and supportive relationships, environments, and activities—can protect us and prevent lasting harms, helping keep stress tolerable rather than toxic.

No matter what our pasts were like, we have the power to heal from the effects of toxic stress. We have the power to help prevent ACEs and support the children in our lives.

## **ACEs do not define who we are.**

Our stories aren't fully written yet. It's up to us to decide what's in the next chapter.



# Caring for Kids

Prevention in Early Childhood



# Prevention in Early Childhood

Caring for kids is one of the most important—and challenging—jobs on the planet. The reality is that our kids face adversity, or maybe trauma, despite our efforts to protect them. Understanding ACEs—and our own ACE histories—can help us better support our kids.

The first few years of a child's life are especially important for development. Millions of connections are being made that shape the brain and every system in the body. How we pay attention and respond play a big part in how our babies develop.

Babies' brains develop through interaction. When babies and young children send out signals that don't get a response or are met with negative feedback that overwhelms their capacity to safely process, their brain development can be disrupted. If the situation becomes chronic, the child's stress response may become elevated, further affecting development.

The good news is that there are things we can do to make young children feel supported and safe. We can encourage healthy brain development and a solid sense of self, which benefit our children's health and well-being throughout their lives.

## Need help?

Parenting infants and young children can be especially stressful. Children ages zero to three have the highest rate of neglect and abuse of any age group, and babies in their first year of life are most at risk. If you feel overwhelmed, please know that you're not alone. It's okay to ask for help. We all need help sometimes. Get immediate support by contacting the Crisis Text Line for free counseling 24/7 by texting the word ACES to 741741.

The Crying Baby Hotline is available at 1-866-243-2229 for 24/7 support.

# Frequently Asked Questions on Raising Kids and ACEs

## How early can my child be impacted by ACEs?

No child is too young to be affected by ACEs. Babies are more vulnerable than any other age group. Their brains are developing rapidly through every new experience and encounter. ACEs and toxic stress can cause developmental challenges, along with a host of other cascading effects, as babies and toddlers grow, especially if they're not surrounded by safe, nurturing relationships and environments.

## Is it always obvious if my child is affected by ACEs or toxic stress?

ACEs can be impactful even if they don't appear to cause harm in the moment. When kids don't have their needs met over a period of time, they may demonstrate a lack of focus and inability to concentrate that can result in an ADHD diagnosis. When kids witness interpersonal violence between adults, they may develop asthma. When a caregiver's anger boils over frequently, with screaming and a loss of emotional control – even without any contact – the results may be as harmful biologically to children as physical abuse.

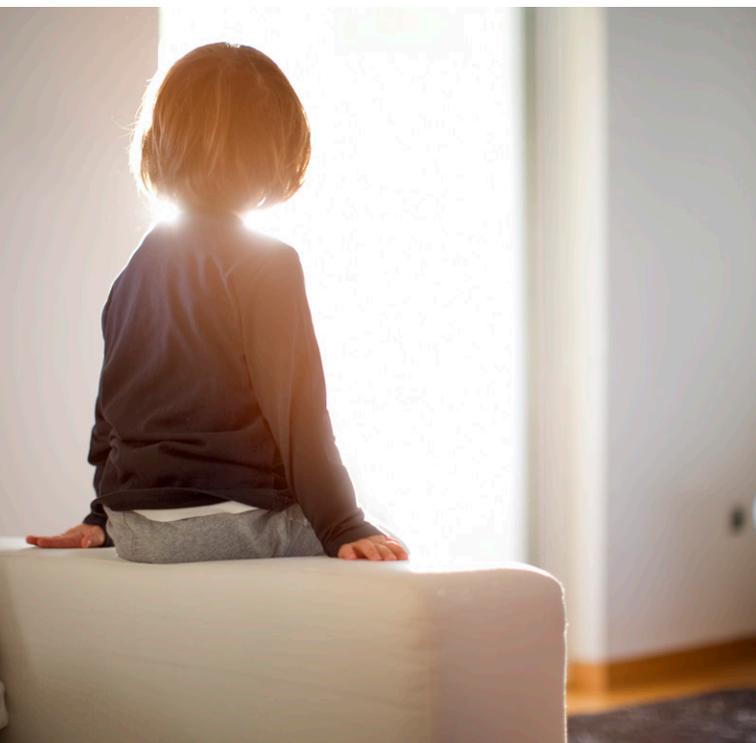
## As a parent with ACEs, how do I cope during stressful situations - like a big transition, or an ongoing crisis?

