

Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP)



GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

Early Childhood Development

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10 FAQs on EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

1. When should I start reading to my child?
2. What are the benefits of reading aloud to my 6 months old baby?
3. How can I positively interact with my child?
4. Is it important that my child interacts with family members and siblings at home?
5. Is sharing an important life skill for my child?
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8. Why is socialization important for my child? How does it affect the overall development of my child?
9. Is there any role of a Speech App or Phonics App to encourage language and socialization for my 2-year-old child?
10. Can the "Internet" applications impact learning in children?

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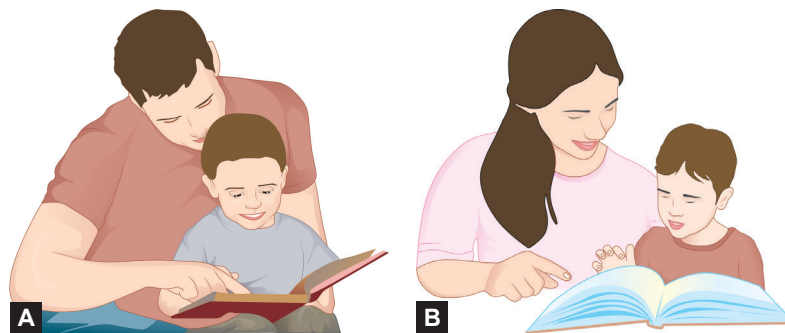
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Early Childhood Development

Q1

When should I start reading to my child?

- Reading aloud to the young babies is an enjoyable activity and very important as it provides the building blocks for language and creative skills.
- Reading aloud to your baby does not have to be a serious, complex, or a time-consuming process. It can be done as a leisure when both baby and mother are relaxed and not in a hurry.
- It is never too late to introduce the habit of reading to the young ones.
- Attention of babies can be taken to the pictures in a book even before they can hold books. The ability to hear and respond to human sounds and vocal imitation starts developing before the age of 4 months. Hence, reading to the babies can begin anywhere between 4 and 6 months of age (**Figs. 1A and B**).



Figs. 1A and B: Beginning of reading to the babies.

Q2

What are the benefits of reading aloud to my 6 months old baby?

- Reading aloud to your baby will introduce the baby to new words and will help to build the mental vocabulary which will further help in creation of fluency of language.
- Reading together gives a signal of emotional security, attachment, love and bonding with parents.
- It helps to build the imaginative and imitation skills, which help the babies to learn from new experiences in their environment and thereby helps in early brain development.
- When you smile, frown, blow your mouth or make different expressions and sounds, the baby learns to imitate the same which help to build social and play skills (**Fig. 2**).
- Research shows that if you start reading books to your child from 6 months of age, it will boost vocabulary and reading skills 4 years later when they start formal learning at school.

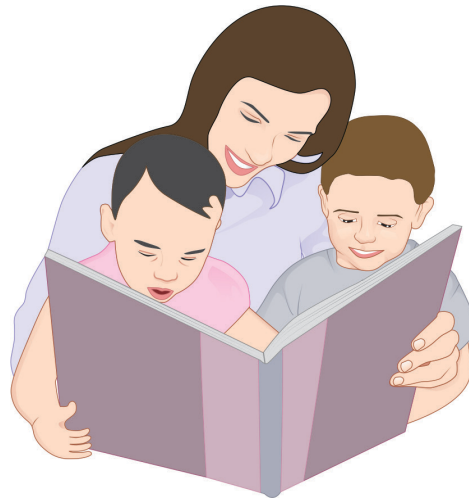
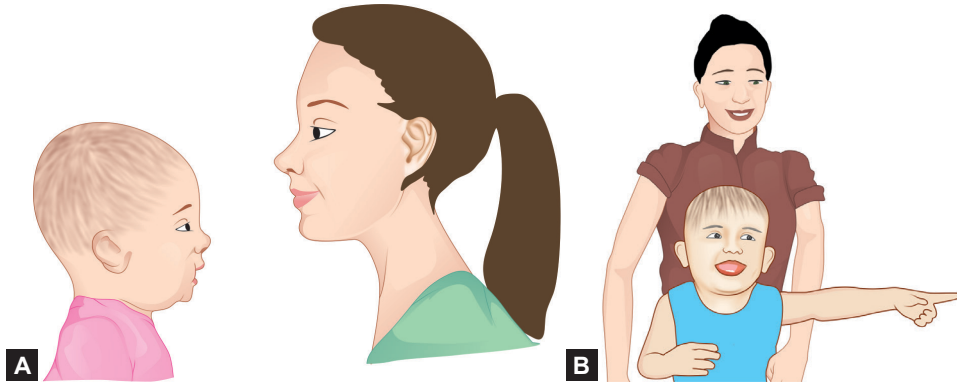


