



Your early learning guide for infants,
toddlers and three-year-olds

Your early learning guide For Children 36 to 48 Months



Read this guide to help your
child grow and learn!

Your early learning guide For Children 36 to 48 Months

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Your early
learning guide
For Children
36 to 48 months



These guidelines are for YOU and YOUR BABY!

You are your child's most important teacher and caregiver, and this guide can help you to notice and understand important signs your baby is growing and learning in ways we know will give him or her the best chance in life to be happy, successful, and healthy. The first years of your child's life are more important than most people know. Did you know that 80% of our brain growth happens by age 3? This means that how parents and caregivers nurture brain development in young children matters, and it matters a lot! What you do now with your child will impact the rest of your child's life.

This guide helps parents understand how to support healthy growth and learning through responsive caregiving. Responsive caregiving means that parents pay attention to their children, notice signs of need and development, and respond to those signals in loving, supportive ways. This guide gives you common examples of how young children show

us their needs and their developmental progress, while providing you with examples of how you can respond to those needs in a loving and supportive way.

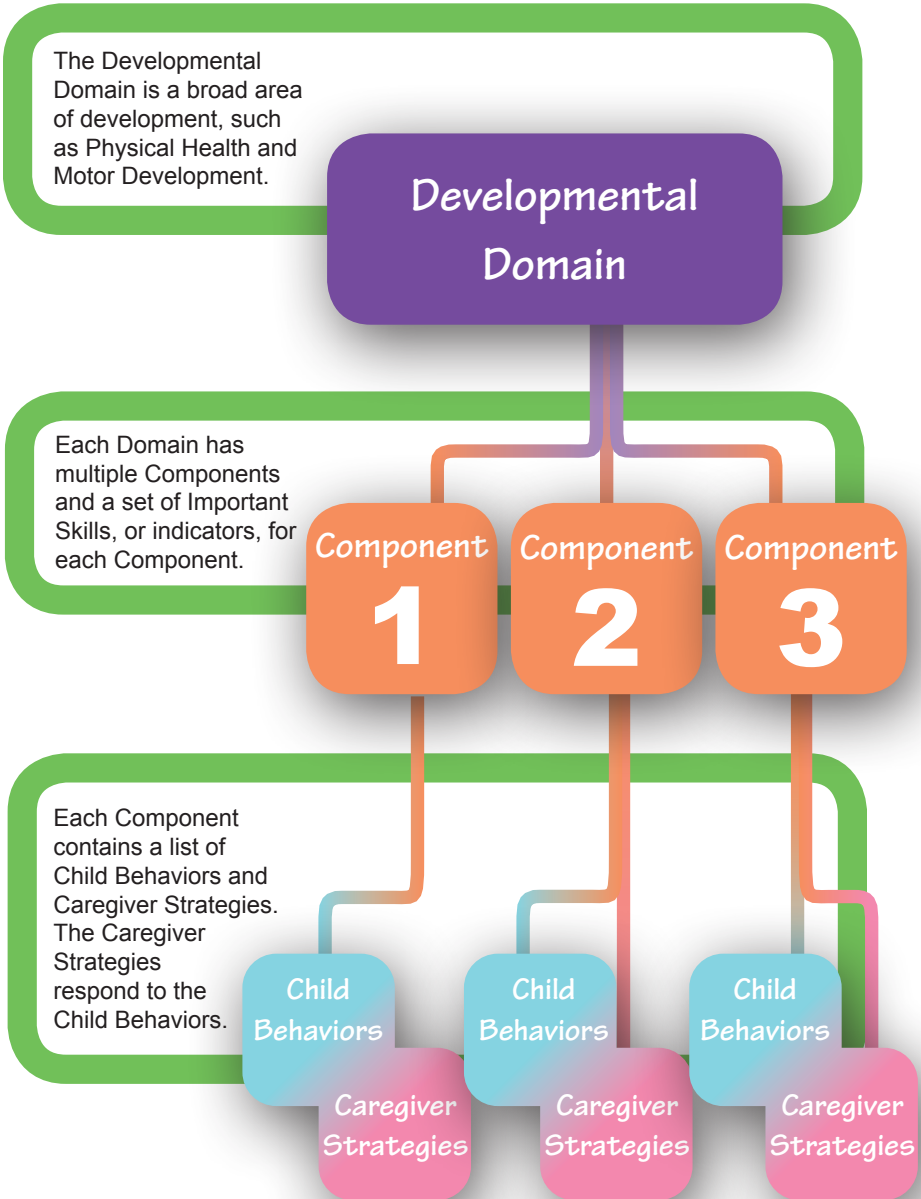
On the following pages, information is organized by *domains*, or categories of development:

