



National Day Nurseries Association

**★Brighter thinking  
for early years**

# Factsheet

A photograph of a baby with blonde hair, wearing a striped diaper, crawling on a wooden bench. The baby is looking back over their shoulder towards the camera with a smile. The background shows a blurred wooden structure, likely part of a nursery or play area.

## Parents' Guide to Home Learning

Parent Guidance

# Parent's Guide to Home Learning

This factsheet looks at what is naturally occurring within your home and ideas to broaden this further to ensure your child goes on to achieve the best outcomes they can. The term 'home learning' is generally used in nurseries by nursery staff to describe any type of learning that takes place in the home between the child and their family members, including grandparents and aunts and uncles.

If your child attends a nursery, the staff there will work with you to find out about your child's interests. Research shows that a stimulating home environment is linked to long term gains in children's development. When nurseries and parents work together effectively, research has shown that this can benefit children's learning and development the most. These benefits include improved language development and early reading skills, as well as supporting them in gaining the skills so they are ready for school.

## Why is home learning important?

### Did you know...?

At birth, your baby's brain is only a quarter formed but by the time your child reaches the age of three their brain will have developed from 25% to 80%?

This shows how crucial the early years are as the brain develops more in this time than at any other time in their life.

A strong attachment between you and your child with lots of love, touch and cuddles all help the development of the brain. A child who has that special emotional relationship that involves an exchange of comfort and care in early childhood, has an important influence on development and behaviour in later life.

From birth information travels to the brain via five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. Enhancing and supporting these in babies and young children is essential in order for children to learn and develop.

## A healthy balanced diet

A healthy balanced diet and regular activity are essential for children's health and well-being, when a child receives this they are ready to learn and able to reach their full potential.

### Did you know...?

That encouraging children to eat well and learn about food in the early years not only protects their health when they are young but also sets the foundations for their future health and well-being. Letting babies and young children explore new foods and textures through play will support them to develop good attitudes about trying different types of food in future.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of children diagnosed as being overweight, obese, having poor dental health, cases of rickets, type two diabetes and at risk of iron deficiency.

Providing a healthy balanced diet with a range of nutrients helps children to grow and develop. This means ensuring they have a range of starchy foods such as potatoes, at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, meat, fish, eggs, beans and other sources of protein, milk and dairy foods. Avoid giving too much salt and sugar as salt can give them the taste for salty foods and can cause serious health problems in later life. Often foods that contain too much sugar fill children up without providing any nutrients, this can also lead to tooth decay.

For more information on healthy eating and menu planning, take a look [here](#).

### Did you know...?

All the small things you do with your baby or young child, like cuddling, chatting, singing and playing, make a difference and all support the development of your child's confidence, learning and security as they grow older?

## What is home learning?

You may hear the term 'home learning' and worry that you are not doing this but all the above including chatting, singing nursery rhymes or songs are all part of developing your child's learning. There is never a time too soon to start this, it should take place as soon as your child is born. Babies will often copy you by pulling out their tongue or by copying you bending your fingers at only a few weeks old. You may notice how your baby will babble to you in turn when you talk to him or her. This is all part of early communication.

## Sharing books with babies and young children is so important

Sharing books not only helps their learning and development but also stimulates your relationship as you sit or snuggle together whilst sharing a book. You don't always have to read the book word

for word, sometimes you can make up the story or just talk about the pictures. It is the activity of looking at books together that is the most important element so that your child begins to develop a love of books, know that print carries meaning and that we turn the pages one by one. They will also begin to recognise some familiar words and associate pictures with vocabulary.

Babies and young children will enjoy the quality time with you and hearing your voice gives them reassurance that you are there. Sharing books supports your child's language development and introduces them to new vocabulary. Older children will begin to recognise some familiar words and learn that print carries meaning. Talking about the author, illustrator, front page and back page can be introduced as children become older, to develop their understanding further.

Often children will have favourite books and ask for them night after night, this is all part of the learning process and can be comforting for children. As children get older they will use recognition of words and pictures to read with you and should be encouraged to start reading a story to you too.

Having special one to one time each day where possible is important for you and your child. Having this time at bath time and/or bedtime can help children to relax before they go to sleep.

There are a range of fun toys and games that can be added to your child's bath for you and your child to enjoy, including animals, foam letters and numbers, waterproof books, bath crayons, items that float and sink, bath mirrors, washcloth puppets, windup toys and bubbles. As well as everyday household items like kitchen utensils, sieves, funnels etc. and containers. These all benefit your child's development, as they experiment with the resources and begin to understand the world around them. Pretend play extends their imagination as they play with the water, puppets and animals (during bath times ensure children are supervised at all times).

If your child has a favourite book or story you could extend it in a number of ways, including:

- Singing the story
- Listening to the story on a CD
- Watching the actions to the story on YouTube. Watch and listen to 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' by Michael Rosen [here](#)
- Acting out the story with your child or using puppets of the key characters
- Drawing (or scribbling, which will still mean something to your child and is the early stage of writing) of pictures from the book or writing a letter to the characters. This will encourage your child's early writing skills
- Extending the story, ask your child what else might happen to characters encouraging your child's imagination skills.