Fig. 2: When mother smiles/frowns/makes different expressions and sounds while reading, babies learn to imitate the same that help build pre-vocabulary and social skills.

Q3

How can I positively interact with my child?

- Smile at your baby and establish good eye contact often during the day in the early infancy period (**Fig. 3A**).
- When a mother makes caring verbal sounds while looking at the baby, it helps to build a good emotional attachment (**Fig. 3B**). Early secure attachment with mother/a main caregiver is thought to enable children to develop independence, good coping strategies, and resilience in later years.



Figs. 3A and B: (A) Smile at your baby and establish good eye contact often during the day in the early infancy period; (B) Providing a feeling of secure emotional attachment and paying attention jointly to the child’s interests.

- Parents must use words to praise and encourage their babies when they make cuddling and gesturing sounds (**Fig. 4**).
- Babies develop awareness of strangers around them by the age of 6–8 months, and it peaks at 14–16 months of age. During this period, parents must provide assurance to the babies that the main family caregivers are always around to provide a secure emotional attachment.
- Mothers who are engaged more to their digital devices may miss out on important time for building an emotional attachment bond with their babies which can be harmful during early brain development period. Give priority to your child than to the phone/TV/computer/laptop.

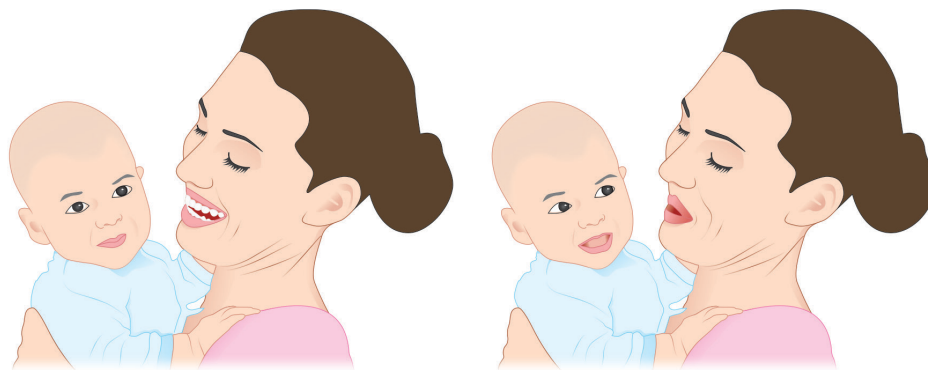
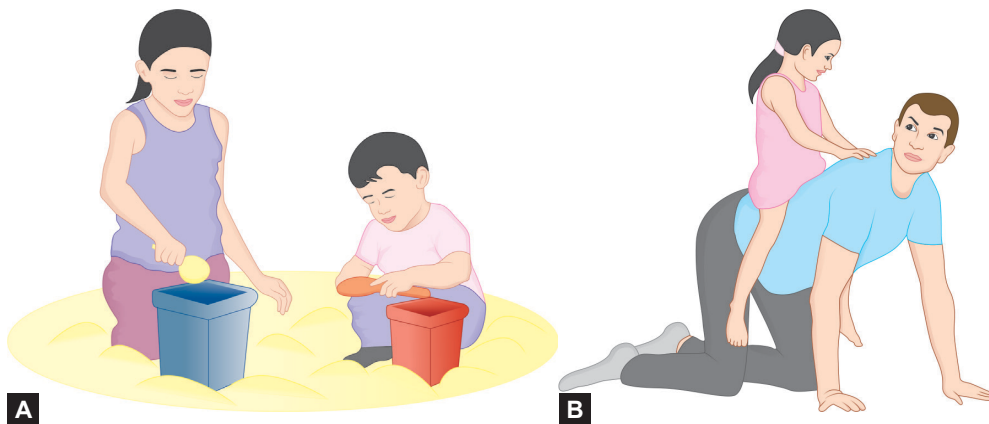