- Physical Health and Motor Development
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language and Communication Development
- Cognitive Development

The *domains* are broken into more focused areas called *components*. Each *component* has specific *child behaviors* alongside *strategies* you can take as a parent to be responsive and encourage the healthy development of your child!



How information in this early learning guide is organized





Physical Health and Motor Development

Physical development relates to children's physical growth, while motor development refers to movements of large muscles (gross motor) and small muscles (fine motor). Young children's physical and motor development affects their cognitive and social development, readiness for school, and adult health. Therefore, good physical health and motor development is necessary for overall development.

The Physical Health and Motor Development domain is broken into three important component areas:

- health and well-being
- gross motor skills
- fine motor skills

Providing a safe environment, free time to experiment with materials and body movements, and planning daily activities that encourage your children to move their growing bodies and make healthy food choices all support young children's physical development and well-being.

Health and Well-Being

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Shows signs of healthy development
2. Responds when physical needs are met
3. Expresses physical needs nonverbally or verbally
4. Participates in physical care routines
5. Begins to develop self-care skills
6. Begins to understand safe and unsafe behaviors

Three-year-olds might

- Feed themselves with fork and spoon without assistance
- Choose their own clothes to wear and dress themselves
- Participate in healthy care routines, such as using a tissue to wipe own nose, covering mouth when coughing, and brushing teeth
- Alert a caregiver when another child is in an unsafe situation or try to stop an unsafe behavior

As a caregiver, you can

- Provide forks and spoons during mealtime and allow three-year-olds to choose types and amounts of foods to eat
- Give three-year-olds a few choices for clothing and provide enough time for them to dress themselves
- Find opportunities to demonstrate good health behaviors and teach about personal hygiene (“Please cover your mouth with your elbow when you cough.”)
- Talk to three-year-olds about using safe behaviors and identify who and where they can go to if they need assistance

Gross Motor Skills

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Moves body, arms, and legs with increasing coordination
2. Demonstrates increasing balance, stability, control, and coordination
3. Develops increasing ability to change positions and move body from place to place
4. Moves body to achieve a goal

Three-year-olds might

- Walk up and down stairs alternating feet
- Kick, throw, and catch a large ball with accuracy
- Run more confidently and ride a tricycle
- Hop or jump
- Climb a small jungle gym

As a caregiver, you can

- Provide a variety of play areas for climbing
- Play games with three-year-olds that include hopping, standing on one foot, walking backwards, etc.
- Encourage three-year-olds to climb on fun equipment like a jungle gym at the park or playground
- Use games and songs that involve movement and exercise (“Hop like a bunny.”)

three-year-olds
will climb small
jungle gyms



Fine Motor Skills

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Uses hands or feet to touch objects or people
2. Develops small muscle control and coordination
3. Coordinates eye and hand movements
4. Uses tools and different actions on objects

Three-year-olds might

- Handle or squeeze delicate or tiny objects between thumb and forefinger
- Start using simple tools like safety scissors (cut in a line or around a picture, etc.)
- Copy simple shapes and write some letters and numbers
- Dress and undress with minimal help
- Feed self relatively neatly