When situations in the present feel overwhelming and out of our control, they can activate similar feelings from past traumas. As parents with ACEs, we likely felt like things were too much or not in our control when we were growing up.

Recognizing and acknowledging these feelings is an important first step. Then we can take some time to focus on the things we can control. The key is to break things down into simple steps that we can control to reduce our stress hormones.

Sometimes what we can control is tiny – maybe even as simple as [focusing on our breath](#). Pick one thing to start with, something within your reach today. Check out the strategies on page 19 or [here](#) for more ideas.

# Potential Signs of Stress in Early Childhood



There are signals that may mean our child is experiencing stress and could use some extra support. While these can also be normal behaviors, if you notice they seem intense or that your child is experiencing several of these behaviors, consider talking with your child's doctor.

- Fear of being alone
- Bad dreams
- Speech difficulties
- Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting after having learned to use the toilet
- Change in appetite
- Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors

# Building Resilience



# Building Resilience

**Resilience** is the ability to recover from difficult and stressful situations. We can help our kids navigate tough times in positive ways. While some of the adversity or trauma our kids face is outside of our control, we can help them reduce and manage the stress they experience. This can help lead to healthier and better outcomes for their lives now and in the future.

One of the most important things we can do for our kids is provide a safe environment to process what they're thinking and feeling. The key to creating that space is managing our own stress, by modeling how we take care of and calm ourselves. This is called co-regulation, and it's critical to our child's ability to calm themselves (self-regulate) as they get older.



# Tipping the Balance

Think of a scale on which a child's positive and negative experiences get stacked up as they grow. On one side are positive experiences - like attentive caregivers, supportive environments, access to health care and nutrition. The other side of the scale holds negative experiences - ACEs, racism, poverty, and other adversities that can cause toxic stress.

When the scale tips in a positive direction throughout childhood - especially early childhood - we're more likely to experience good health, academic success, strong relationships, and economic security throughout life. These odds are less likely when the scale tips the other way.

The genes we're born with are like the starting position of the fulcrum, or balance point, of the

scale: some of us are born more or less sensitive to the effects of toxic stress than others. The position of the fulcrum affects how much leverage positive or negative experiences have in shaping our life outcomes.

Experiences can change how our genes are expressed. Over time, supportive relationships and interactions can shift the fulcrum in a more resilient direction, so that we're better prepared to bounce back from life's hardships.

We can't prevent every negative experience our children may face. However, we can do our best to provide positive supports to help them through tough times, and to tip the balance toward positive life outcomes for their futures.



Source: The Brain Story/Patix Foundation

# Tools for Stressful Early Childhood Moments



# Building a Stress-Busting Family Routine

Routines help kids feel safe and nurtured in their environment. Predictability and structure allow kids to develop and grow in ways that will help them get through tough times, now and in the future.

## Make it consistent:

Consistent wake-up and bedtimes, regular mealtimes and snacks, quiet time for reading, and time for movement are important basics. Hygiene – bathing, brushing teeth, and getting dressed – are also important to schedule for health and well-being.

## Don't forget play:

Play is an essential part of a kid's "job." Build in time for self-expression, creativity, and imaginative play. These activities are critical for behavior, learning and development.

## Include stress-busting strategies:

Practicing the strategies on the following pages (also found [here](#)) over time can help prevent and decrease changes made to the body by toxic stress, and boost our overall well-being.

