



# Speaking for Children

**What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!**

## Playing together in the arts

From infancy through kindergarten and beyond, a child learns by playing. The arts—singing, dancing, painting, drawing, acting—can help create the best kind of play experience for your child. From a baby's first lullaby, to a three-year-old's experimentation with finger paint, to a five year old's acting out of a favorite story, an arts experience that is appropriate to your child's age is important.

For all children, at all ability levels, the arts play a central role in cognitive, motor, language, and social-emotional development. The arts make learning fun, while they stimulate memory and improve a child's understanding of the world. They also improve communication skills, promote relationships, and improve physical skills. The arts are natural for young children, and a wonderful way for you and your child to have a great time together.

Use these ideas for age-appropriate activities to enjoy the arts with your children and help them learn and grow. Remember, all children grow and develop at different rates. Follow children's signals about which activities they're ready for. If you are worried that your child is not developing appropriately, check with his or her pediatrician.

### Young babies birth to three months

- Watch for your baby's response to music or things he sees. She may smile or reach for a toy or your nose. Play along.
- Bring soothing music, birds singing, water babbling, and other soft sounds into your baby's environment.
- Hang mobiles where your baby can see them, within a foot of his eye level.

- Sing, talk and read books to your baby. You are helping her brain develop.
- Use gentle movement when holding babies (e.g., rocking and swaying).

### Young babies three to eight months

*Continue previous experiences as well as the following:*

- Begin to place rattles or appropriate toys that have textures and make sounds in your baby's fist.
- Encourage him to reach and sway his arms.
- Use appropriate soft and colorful materials for her to touch (soft blankets or colorful toys).
- Make sounds with your voice to express feelings, such as happy and surprised.
- Encourage your baby to laugh and smile by rhyming, singing, and playing pat-a-cake.
- Help your baby relax at nap time by reading nursery rhymes or singing lullabies.

### Crawlers and walkers eight to 18 months

*Continue previous experiences as well as the following:*

- Take your child to different places to play, where he can see nature, people, or animals; talk about what she sees. "Look, that's a cow. She has brown eyes and four legs. Where is your leg? What does the cow say?"
- Play music and move the children's feet, legs, and hands to the beat.
  - Explore shapes and colors of everyday objects, like clothes or cereal boxes.
  - Talk about what is around you and make up songs to go with what your child is seeing and hearing.
  - Hang pictures at your child's eye level; name, describe, and point to items in the pictures.

- Use character voices and gestures when reading stories together.
- At this age, give your child opportunities to finger paint with water or draw with crayons.

### Toddlers 18 to 24 months

*Continue previous experiences as well as the following:*

- While you watch, allow your child to explore and experiment with simple things like a paper plate, non-toxic paint, or play dough.
- Hold your child's hands and dance and move to the music; sing along.
- Pretend socks are puppets or an animal when you're helping your child dress.
- Act out his favorite stories or musical routines.
- Build a library of books and take your child on weekly trips to the local library.
- Show and tell stories from photographs.
- Have simple musical/percussion instruments available to play (pots and pans are always available).
- Visit children's museums and appropriate child-friendly exhibits and performances.



### Toddlers 24 to 36 months

*Continue previous experiences as well as the following:*

- Provide experiences in music, drama, dance, and art (libraries and community centers often have free activities in the arts for young children).
- Make arts-based activities a daily routine.
- Make singing, storytelling and dancing a part of your child's daily experiences; tell stories while eating lunch, sing at nap time, and do a little dance together when saying goodbye).
- Point out shapes, textures, and colors in foods and clothing to your child.

- Tell and act out family stories about grandparents, aunts and uncles, and others.
- Help your child use brushes to paint or shape animals out of clay.
- Create simple costumes for drama and theater activities (dress-up in old clothes or make a hat from a piece of newspaper).

### Preschoolers three to four years

*Continue previous experiences as well as the following:*

- Act out characters from books read with your child or make up new stories about the characters.
- Pretend you are a car or a lion and zoom and roar around your house or yard together.
- Make collages using paper, glue, scissors, and magazine cut outs.
- Hum tunes to familiar songs and make up new words together that go with the melody.
- Stand in front of the mirror and try to follow one another as you raise arms and legs and make faces.

### Preschoolers four to five years

*Continue previous experiences as well as the following:*

- Create music with your preschooler by using empty containers as drums. (Empty plastic containers filled with beans and rice can serve as maracas, for example.)
- Make a patchwork quilt with scraps of materials sewn together with yarn; make up stories about all the children around the world who might have slept under the quilt.
- Strengthen your child's memory by asking her to repeat a story, rhyme or song.
- Draw together while telling stories or talking about favorite books.
- Take your child and his friend or cousin to a children's theater performance.

### Resources

- *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*, a resource guide from the National Association for the Education of Young Children,
- *Prekindergarten Music Education Standards from MENC* (National Association for Music Education)

Adapted from *Young Children and the Arts: Making Creative Connections*, a report of the Arts Education Partnership <http://aep-arts.org>

## About First 5 Sonoma County

First 5 Sonoma County funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit [www.first5sonomacounty.org](http://www.first5sonomacounty.org)