As a caregiver, you can

- Provide three-year-olds with tongs and clothespins to play with and practice picking up small objects
- Make a scissor station in a box with safety scissors and paper, and ask three-year-olds to try to cut out shapes, words, and pictures
- Ask three-year-olds to write and draw and provide fun materials for doing so (colored pencils, crayons and markers, paper of various colors, pens, markers, etc.)
- Encourage three-year-olds to dress themselves and celebrate their attempts
- Encourage three-year-olds to use utensils while they eat and celebrate their success in doing so

three-year-olds can dress and undress with minimal help



Social and Emotional Development

The Social and Emotional Development domain includes many skills that form the foundation children need to become happy and successful adults. The Social and Emotional Development domain includes four components:

- Trust and Emotional Security (Attachment)
- Self-Awareness
- Self-Regulation
- Relationships with Others

Children's brains are especially sensitive to caregiving experiences – those who receive warm, consistent, responsive care develop a sense of emotional security and confidence that allows them to be open to exploring their world, trying new activities, and forming relationships.

In contrast, young children who receive harsh or chronically unresponsive care become insecure and anxious. Thus, caregivers of young children have an especially important role in modeling warm, caring behaviors, fostering healthy attachment relationships, helping children cope with emotions, regulate their behaviors, and promoting children's prosocial behaviors toward others.

Trust and Emotional Security

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Establishes secure relationships with primary caregivers
2. Differentiates between familiar and unfamiliar adults
3. Shows emotional connections and attachment to others while beginning to show independence

Three-year-olds might

- Consistently seek out a trusted adult for comfort when they are upset
- Show interest and comfort in playing with and meeting new adults
- Show comfort in new situations

As a caregiver, you can

- Connect with three-year-olds on a daily basis, such as at naptime or bathtime
- Respond with affection and care when approached by upset or hurt three-year-olds
- Encourage independence and participation in new situations (“Go ahead, you can do it!”)

three-year-olds will show more comfort in new situations



Self-Awareness

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Expresses needs and wants through facial expressions, sounds, or gestures
2. Develops awareness of self as separate from others
3. Shows confidence in increasing abilities
4. Shows awareness of relationship to family/ community/cultural group

Three-year-olds might

- Refer to themselves as “I” when speaking (“I can do it.”, “I go with Mommy.”)
- Express more emotions through words, actions, gestures, and body language
- Show more familiarity with personal space (sit on own carpet square during Circle Time, keep their hands to themselves)
- Make choices, such as clothing or art materials
- Enjoy being a helper with a special job to do
- Speak about family members and friends who are not present
- Begin to notice how people’s skin color, hair color, and abilities are different or the same
- Be able to speak about familiar community places and activities, such as going to church, post office, or grocery store
- Enjoy joining others in cultural celebrations

As a caregiver, you can

- Describe and name emotional gestures, actions, words, and feelings (“Wow, Quincy, you are really jumping around. Are you excited to go outside today?”)
- Offer activities for creative play and arts (clothing choices, art projects, etc.)
- Show interest in three-year-olds’ conversations about experiences and activities (“Tell me more about your visit to grandma’s, Aviel.”)
- Give three-year-olds chances to take on different roles and chores (wiping tables, watering plants, sorting materials, getting the mail, etc.)
- Invite three-year-olds to talk about their family members and friends, and help children use words indicating relationships, such as “sister,” “brother,” “grandmother/ grandfather,” “aunt/uncle,” “cousin,” etc.
- Respond to three-year-olds’ interest in physical differences in each other (“Alex uses a wheelchair to move around.”)
- Read books that teach three-year-olds about familiar community places and activities, such as the post office, grocery store, fire station, library, etc.