# Preventing, Healing, and Reducing the Effects of ACEs and Toxic Stress

These strategies are proven to have powerful effects on our brain and body - especially when practiced over time. They can help us with our own stress and healing journeys, and when introduced as part of our children's lives early, they can help them manage tough times and promote their well-being.

**Supportive relationships** are vital to development for our kids, and can help us heal and build resilience.

- Encourage connections to supportive, trusted adults.
- Find meaningful ways to be part of the community together, like volunteering.
- Spend high-quality family time together. Try making art, cooking, or playing games.
- Help kids get involved in activities with peers like art, theatre, music, or sports. During the pandemic, this may mean getting creative at a distance or online at times.
- Help kids stay connected to friends and family with video chats, creating video messages, or making cards to send.

**Mindfulness** is awareness in the moment without judgment. It boosts our focus and mood, helps us control impulses, and decreases anxiety.

- Take moments to notice and talk about how you and your child are feeling, physically and emotionally.
- Talk about or draw things you and your child are grateful for each day.
- Try meditation or a calming practice. Try meditations designed to do with very young children.

# Preventing, Healing, and Reducing the Effects of ACEs and Toxic Stress

**Healthy sleep** provides an important foundation for our well-being at every age.

- Create a regular bedtime routine.
- Read a book to or with your child before bed.
- Create a calm, quiet place for sleep, if possible.

**Nourishment** can help combat stress at any age.

- Plan regular times for meals and snacks. It's helpful for kids to know what to expect.
- Many of us are facing tough times. For help finding food resources in your community, call 2-1-1, visit [211.org](http://211.org), or text "stress" to 211211.

**Movement** helps us release stress hormones and express ourselves, and can boost our energy, flexibility, and mood.

- Movement can be anything we enjoy. Try to get the family in on the fun - dance parties, Simon Says, silly stretches, whatever works!

**Mental and behavioral health support** can benefit us all. Support each other as a family, and seek help from your community, your doctor, or another expert if you need it.

- Have open conversations as a family about emotional and mental health.
- If you don't have a regular mental health professional and feel like it's time to [seek help for you](#) or [your child](#), here are [some resources](#) to help you [get started](#).
- If you're struggling with meeting your family's needs, call 2-1-1, visit [211.org](http://211.org), or text "stress" to 211211 for help getting connected to resources in your community. You don't have to handle everything on your own.

**Connect to nature** to boost everyone's health and well-being. Being in nature increases memory, focus, and happiness, while reducing stress and pain.

- Get outside in a safe place if you can. Enjoy a picnic, look at the sky, or take a walk.
- If your access is limited, explore new places online or in a documentary as a family. Listen to nature sounds while creating drawings or telling stories set in nature.

# Your Child's First Chapters

Promoting the Positive Parenting of  
Children Ages 0 to 5



# Positive Parenting

Many of us find ourselves parenting the way we were parented, for better or worse. We may know what we don't want to do, but aren't as sure how to parent a different way. Positive parenting is guided by sensitivity to our child's needs, an understanding of their development, and conscious choices that reflect our values and celebrate our child's strengths and capacity to learn and grow.

## 4 Keys to Positive Parenting

### Positive Parenting is...

**Effective:** Your words and actions are responsive to your child's needs as they learn and grow.

**Consistent:** You follow similar principles or practices in your words and actions.

**Attentive:** You pay attention to what goes on in your child's life.

**Active:** You actively participate and are involved in your child's life.

Parenting is a full-time job, full of joys, trials, challenges, and triumphs. There is no doubt that parenting can be rewarding and exhausting all at the same time. No parent is perfect.

Our relationships with our children have powerful effects on their emotional well-being, basic coping and problem-solving abilities, and future capacity for relationships.

When we're sensitive to their needs and respond with predictable care, our children develop the skills they need for the future.

No matter how we were raised, we can be empowered to learn and develop positive parenting skills. We can take the lead in guiding our children's healthy development and act as positive role models. We can mentor and guide our children with positive support throughout childhood, providing the foundation for future well-being.

