

Is it Developmentally Appropriate? Let's see...

In early childhood education (birth through 8 years of age), we have a term we use to determine if an adult should do an activity with a child. This term is “developmentally appropriate”. What this term does is it looks at the activity and asks is it appropriate where that child is in development. It is one of the most important topics in early childhood because if activities are too easy a child becomes bored and won't learn. If an activity is too hard, a child will get frustrated and either get angry or give up and this creates a negative feeling to learning. The magic space is developmentally appropriate because we want the activity to be challenging enough where learning happens, and the brain grows! As a teacher, we know that if we build too fast, the foundation is weak and learning that comes next will be weak. Therefore, it is so important in the first 8 years of life to understand child development, brain development, and to be aware that many activities look cute but are not appropriate. In this uncertain time, parents feel as though they are being thrust into a teacher's role and we as teachers want to give you a cheat sheet to help you navigate the thousands of activities that are flooding social media. How do you choose?

One last thing, many of us are working from home and trying to support our children academically. For early childhood, I will say it is quality over quantity. When you feel that you must fill your child's day with activities, remember a high-quality activity that covers multiple academic areas (math language, reading, art) is better than one activity in each spread out over the day. Why? Well kids are amazing little creatures, they learn by doing and they learn as a whole being, they learn better when material is connected and relevant to them. This is tough for us who were taught letters, then numbers, then we painted, then we read a book. But what brain scans show us about young children is they learn better when subjects are connected and even better when real life. Remember mundane things bore you because you have been on this earth for 20, 30, 40 years- this is all still new to them.

Instead of giving you more activities, the chart below will help you filter the flood of ideas that are drowning you. You can choose what is best for your child at their age and their interests. You got this! Welcome to the world of early childhood education!



Age of Child	Focus of Development	Is this a good activity to do with my child (Developmentally Appropriate). If you answer yes to any of the questions, then it is quality
0-9 months (young infants)	<p>Security and Safety (they look for you to comfort and calm them)</p> <p>Be calm and predictable in all routines such as changing diapers and feeding, your face is their focal point</p> <p>Avoid digital media (other than video chatting)</p> 	<p>*Does this activity involve the caregiver and child interacting?</p> <p>*Does this activity involve things such as singing or gentle movements (dancing)?</p> <p>*Does this activity involve you speaking to your child?</p> <p>*Does this activity ask you to follow your child's lead (watch their body clues as to what interests them)?</p>
8-18 months (mobile infants)	<p>Explore (they need a safe place from which to explore)</p> <p>Be calm and predictable in all routines such as changing diapers and feeding. You are still a focus but so is the new world around them. Science tells us that the longer you stay focused on an item your child will build their attention span...this means be totally engaged and they will stay engaged longer.</p> <p>How long should an activity last? Average attention span without an adult is about 1-2 minutes; with an engaged adult 2-4 minutes</p> <p>Why? This age is meant to move and explore- there is a lot to learn!</p> <p>Avoid digital media (other than digital chatting)</p>	<p>*Does this activity offer your child a opportunity to move?</p> <p>*Does this opportunity ask you to read or talk with your child such as nursery rhymes?</p> <p>*Does this activity ask you to follow your child's lead (when they point to something do you follow where they point and then name it)?</p> <p>*Does this activity involve the senses like taste, touch, sound, smell, sight (involving the senses engages the brain and then give words to the experience)?</p> <p>*Does the activity allow the child to explore new activities safely?</p> <p>*Does the activity have simple games like peek-a-boo (think old school games there is a reason they have been around so long...they work)?</p>
18-36 months (toddlers)	<p>Identity (they are developing a sense of who they are and who you are)</p> <p>Be calm and predictable in all routines. Be clear in stating what you want the child to do. Stay positive!</p> <p>Finding out who they are means that a very special part of their brain is turning on and it is what makes them realize they are different</p>	<p>*Does this activity encourage choice (do you want red or blue crayon)?</p> <p>*Does this activity allow for movement?</p> <p>*Does this activity allow for simple problem solving (how to get a toy out of a box)?</p> <p>*Does this activity ask you to sing or teach a song to a child with movements?</p>

	<p>from you as their parent. This means that “no” is them experimenting with the idea that they can do something different from you. Its what makes toddlers so challenging, but it is a necessary part of brain development.</p> <p>They understand more than they can say</p> <p>Attention span: 2-3 minutes. With an engaged adult 4-6 minutes with the activity</p> <p>Watch digital media with your child (because they learn from watching & talking with you). Limit screen time to under 1 hour a day (only high-quality programming). Co-viewing is best when possible. Young children learn best when they can experience what they saw on the screen in the real world, so re-teach what was presented during screen in a real-world, hands-on way</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Does this activity discuss feelings in simple terms? *Does this activity allow for creating such as with paint, crayons, or markers (are you ready for a mess)? *Does this activity allow you to follow your child’s lead and follow their interests safely? *Does this activity use gross motor such as running, crawling, climbing, jumping? *Does this activity allow a child to explore with their fingers with small movements such as holding a crayon or stacking? *Does this activity begin to introduce self-regulation skills such as teaching them to play freeze to music (this will take time, have patience)? *Does this activity ask you to play house or act out other routines that your child knows? 
<p>3-5 years</p>	<p>Known as the “Magic Years” because they use more words, their imagination soars, their bodies start to get stronger, they can plan and create</p> <p>Attention span develops up to 10 to 15 minutes, but this takes time to develop over these two years. Three-year olds will have about 6-8 minutes.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Does this activity allow your child to create with materials such as paints, markers, crayons? *Does this activity ask you to look for problem solving opportunities and then ask your child for some ideas? *Does this activity ask your child to write or attempt to write in a meaningful way? *Does this activity ask your child to pretend play with different props? *Does this activity ask your child to use numbers in a meaningful or fun way? *Does this activity ask your child to use their whole body to play? *Does this activity ask your child to create a game and rules for you to play together? *Does this activity ask your child to learn a new song or make one up?