Self-Regulation

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Begins to manage own behavior and demonstrates increasing control of emotion
2. Shows ability to cope with stress
3. Develops understanding of simple routines, rules or limitations

Three-year-olds might

- Express strong emotions constructively with assistance, such as going to quiet area or asking for a favorite book to be read when upset
- Stick with difficult tasks without becoming overly frustrated
- Tell a story that shows their feelings (“I was so happy...”)
- Know what will happen next in their day, such as knowing that naptime comes after lunch
- Gently handle materials and living things, such as a plant or pet animal
- Follow schedules with few reminders, such as cleaning up toys and joining group activities
- Change behavior for different surroundings, such as running outside and walking inside

As a caregiver, you can

- Offer guidance and comfort when three-year-olds are having trouble with their emotions and behavior (“You seem really sad. Do you want to read a book with me or play with Maya?”)
- Have a quiet space for three-year-olds to go when they are having trouble with their emotions and behavior
- Positively recognize three-year-olds for expressing and controlling intense feelings like anger and frustration (“You used your words, Eva, even though you were frustrated.”)
- Discuss upset feelings with three-year-olds when they have become calm (“I am glad that you feel better now. You seemed angry; was it because you didn’t get your toy?”)
- Talk about and use consistent rules, and praise toddlers when they follow the rules
- Use pictures to explain rules and schedules and keep lists of rules positive and short

Relationships with Others

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Shows interest in and awareness of others
2. Responds to and interacts with others
3. Begins to recognize and respond to the feelings and emotions of others and begins to show concern

Three-year-olds might

- Initiate play and share toys with friends and adults
- Ask questions about why another child is crying or tell a familiar caregiver when a friend is hurt
- Share and take turns with other children
- Encourage and praise peers
- Express interest in, acceptance of, and affection for others
- Begin to plan play with friends and follow through with actions, such as asking a friend to play in the block center, and then doing so
- Make decisions with other children with adult assistance
- Join others in group activities for brief periods of time

As a caregiver, you can

- Provide many activities and experiences for three-year-olds to do with others (pretend play, art activities, outside play, etc.)
- Help three-year-olds join ongoing play; for shy three-year-olds, more encouragement may be needed (“Come on, let’s join Juan. He’s having fun with that puzzle!”)
- Help three-year-olds who have arrived late join in activities, by saying welcoming and encouraging words (“Come play with us!”)
- Support three-year-olds’ play with others by staying nearby and assisting them with resolving their problems
- Continue to show how to share control (“Johnny can measure the flour and Miguel can measure the sugar.”)
- Read stories or invent puppet plays in which characters share, take turns, and cooperate



Language and Communication Development

The Language and Communication Development domain includes three components describing how young children learn to:

- understand language
- speak to communicate with others
- develop early literacy skills needed for reading and writing

The development of language and communication skills begins long before children say their first word. Even very young infants are learning a great deal about their home language, or other languages in their environment, and caregivers can do many things to help support language development. Speaking to children about their daily routines, objects in their environments, their feelings, and sharing books with children are all important ways to support language development.

Listening and Understanding

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Listens with interest to language of others
2. Responds to nonverbal and verbal communication of others
3. Begins to understand the rules of conversation

Three-year-olds might

- Follow three-step directions
- Participate in short conversations with expected words and phrases
- Produce expected responses to different types of requests
- Ask or gesture for a request to be repeated or clarified
- Ask a question and wait for an answer from others
- Provide expected responses to “wh” questions (who, what, where, when, why), as well as other question forms (how, if/then, etc.)
- Let others know when they are interrupted by saying “It’s my turn.”
- Know many words and the opposite of those words (tall/short, smooth/rough, light/heavy)

As a caregiver, you can

- Give three-year-olds some three-step directions (“Please wipe your mouth, pick up your plate, and bring it into the kitchen.”)
- Ask three-year-olds questions that encourage them to remember and discuss events
- Talk about what belongs to other people by using pronouns (he, she, it, them, his, her, their) to refer to them (“Grandma has the big hat. Point to her hat.”)
- Support three-year-olds’ interactions with other children by giving support when they have difficulty (“Zeeba is asking you to play with her. What do you say?”)
- Ask three-year-olds many different questions, including “wh” (who, what, where, when, why), “how,” “if/then,” etc.
- Remind three-year-olds when they interrupt others’ conversations that they need to wait their turn to talk and that they will get a turn to talk (“When Theresa is finished talking, you can tell us your story.”)
- Create play activities for three-year-olds in which you talk about contrasting objects. (“Let’s find all of the dolls that are ‘small’ and then ones that are ‘large.’” or “Can you point to the dog in the picture that has long ears? Now touch the one with short ears.”)