# Positive Parenting

## 3 Major Goals of Parenting

Caring for children's health and safety

Preparing children for adult lives

Sharing cultural values

A high-quality caregiver-child relationship is critical for healthy development.

As parents and caregivers, we help children stay healthy and safe, equip them with skills and resources for adulthood, and share basic cultural values with them.

We offer our children love, acceptance, appreciation, encouragement, and guidance.

We nurture and protect children as they develop their personalities and identities, and as they mature physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially.



### To build positive relationships with our children, we do our best to:

1. Respond to our children in a manner appropriate to their age and stage, and sensitive to their individual needs.
2. Pay attention to our children's contact with their surrounding world.
3. Mentor our children to support and encourage their growth and well-being.
4. Model behaviors to provide a consistent, positive example for our children.

# New Parents



# New Parents

Becoming a new parent is exciting and enjoyable, but it can also be stressful. We can easily become overwhelmed and confused learning how to meet our own needs, the needs of a new baby, and navigating the routines of daily life. It's important to know that new parents frequently experience postnatal depression and anxiety. Taking care of ourselves is essential, including eating well, getting plenty of sleep, and addressing any emotions that arise.

## Tips for new parents/caregivers:

- Approach the first few months as a fourth trimester. Your baby is adapting to a whole new world, and you and your body are recovering and adapting to a new lifestyle. Be kind to yourself, and patient with your baby. A gentle approach can help soothe and ease your baby - and yourself - through this transition.
- Give yourself permission to ask for and accept help. It may be useful to make a list of things friends and family could do that are actually helpful to you (like dropping off meals, doing simple household chores, dropping off groceries, or going with you and baby to early doctor's visits).
- Have a plan for the baby's arrival and the weeks following - and be flexible and adaptable. Most plans change, but it's good to have basic preparations in place.
- Release any pressure to have visitors until you feel ready. Let go of any expectations you may have around housework and know that the well-being of you and your baby take priority.
- A routine may be helpful for both you and your baby.

# Infant Bonding, Attachment, & Development

The quality of our interactions with our infants is a key element in their development of a secure attachment, and it influences the child's emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development. Understanding our baby's development can help us maintain realistic expectations of their behavior. Babies can't soothe themselves or explain their needs using words during the first year. Crying is often a signal that our baby needs us for food, sleep, comfort, or reassurance.

Every parent needs help, especially with newborns. Reach out to your friends and family and ask for help when you could use some extra support. If your infant is unresponsive or indifferent, seek professional help right away.



# Infant Bonding, Attachment, & Development



## Serve and Return

“Serve and return” is the process of paying attention to the cues our baby sends and responding in a supportive, encouraging way. Babies send out signals - like looking or pointing, or certain types of crying or faces they make. These are “serves,” and our role is to catch and return them. Finding blocks of time to give our full attention - without screens or distractions - can be helpful. “Returning the serve” means reacting in a supportive, engaging way. If they point to a ball, we can pick it up and say, “are you looking at this ball?” These exchanges build our bonds, help them process thoughts and learn language, and encourage them to explore the world while feeling secure and supported.

## How Play Helps Babies Develop

Early play is an extension of “serve and return.” Simple games like peekaboo and pat-a-cake are more than fun. They’re literally building our baby’s brain circuitry in a powerful way. As our babies and very young children develop, playing together helps all of us – kids and families – grow and thrive.

While we play with our kids, we connect and deepen our bond. Play helps develop core life skills, like planning, problem-solving, coordination, collaboration, rule-following, flexibility, and negotiation. We don’t need a lot of space, toys, or fancy equipment. Imagination enables exploration and growth in social, emotional, motor, and cognitive skills. Play can help kids practice coping skills, while reducing our stress. As children grow, play helps them process experiences and express themselves.