Fig. 4: Parents must smile and encourage the babies when they make cuddling and gesturing sounds.

Q4

Is it important that my child interacts with family members and siblings at home?

- Positive interactions between children and family members are important and serve important purpose such as learning to share, solve problems, working together as they watch, imitate, model, and interact. These skills are important for children in preschool age and will help them to perform independently and confidently at school.
- Interaction with siblings and family members in the early years help to create the foundation for children’s future learning for social and emotional skills.
- The interactions with siblings may not be pleasant always, there may be moments when the child will be upset and when parents may not be able to calm the tantrum of the child. But, each opportunity for interacting with siblings/peers should be taken as an opportunity to teach them social and emotional skills.
- Siblings and parents can act as the role models for teaching social and emotional skills (**Figs. 5A and B**).



Figs. 5A and B: Siblings and parents can act as the role models for teaching social and emotional skills.

Q5

Is sharing an important life skill for my child?

- If the gestures of sharing and caring are expressed openly at home by parents, children will also learn to play cooperatively with siblings/peers.
- A young child up to the age of 2–3 years feels that he/she is the whole center of the world and that his/her needs should be gratified and fulfilled immediately. They do not understand the concept of “waiting for their turn”. It takes a lot of time for them to understand that other people who exist around them also have needs just as they do.
- Sharing, helping, and cooperating are “prosocial behaviors”. Usually children <3 years cannot understand idea of sharing; sharing skills usually appear around 3.5–4 years of age [American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)].
- After the age of 3.5 years, children start to develop a sense of responsiveness, and empathy and ability to share (**Fig. 6**).

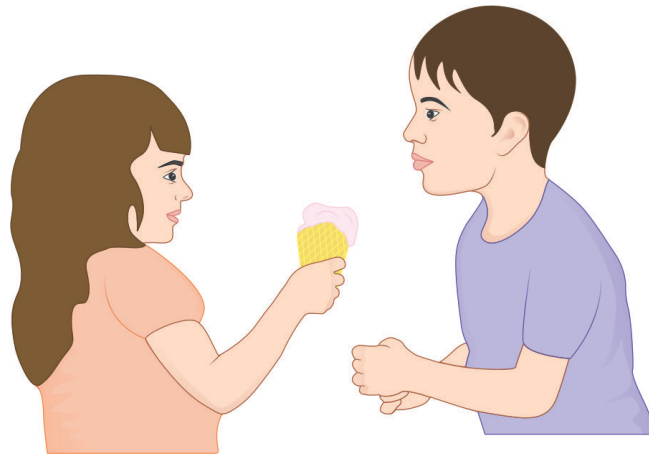


Fig. 6: Children developing a sense of responsiveness, empathy and ability to share.

Q6

How can I teach sharing to my child?

Parents can help the development of the skill of “sharing” by role modeling. They can create scenarios using normal day-to-day activities to express kindness, empathy, and cooperation with siblings or peers. For example, parents can buy a single chocolate instead of buying a chocolate for each child. The child can be asked to share a piece each with everybody. When doing homework, a single rubber and sharpener can be kept on the study table for siblings instead of giving them individual stationery; this gives a sense of sharing and avoids creation of self-centeredness and tantrums when asked to share.

- Sharing will help children to learn about negotiating, playing cooperatively with other children and to cope up with small disappointments, especially when parents are not around, for example, at school.
- Children may not have many opportunities to interact with others, share, or exercise their ability to self-control especially in times of pandemics and lockdowns.

