

E is for **EVERYDAY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

Making the Most of Everyday Routines

Everyday routines at home, in early education and care programs, and in the community offer thousands of opportunities to support children's early learning and brain development. They also provide natural opportunities for children to learn important skills. Research shows there are strategies adults can use to provide meaningful learning opportunities to children during their everyday routines.

HERE ARE FIVE STRATEGIES TO MAKE THE MOST OUT OF EVERYDAY ROUTINES.

1

Think about everyday routines the child does most days, from waking up until going to bed at the end of the day.

These routines provide many opportunities for children to practice new skills.

2

Consider what learning opportunities are available in each routine.

Each interaction the child has with others and with things during a routine is a learning opportunity. Think about how many times routines happen each day or week and the learning opportunities that are happening within them. It is probably a lot more than you think!

3

Learn about developmental milestones.

Knowing about developmental milestones and when you see or hear a child do them will help you know which skills the child has learned. It will also help you know what the next skill might be to learn.

4

Consider which routines provide opportunities for children to practice skills that are the "next step?"

To identify "next step" skills, think about what the child already knows and can do. Then think about what the child needs to know or be able to do to take part in a routine.

5

Create learning opportunities within routines.

You can create planned opportunities for children to practice and learn skills within everyday routines. These are called embedded learning opportunities. When a child does something you are supporting him or her to learn, be sure to provide a positive response by describing what the child did, giving positive attention or affection, or giving the child access to something he or she enjoys or wants.

EXAMPLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFANTS (LESS THAN 12 MONTHS OLD)

Routine: Diaper change

Developmental Milestones/Skills: Looks at caregiver; smiles at caregiver

Learning Opportunity: Play peek-a-boo. Smile as you say, “peek-a-boo!” Then wait to give the baby a turn to look or smile back at you.

Child Behavior: The baby looks at you and smiles.

Positive Response: Smile back at the baby. Cover your eyes and start another turn in the game.

Routine: Tummy time

Developmental Milestone/Skill: Reaches for an object

Learning Opportunity: Place a rattle in front of the baby but just out of reach to encourage her to reach for it.

Child Behavior: The baby reaches for rattle and touches it.

Positive Response: Push the rattle into her hand, smile, and say, “You got your rattle!”

Routine: Inside or outside play

Developmental Milestone/Skill: Crawls

Learning Opportunity: Sit on the floor a few feet away from the baby. Hold out your arms, smile, and say, “Come see me!”

Child Behavior: The baby crawls to you.

Positive Response: Pick the baby up, give him a hug and say, “Yay! You crawled to Daddy!”

EXAMPLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TODDLERS (1 TO 3 YEARS OLD)

Routine: Snack

Developmental Milestone/Skill: Uses 1 word to ask for food or a drink

Learning Opportunity: Put just a few crackers on the high chair tray. When the crackers are gone, wait and look at the child. When the child looks at you or reaches for more crackers, say, “Say, ‘more.’”

Child Behavior: Child says, “More.”

Positive Response: Give the child more crackers.

*** If the child does not say, “More,” you might give the child the cracker and say, “Next time, tell me ‘more’ when you want more crackers.” This will help her to learn what to do when she wants more crackers.***

Routine: Reading a story

Developmental Milestone/Skill: Repeats words to label objects or pictures

Learning Opportunity: Point to a picture in a book and label it. Then say, “What is this?” while still pointing at the picture.

Child Behavior: The child says the correct name.

Positive Response: Say, “That’s right, it is a [name of object].”

*** If the child does not say the correct name, say, “It’s a [name of object]. Can you say [name of object]?” If the child still does not say the correct name, say, “[name of object]” and try again later.***

Routine: Lunch

Developmental Milestone/Skill: Uses a spoon to scoop food

Learning Opportunity: Show the child how to scoop macaroni with a spoon by doing it yourself. Then say, “Now you try,” and give the spoon to the child.

Child Behavior: The child puts the spoon in the bowl, scoops macaroni on the spoon, and takes a bite.

Positive Response: Say, “Mmmm, you got the macaroni! Does it taste good?”

Routine: Bedtime

Skill: Follows simple directions

Learning Opportunity: After changing into pajamas for the night, give the child his dirty clothes. Point to the laundry basket and say, “Put your clothes in the basket.”

Child Behavior: The child puts his clothes in the laundry basket.

Positive Response: Say, “Thank you for putting your clothes in the basket so we can wash them.”

EXAMPLES CONTINUED →

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EXAMPLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRESCHOOLERS (3 TO 5 YEARS OLD)

Routine: Play

Developmental Milestone/Skill: Uses 2 to 4 words to ask for an object

Learning Opportunity: Roll a ball back and forth a few times. Then hold the ball, look at the child, and wait. If she does not use words to ask for the ball, tell her, “Say, ‘I want the ball.’”

Child Behavior: The child says, “I want the ball.”

Positive Response: Roll the ball back to the child.

Routine: Getting ready to go outside

Developmental Milestones/Skill: Zips or unzips clothes

Learning Opportunity: Start the zipper of the child’s jacket. Then tell the child to pull the zipper up the rest of the way.

Child Behavior: The child pulls the zipper up.

Positive Response: Say, “You zipped your jacket up all the way. High five!”

Routine: Reading a story

Developmental Milestone/Skill: Uses fingers to turn the pages of a book

Learning Opportunity: When it is time to turn to the next page in the book, ask the child to turn the page.

Child Behavior: The child turns the page of the book using his thumb and finger.

Positive Response: Say, “Thank you for turning the page. Now we can read some more.” Then start reading the next page and talking about the pictures with the child.

Routine: Grocery shopping

Developmental Milestone/Skill: Counts objects

Learning Opportunity: Let the child put fruits or vegetables in the cart. Ask her to count each fruit/vegetable as she puts it in the cart.

Positive Response: Say, “You counted all the [fruits/vegetables]. Now we know we have enough for everyone.”

What We Are Doing

The Anita Zucker Center and our collaborators are helping families and practitioners learn how to use strategies that will support children’s learning in everyday routines.

Remember, **relationships, repetition, and routines (the 3R’s)** are the foundation for supporting brain development and early learning.

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