# Ages & Stages

Developmental Milestones and Tips  
on Positive Parenting, Safety, and  
Health



# Developmental Milestones

**Developmental milestones** are things most children can do within a certain age range. Children reach milestones in how they play, learn, speak, behave, and move (like crawling, walking, or jumping).

Some children develop at rates that vary from within typical ranges. They may meet some milestones within typical ranges and others much later. Some develop typically for a while then slow down, stop, or even reverse in their skill-building. These are examples of **developmental delay**. The causes of developmental delay may be unknown, or may include prematurity, medical issues, trauma, an environment that isn't meeting a child's needs, or other factors.

All children are unique. *If you're concerned about your child's development, discuss it with their health care provider.*



# Infants (0-12 Months)

## Baby's First Year Milestones

Skills such as pulling up to stand, smiling for the first time, waving “bye-bye,” and playing games like pat-a-cake are called developmental milestones.

In the first year, babies learn to focus their vision, reach out, explore, and learn about the things that are around them. They begin the learning process of memory, language, thinking, and reasoning - together called cognitive development. Babies learn language not only through making sounds (“babble”), and saying words like “ma-ma,” but also

through listening, understanding, and learning the names of people and things.

During this stage, babies are also developing ways to show emotions as part of social and emotional development. Babies are starting to show facial expressions, like happy, sad, angry, and surprised. They seem happy to see us, smile on their own to get our attention, and chuckle when we try to make them laugh. The way we cuddle, hold, and play with our baby serves as the foundation for how our child will interact with others.

## Positive Parenting Tips for Infants

- Talk to your baby. They will find your voice calming.
- Answer when your baby makes sounds by repeating the sounds and adding words. This will help him learn to use language.
- Read to your baby. This will help her develop and understand language and sounds.
- Sing to your baby and play music. This will help your baby develop a love for music and will help their brain development.
- Praise your baby and give her lots of loving attention.
- Spend time cuddling and holding your baby. This will help him feel cared for and secure.
- Play with your baby when she's alert and relaxed. Watch your baby closely for signs of being tired or fussy so that she can take a break from playing.
- Distract your baby with toys and move him to safe areas when he starts moving and touching things that he shouldn't touch.
- Take care of yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally. Parenting is hard work! It is easier to enjoy your new baby and be a positive, loving parent when you are feeling good yourself.

# Infants (0-12 Months)

## Child Safety for Infants

- Do not shake your baby - ever! Babies have very weak neck muscles that are not yet able to support their heads. If you shake your baby, you can damage his brain or even cause his death.
- Make sure you always put your baby to sleep on her back to prevent sudden infant death syndrome (commonly known as SIDS).
- Protect your baby and family from secondhand smoke. Do not allow anyone to smoke in your home.
- Place your baby in a rear-facing car seat in the back seat while he is riding in a car.
- Prevent your baby from choking by cutting her food into small bites. Also, don't let her play with small toys and other things that might be easy for her to swallow.
- Don't allow your baby to play with anything that might cover their face.
- Never carry hot liquids or foods near your baby or while holding him.
- Vaccines are important to protect your child's health and safety. Because children can contract serious diseases, it is important that children receive the right shots at the right time. Talk with your child's health care provider to make sure that your child is protected.

## Healthy Bodies for Infants

- Handle your baby very gently - especially their head and neck. Their weak neck muscles can't yet support their heads, and they need to be held and moved with lots of support and care.
- Keep your baby active. She might not be able to run and play like the "big kids" just yet, but there's lots she can do to keep her little arms and legs moving throughout the day. Getting down on the floor to move helps your baby become strong, learn, and explore.
- Try not to keep your baby in swings, strollers, bouncer seats, and exercise saucers for too long.
- Limit screen time to a minimum. For children younger than 2 years of age, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that babies do not watch any screen media.

# Toddlers (1-3 Years)

## Developmental Milestones

Skills such as taking a first step, taking turns, playing make-believe, and kicking a ball are called developmental milestones.

