

Your baby is ready to learn from the moment he or she is born!

The first five years are when the groundwork for future development and school success are laid and you play the most important role in helping your child develop and be ready for learning in school.

It is never too early to plan for your baby's future success in learning, school, and life! Just remember to have fun together, enjoy your child's various stages of growth, model how to learn from challenges, and celebrate the successes along the way!

**For more information on early learning & development and related programs and services, contact one or all of the following:**

**Niagara Region**

**Children's Services, Community Services Department**  
905.984.6900  
[www.regional.niagara.on.ca/living/children/default.aspx](http://www.regional.niagara.on.ca/living/children/default.aspx)

**Public Health Department**  
905.688.8248 or 1.888.505.6074 ext. 7555  
[www.regional.niagara.on.ca/parenting](http://www.regional.niagara.on.ca/parenting)



**Speech Services Niagara**  
905.688.3550 or 1.800.896.5496



**Ontario Early Years Centres**  
Erie/Lincoln 905.834.9071  
Niagara Centre 905.734.3563  
Niagara Falls 905.357.2398  
St. Catharines 905.938.9392  
[www.ontarioearlyyears.ca](http://www.ontarioearlyyears.ca)

**eccdc**

**Early Childhood Community Development Centre**  
Contact information below. For a comprehensive list of child care options, visit Child Care Choices at [www.eccdc.org](http://www.eccdc.org)

**Understanding the Early Years**  
The Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC)  
395 Ontario Street, St. Catharines, ON L2N 7N6  
P. 905.646.7311 F. 905.646.2692  
[eccdc@eccdc.org](mailto:eccdc@eccdc.org) [www.eccdc.org](http://www.eccdc.org)

The Understanding the Early Years initiative is funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada. For further information, visit [www.hrsdc.gc.ca](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca)



# Understanding the Early Years

EARLY LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT  
Information and Tips  
for New Parents



The five main areas of importance for preschoolers' readiness to learn in school, and tips you can use to help your infant develop strengths in all of them, are described below. Remember that children develop differently and that by providing lots of daily opportunities or experiences, you are taking steps that support your infant's optimal learning and development.

### Physical Health & Well-being

Basic essentials such as housing, food, clothing, health care, and attention support the overall well-being and health of your child. Physical fitness has many benefits, including the development of good gross motor (running, walking) and fine motor (holding a pencil) skills. Being well-rested, energetic, and alert also improves attention and learning.

- Make sure your baby has the sleep he or she needs to be refreshed.
- Establish a daily routine that includes regular meal times.
- Provide a safe play area that your infant can physically explore.
- Select clothing according to the indoor climate and outdoor weather conditions.
- Take your infant for his or her regular check-ups.
- When necessary, use additional health and community services available.

**TIPS**

### Social Competence

Children's life experiences are more positive, and learning experiences more productive, when they are able to get along well and play with others. A sense of curiosity and an eagerness to explore new activities will help your infant develop a lifelong ability for, and love of, learning.

Following rules and routines, taking care of personal belongings, working neatly and independently, being responsible, and showing self-control and flexibility are all important aspects of social competence that can be encouraged from early on.

- Respond with loving care and delight to your infant's cries and gurgles.
- Provide toys and play games with your infant that encourage curiosity.
- Delight together in the exploration of new activities.
- Get to know your infant's special qualities and encourage him or her in a positive way.

**TIPS**

### Emotional Maturity

Children need a sense of well-being in order to fully develop and learn. Being helpful and kind towards other children will help your child form long-lasting friendships and positive relationships. The ability to concentrate, take turns, adapt easily to change, and focus on activities are important skills that you can begin encouraging early on.

- Provide your infant a safe and comfortable environment and establish regular routines.
- Model cooperation and kindness and manage your stress level.
- Provide opportunities for your baby to interact and socialize with other babies, children, and adults.
- Cuddle your baby and respond lovingly to his or her cries and gurgles.

**TIPS**

### Language & Cognitive (Thinking) Growth

Early exposure to reading, as well as letters, numbers, and the sounds of

language are an excellent way to support a good start for your child's ability to keep pace in today's information-based society. Encouraging babbling, playing with sounds, and using words are the stepping stones to strengthening your child's language and thinking capacity.

- Read and talk to your child every day.
- Provide baby-friendly books for your child to handle.
- Expose your baby to a variety of sounds, words, rhymes, and rhythms.
- Read poems and sing songs to your infant.
- Visit your local library and use other early years services.

**TIPS**

### Communication Skills & General Knowledge

Communicating with family and friends and attending community events will help your child to develop general knowledge about the world. Telling or listening to stories, playing creatively alone or with friends, and being encouraged to use language while playing games or communicating through voice or body will also add to your child's overall development.

- Interact frequently with your infant each day by talking, listening, and touching.
- Take your child to a variety of places such as an Ontario Early Years Centre, the library, the park, the grocery store, the post office, etc.
- Encourage your infant to communicate with you and others.
- Play language-based games such as rhymes and sing-songs.
- Notice and encourage your baby's natural curiosity.

**TIPS**