Tips to Help Develop Sharing

- Involve the child in household chores.
- Family members sharing responsibilities at home chores work as good role modeling.
- Create a feeling of strong emotional attachment with your child, let them know that even if you are away at work you think about them and miss them. Do not express too much guilt for being away or try to compensate your time with materialistic gifts.
- Praise your child when they have expressed their feeling of empathy or cooperating with peers.
- Praise when they share, show them it makes the parents happy.
- Allow opportunity for independence in skills they have attained such as self-feeding, climbing stairs, brushing teeth, etc.
- Allow children to play in group activities in the residential society area with all safety precautions.
- Do not force your child to share/do not taunt, tease or humiliate them in front of others for not sharing.
- Do not give into temper tantrums, this will teach that by throwing a tantrum, they can achieve what they desire.

Q7

What social skills should be present in my child who is 14 months old?

- The first experience of socialization is gained by a baby from his/her immediate environment through primary caregiver that is the mother, grandmother, other family members, and/or siblings.
- Social skills in children can be understood by their ability to engage in reciprocal interactions with family members, either by smiling back at them, providing good eye contact and enjoying a game like peek-a-boo and laughing.
- Between 12 and 14 months, the baby requests by pointing at the object of interest. Proto-declarative pointing follows by 14–16 months of age when the child points with eye-gaze coordination to show interest and tries to get parents attention to the object by looking at them and the object to and fro (**Fig. 7A**). By 18 months of age, the child can bring the object to show or give it to the parent expressing his/her interest.
- Around 14 months of age, the children continue to take part in games such as peek-a-boo, hide and seek, pat a cake, etc. (**Fig. 7B**). They can wave bye-bye. They can imitate and also like to help in household chores. The child's first meaningful word may appear anytime between 8 and 14 months of age, though by 14 months a child can have two to three meaningful words in his/her vocabulary.
- By 14–15 months, children also start showing interest in peers around them though they may not play cooperatively with them.



Figs. 7A and B: (A) Social skills in children can be understood by their ability to engage in reciprocal interactions with family members; (B) Children also start showing interest in peers around them though they may not play cooperatively with them.

Q8

**Why is socialization important for my child?
How does it affect the overall development
of my child?**

- Socialization helps to build self-confidence, improve self-image and decrease shyness, and stage fear in children. For social skills to develop, it is important that the child learns self-regulation.
- *Self-regulation:*
 - Self-regulation is the child's ability to modify his/her own emotional expression, behavior, and attention for a need or a task. It starts developing around 6 months of age and teaches the child to interact with others in a socially appropriate manner.
 - Self-regulation goes hand-in-hand with emotional regulation where the child learns to observe self and others emotions, integrate them, and then facilitate the thought process for changing own behavior for a need. It is important that parents themselves watch their emotions and maintain a congenial cheerful environment as the babies are constantly watching them and learning from them.
- The social and emotional skills are basically all learnt by interacting with others. Self-regulation helps to develop the skill of "social cognition" which demonstrates the "theory of mind" teaching the children that peers/other people around them do not have the same thoughts and feelings as them. Social cognition encourages children to search for ways to get along with others keeping in mind empathy for others.
- Social cognition and socialization helps to build self-confidence, improves self-image and decrease shyness, and stage fear in children. Hence, it is important that children learn self-regulation from an early age, and is an important skill during early childhood development.

Q9

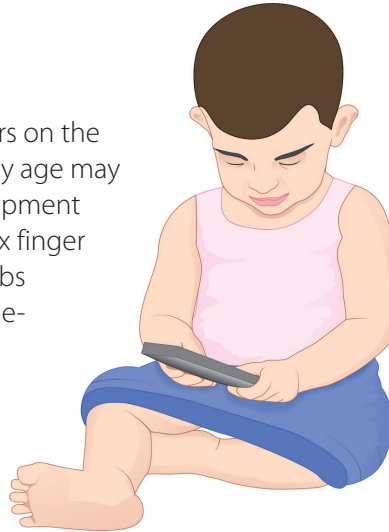
Is there any role of a Speech App or Phonics App to encourage language and socialization for my 2-year-old child?