## Toddlers (1-2 Years of Age)

At 15 months, toddlers are developing bonds of love and trust with their parents or caregivers and others as part of social and emotional development. During this stage they start to show affection (hugs, cuddles, or kisses).

During the second year, toddlers are moving around more, and are aware of themselves and their surroundings. They show an increasing desire to explore new objects and people.

During this stage, toddlers show greater independence, begin to show defiant behavior, recognize themselves in pictures or a mirror, and imitate the behavior of others, especially adults and older children.

Toddlers also begin to recognize the names of familiar people and objects, say at least two words together, like "more milk," and follow simple instructions and directions.

## Toddlers (2-3 Years of Age)

Because of children's growing desire to be independent, this stage is often called the "terrible twos." However, this can be an exciting time for parents and toddlers.

Toddlers experience significant thinking, learning, social, and emotional changes that help them explore and make sense of their world.

During this stage, toddlers are able to follow two- or three-step directions, sort objects by shape and color, imitate the actions of adults and playmates, and express a wide range of emotions.

# Toddlers (1-3 Years)

## Positive Parenting Tips for Toddlers

- Set up a special time to read books with your toddler.
- Encourage your child to take part in pretend play.
- Play parade or follow the leader with your toddler.
- Help your child to explore things around them by taking a walk or wagon ride.
- Encourage your child to tell you their name and age.
- Teach your child simple songs like Itsy Bitsy Spider, or other children's songs.
- Give your child attention and praise when she follows instructions and shows positive behavior, and try to understand her point of view during challenging behavior like tantrums. Regulate your own feelings before responding, and model ways to express big feelings.



# Toddlers (1-3 Years)

## Child Safety for Toddlers

- ALWAYS provide adult supervision for your toddler near or around water (for example, bathtubs, pools, kiddie pools, ponds, lakes, whirlpools, or the ocean). Fence off backyard pools. Drowning is the leading cause of injury and death among this age group.
- Encourage your toddler to sit when eating and to chew food thoroughly to prevent choking.
- Check toys often for loose or broken parts.
- Encourage your toddler not to put pencils or crayons in their mouth when coloring or drawing.
- Do NOT hold hot drinks while your child is sitting on your lap. Sudden movements can cause a spill and might result in burns.
- Make sure that your child sits in the back seat and is buckled up properly in a safety-approved car seat with a harness.

## Healthy Bodies for Toddlers

- Talk with staff at your child care provider to find out if they serve healthy food and drinks and limit screen time.
- Your toddler's food preferences might change from day to day. It's normal behavior, and it's best not to make an issue of it. Encourage them to try new foods by offering small bites to taste.
- Limit screen time, including video and electronic games, to no more than 1 to 2 hours per day.
- Encourage free play as much as possible. It helps your toddler develop strength and motor skills.



# Preschoolers (3-5 Years)

## Developmental Milestones for Preschoolers

Skills such as naming colors, showing affection, and hopping on one foot are called developmental milestones.

As children grow into early childhood, their world begins to open up. They become more independent and begin to focus more on adults and children outside of the family.

They want to explore and ask questions about the environment around them. Their interactions with family and caregivers help shape their personality and world views.

During this stage, children ride a tricycle, use safety scissors, help to dress and undress themselves, play with other children, recall part of a story, and sing a song.

## Positive Parenting Tips for Preschoolers

- Continue to read to your child. Nurture their love for books by taking them to the library or bookstore.
- Let your child help with simple chores.
- Encourage your child to play with other children. This helps them learn the value of sharing and friendship.
- Be clear and consistent with your child. Explain and show behaviors you expect. Whenever you tell your child no, follow up with a positive option instead.
- Help your child develop good language skills by speaking to them in complete sentences and using “grown up” words. Help them use correct words and phrases.
- When they are upset, help them calm themselves first. Then help your child through problem-solving steps.
- Give your child a limited number of simple choices (for example, deciding what to wear, when to play, and what to eat for snack).