	 <p>Watch digital media with your child (because they learn from watching & talking with you). Limit screen time to 1 hour a day (only high-quality programming). Co-viewing is best when possible. Young children learn best when they can experience what they saw on the screen in the real world, so re-teach what was presented during screen in a real-world, hands-on way.</p>	<p>*Does this activity ask your child to use their fingers in stacking, building, legos, or other quiet activities?</p> <p>*Does this activity ask your child to create their own stories and you to write them down for them?</p> <p>*Does this activity ask your child to use their imagination?</p>
<p>5-6 years</p>	<p>Enjoy pushing the limits on what their bodies can do: they want to know how high they can jump, how fast they can run, or how far they can throw.</p> <p>Building fine motor skills that will assist in helping the child begin handwriting, cutting, and drawing.</p> <p>Interested in forming relationships with their peers and adults. They are starting to be concerned with how others feel about them and how they feel about others. They are also learning to problem solve on their own but will need some assistance from adults</p> <p>Building language and literacy skills that will later turn into reading and spelling.</p> <p>Watch digital media with your child (because they learn from watching & talking with you). Limit screen time to 1 hour a day (only high-quality programming). Co-viewing is best when possible. Young children learn best when they can experience what they saw on the screen in the real world, so re-teach what was presented during screen in a real-world, hands-on way.</p>	<p>*Does the activity include a safe place and the freedom for the child to jump, run, and throw while also teaching boundaries and limits?</p> <p>*Does the activity allow for the child to use their hands, including activities that allow the child to freely write, draw and cut paper?</p> <p>*Does the activity allow for discussion and practice around cooperative play and healthy relationships?</p> <p>*Does the activity allow for the adult to offer praise or encouragement to the child?</p> <p>*Does the activity allow for problem solving with the assistance and encouragement from an adult?</p> <p>*Does the activity introduce letter recognition, letter-sound recognition and sight word recognition?</p> 
<p>6-7 years Primary</p>	<p>The child enjoys exploring, reading, reasoning, problem solving, communicating</p>	<p>*Does the child have a desire to read?</p> <p>*Does the child have the motivation to solve mathematic problems?</p>

	<p>through conversation and writing, and developing lasting friendships.</p> <p>The child is building on social skills and physical abilities (competition should be at an individual level. For example: meeting their own goals, doing better than an earlier performance.)</p> <p>Show that you care about their needs, interests, the relationship, and demonstrate genuine enthusiasm for the task at hand. Encourage persistence, support the child when they try new tasks.</p> <p>Watch digital media with your child (because they learn from watching & talking with you). Limit screen time to 1 hour a day (only high-quality programming). Co-viewing is best when possible. Young children learn best when they can experience what they saw on the screen in the real world, so re-teach what was presented during screen in a real-world, hands-on way</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Does this activity allow the child to use mental representations and think in concepts of height, length... *Does this physical activity promote cooperation and validation? *Does this activity build on empathy skills, express respect and appreciation for diversity? *Does this activity help to develop collaboration with others? *Does this activity help build a sense of connection between the child and another person (an adult or another child)? 
<p>7-8 Years</p>	<p>Physical, mental and social skills are rapidly developing.</p> <p>Attention Span is about 16 minutes.</p> <p>Screen Time limited to 1.5 hours a day.</p> <p>The child enjoys answering open-ended questions, discussions about right and wrong, making independent decisions, uses a vocabulary of several thousand words, and solves more complex problems.</p> <p>The child is emotionally sensitive, he may have strong emotional reactions.</p> <p>The child is very curious about the world we live in. He enjoys projects and play that build on interest about the world around him.</p> <p>The child's moral compass is high?</p> <p>Show support by talking with your child about future goals, responsibility, and patience.</p> <p>Also, having fun with your child by playing board games and reading.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Does this activity help to build a sense of responsibility? * Does this activity allow him to express experiences or thoughts? * Does this activity help build concern for others? *Does this activity help build self-control? *Does this activity help develop independence? *Does this activity aid in understanding his /her place in the world? *Is this cultural experience centered around the child's interest? *Does this activity have clear rules and directions to follow? 

Remember, you've got this! You are doing a beautiful job figuring this out, however it looks for you & your family. This is heavy stuff, and you are doing it! We're here for you & are in this together. Your child simply needs you. Share these precious moments with them. They simply need you!