- Children may not learn language from “Digital Apps” as well as they can from interacting with parents and siblings, or by being creative with toys or tools.
- The ability of brain to learn the “mother tongue”/local language is maximum in the first 2 years. During this time, the neurons in brain are most flexible and are able to adapt to the language, accent, rate, and rhythm of speech as well as fluency of language that the child is exposed to most. Hence, it is important that a mother/father/grandparents/primary caregiver talk and interact with the child more rather than the child spending time with digital Apps.
- As the child grows and the brain matures, the neurons are less capable of reorganizing to adapt to new languages and may cause frustration to the child causing a change in behavior.

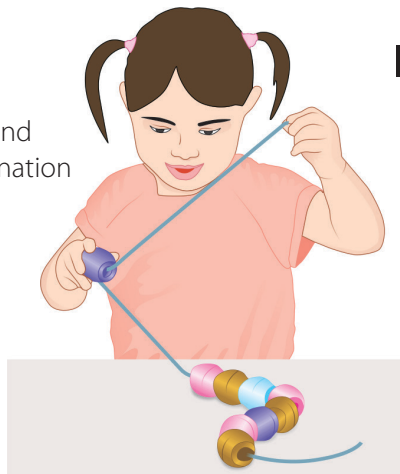
Disadvantages

- Early introduction to digital sounds through rhymes and songs from devices may hamper with the neuronal processes in brain for picking up the first native language.
- They may also delay the developmental process of speech and communication skills in children.
- Early introduction of digital screens and audio hampers development of the social skills during the toddler and preschool years.
- Swiping with fingers on the screen from an early age may hamper the development of thumb and index finger grasp, which disturbs development of fine motor skills (**Fig. 9A**).
- If children get hooked to digital screens, then they may miss out on the opportunity for developing good eye-hand and eye-foot coordination (**Figs. 9A to D**).

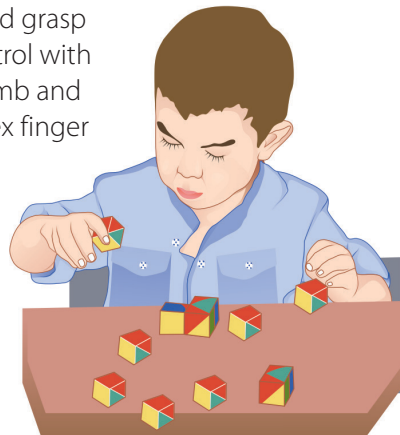
A Swiping with fingers on the screen from an early age may hamper the development of thumb and index finger grasp, which disturbs development of age-appropriate fine motor skills



B Eye-hand coordination



C Good grasp control with thumb and index finger



D Eye-foot coordination



Figs. 9A to D: Age-appropriate development of fine motor skills in first three years of life will enhance reading and handwriting skills in school going age.

Q10**Can the “Internet” applications impact learning in children?**

- Based on the Montessori learning method, it may help to develop reading and spelling skills. However, language learning Apps should not be introduced to children before they have developed good social, communication, and emotional skills. These skills are best learnt in the home environment by observing and imitating family members, siblings, and peers.
- As mentioned above, early introduction to digital devices may interfere with the neuronal processes in brain for learning the first native language, the mother tongue.
- One should wait at least till the child is 3–4 years old before introducing digital applications or digital devices for educational learning.
- There is evidence that during the first three years of life children find it difficult to transfer new knowledge from screen to real life. Their understanding of space, depth and distance may get disturbed by watching programs on screen.
- Overuse of digital screen in the early childhood years can have a negative impact on development of communication and social skills, language and attention span.
- Parents working from home on laptops/computer must ensure that digital devices are kept away from young children. Background sounds from digital devices and TV may interfere with children’s new learning from their environment.
- If parents want to introduce their children to educational programs, it should be done not before the age of 3 years and should be supervised closely by parents.
- Screen time should be limited to less than one hour per day for children between 3 and 5 years (AAP).