# Preschoolers (3-5 Years)

## Child Safety for Preschoolers

- Watch or supervise your child at all times, especially when they are playing outside.
- Tell your child why it is important to stay out of traffic. Tell them not to play in the street or run after stray balls.
- Be cautious when letting your child ride a tricycle. Keep them on the sidewalk and away from the street and always ensure your child wears a helmet.
- Check outdoor playground equipment. Make sure there are no loose parts or sharp edges.
- Teach your child how to be safe around strangers.
- Be safe in the water. Even if your child learns to swim, actively supervise them at all times when in or around any body of water (including kiddie pools).
- Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness until they reach the top height or weight limit allowed by the car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it will be time for them to travel in a booster seat, still in the back seat of the vehicle. For more, visit the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](https://www.nhtsa.gov/).

## Healthy Bodies for Preschoolers

- Eat meals with your child whenever possible. Let your child see you enjoying fruits, vegetables, and whole grains at meals and snacks. Your child should eat and drink only a limited amount of food and beverages that contain added sugars, solid fats, or salt.
- Limit screen time for your child to no more than 1 to 2 hours per day of quality programming, at home, school, or child care.
- Provide your child with age-appropriate play equipment, like balls and plastic bats, but let your child choose what to play. This makes moving and being active more fun.



## A Brighter Future Starts Here!

American Society for the Positive Care of Children (American SPCC) was formed in 2011 as a first-of-its-kind 501 (c)(3) nonprofit dedicated solely to the prevention of child maltreatment and raising awareness of the lifelong impacts of adverse childhood experiences. We believe this is possible by providing parents with educational tools that build their confidence and capacity as caregivers while strengthening family bonds.

Through the generosity of our donors, we make life-changing resources available to all through our Parenting Resource Center, Trusted Parenting Network, and The Happy Child app.

For additional resources, visit [AmericanSPCC.org](https://AmericanSPCC.org).

©American SPCC is a 501(c)3 top-rated nonprofit organization (Federal tax ID 27-4621515). Charitable donations are tax deductible.



Backed by cutting-edge research from top parenting experts in the field, The Happy Child is a new kind of parenting app to help families forge deeper bonds with their children.

Years of ground-breaking research and findings in psychology, neuroscience and pediatrics have been curated into one easy-to-use, completely free app!



# Childhood lasts a lifetime.

Understanding our Number Story - considering the lasting effects of our childhoods - can be a catalyst for change. We can break cycles, pave new parenting paths, and connect with people, resources, and communities to support our journeys. We can choose where our stories go from here, and help ensure our children's stories start with promise and hope.

A close-up photograph of a birthday cake with white frosting and colorful sprinkles. A single lit candle in the shape of the number 3 is the central focus, with a bright flame. Other candles in the shape of stars are visible on the cake.

**The story of your number impacts the children in your life.**

We all have a number story.  
Explore the story of your number  
and learn to heal at [NumberStory.org](https://NumberStory.org)



NumberStory.org

# Hotlines & Help Resources

We all need help sometimes. Whether you chat, click, text, or call - reach out when you feel like you could use some support. There is always someone ready to listen and help.

If you or your child are in immediate danger, call 911.

## [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)

1-800-273-8255 or [Chat](#)

TTY: Dial 711, then 1-800-273-8255

## [Crisis Text Line](#)

Text ACES to 741741

## [Nurse-Family Partnership \(first-time parent support\)](#)

Leave a message to be contacted

1-844-NFP-MOMS (844.637.6667)

Text: 844.355.8423

[More Resources](#) from the American SPCC

[More Resources](#) from Number Story

Need to feel better right now?

Try one of these [grounding tools](#).

## [Postpartum Support International HelpLine](#)

Leave a message to be contacted

1-800-944-4PPD (1-800-944-4773) or [Web form](#)

Text (English): 800-944-4773

Text (en Español): 971-203-7773

## [Crying Baby Hotline](#)

1-866-243-2229

## [National Child Abuse Hotline](#)

1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453) or [Chat](#)



# References & Sources

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