## The importance of the early experiences of home, nursery and school in improving children's learning

If your child attends a nursery it's important to work together. Nurseries value the information you give them as you are your child's first teacher and you know them best. By passing on valuable information about your child's interests and/or favourite books or toys or where you have been at the weekend helps the nursery to plan specifically for your child's individual needs. Children learn best when doing something that they enjoy and combining interests with learning will help your child to progress.

Additionally, you could ask your child's nursery what they enjoy doing at nursery too, so you can add to this at home.

You may receive photos or stories from your child's nursery showing you what they have been doing, it's nice for nurseries to receive feedback from you, to link to their learning portfolio or some nurseries may refer to them as learning journeys. Most nurseries develop these for each child to build up a picture of the child's development from when they start until when they leave. The reflection of the child's journey is about their life and therefore encourages and welcomes photos or comments from home. This allows a joined up picture of the child's life. Often nurseries will pass on their learning journeys to you when the child leaves or moves on to school. They make a special keepsake that you and your child will enjoy looking through for many years to come, which makes the contribution to them important and worthwhile.

Whether your child attends nursery or not you may also choose to develop photo albums or scrap books including certain milestones or favourite pictures. These are nice to collect so in years to come when children ask questions about "how old was I when..." you can look back through the albums.

**You may ask your older child after nursery if they have had a nice day and they may nod or just say yes.**

Consider asking more open ended questions such as:

- "What was most fun at nursery today?"
- "What made you laugh today?"
- "Which friends did you play with?"
- "Did anything make you sad today?"
- "What toys have you played with?"

These show your child that you are interested in what they have been doing and may encourage your child to tell you a bit more about their day or if they have any interests, issues or concerns.

This may also extend their learning and development in terms of recalling experiences, and extending vocabulary. Don't be too concerned if they still continue to nod their head and try not to push them by asking too many questions.

## Play

### Did you know...?

Children learn best through play.

Playing both indoors and outdoors is the most important way in which children learn. Providing a variety of play opportunities is not always about manufactured toys. Everyday routines such as shopping, baking, gardening and spending time playing together with your child will support their learning and development greatly.

Although some television programmes provide children with some learning opportunities, it's nice to watch these together to share learning and to have a set time each day without the television on, as it allows for play without the distraction from the television. Trying to achieve a balance of television, toys and play experiences will mean that your child can learn through a range of different ways. Communicating through play and asking questions can extend the activities and learning further, e.g. "What will happen if we..."

Home learning also includes involving your child in everyday activities, such as asking your child to help set the table. This encourages counting opportunities as they count out the utensils and the place settings. Folding up the washing, matching the socks, digging in the garden, planting seeds and flowers or watering the plants are also great opportunities. These all involve your child in day to day experiences whilst continuing to widen their experiences and vocabulary. There are many other activities similar to these on the supporting learning in your home factsheets. View these [here](#).

You may notice that your child often prefers to play with empty cardboard boxes than the actual toys. This is usually because resources, such as boxes, can be used for a number of different purposes and allows children to use their imagination to make them into different things, one day a box could be a play house and the next it could be a spaceship. Other everyday items such as pans, tins, jewellery, wooden spoons, brushes etc. all allow children to investigate and explore, they can fill and empty containers, which is a favourite for children or make sounds with them. Having real paintbrushes and water outdoors is an effective activity that children usually enjoy, as they paint water up and down the fence or wall, this encourages early writing skills as well as developing their understanding of how things happen, e.g. the water will dry quicker when it's warm outside and their marks will disappear. When providing these activities, it's important to make sure they are safe and that children are supervised.

## Schemas

### Did you know...?

That young children display patterns of repeated behaviour sometimes referred to as schemas?

Often children will go through stages of displaying repeated behaviour such as dropping food from a highchair, emptying the kitchen cupboards, lining up toys or items such as bottles in a row or moving toys from one area to another. These repeated behaviours have been named schemas by early years researchers. These researchers studied a number of children and found that repeated patterns of behaviour are part of a child's development.

Often the range of schemas children display can be frustrating for you as parents. By understanding some of these behaviours a little more you can build on them, which will further support your child's development. This may include providing containers and corks for example so children can fill and empty them again and again.

### You can find more information on schemas at:

- Schemas: behavior patterns – [Google Play app store](#)
- NDNA Parent factsheets - [here](#).

### Further information

- [BBC Bitesize](#)
- [Baby Centre](#)
- [Literacy Trust](#)
- [NDNA Parent factsheets](#).

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# Factsheet

Our factsheets are written by early years experts for the early years workforce. Most NDNA factsheets are free to our members.

NDNA is the national charity and membership association representing children's nurseries across the UK. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability, so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours.

We are the voice of the 21,000-strong nursery sector, an integral part of the lives of more than a million young children and their families. We provide information, training and advice to support nurseries and the 250,000 people who work in them to deliver world-class early learning and childcare.

See the full range of NDNA factsheets at [www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets](http://www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets)

*The information provided in this factsheet is for use by early years practitioners only. It has been written by early years experts but is not intended to be, and should not be relied upon, as a substitute for professional advice. NDNA has endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of the information presented in this factsheet. NDNA assumes no legal liability or responsibility for your interpretation or use of the information contained within it.*

## National Day Nurseries Association

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