Communication and Speaking

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Uses consistent sounds, gestures, or words to communicate for a variety of purposes
2. Imitates sounds, gestures, signs, or words
3. Uses language to engage in simple conversations

Three-year-olds might

- Ask more difficult questions that need more information and clarification (“Why does ___ happen?”)
- Use multiple words to describe and communicate feelings
- Use more abstract words to understand their world (use words like “think”, “know”, “guess”)
- Speak using the past tense or possessive (“Daddy carried the cake.” “Mommy’s car is blue.”)
- Use approximately 4000+ words in home language or in English by 48 months

As a caregiver, you can

- Support three-year-olds’ curiosity about their world by responding to questions with clear understandable answers
- Encourage three-year-olds to name feelings (“Darius, tell Maya how you felt when she knocked your blocks down.” “You are smiling so big. Are you happy?”)
- Use appropriate words to describe objects and events in the environment
- Follow three-year-olds’ lead in conversation by showing the correct use of past tense or possessive (“Mommy went to the store.”, “Yes, Donny’s door is blue.”)

by 48 months,
children will use
4000+ words in
their home language



Emergent Literacy

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Shows interest in songs, rhymes, and stories
2. Develops interest in and involvement with books and other print materials
3. Begins to recognize and understand symbols
4. Begins to develop interests and skills related to emergent writing

Three-year-olds might

- Like to repeat phrases in books or nursery rhymes, read aloud as a group
- Enjoy doing “pretend readings” of familiar books and making up a story to match drawings (in English and in home language)
- Enjoy a variety of literacy activities, including shared book reading, listening to recorded stories with headphones, or interacting with e-books
- Recall characters and events or predict what will come next in familiar books without help
- Handle books with increasing skill

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As a caregiver, you can

- Pause during reading to allow three-year-olds to fill in repetitive phrases when reading or saying rhymes
- Praise children for reading their own way
- Ask questions and talk to three-year-olds about the electronic media (webpages, e-books, recordings) they use (rather than only letting three-year-olds listen or click through pages independently)
- Recognize three-year-olds’ interest in books and reading and encourage them to explore or read books on their own
- Continue asking three-year-olds to name, locate, describe, count, and talk about events in books and help them add details to their responses
- Talk to three-year-olds about things that are not directly stated in books so they can learn to make inferences “I think he’s feeling jealous and that’s why he...”, “I bet it’s winter in this book.”)
- Sing songs that play with the sounds in language

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Emergent Literacy, continued

three-year-olds might

- Show increasing understanding that print in most languages is read from left to right, top to bottom, and front to back
- Begin to understand that letters are combined to make words
- Recognize some familiar words in print, like their name
- Identify some letters and know some sounds that letters make
- Begin to write letter-like forms and attempt to write from left-to-right and top-to-bottom in English writing
- Attempt to reproduce letters (or characters depending on home language) by copying • one or more letters (or characters)
- Use various writing and drawing tools without adult assistance
- Count words in a sentence
- Break words into syllables (clap syllables in own name)

As a caregiver, you can

- When three-year-olds see print in more than one language, point out important differences across languages
- Provide opportunities for three-year-olds to imitate adult writing and reading activities during pretend play (in the home center: “Do you want to write a grocery list?”)
- Explain that letters are put together to make words while reading with three-year-olds (“This word says ‘dog’ – it’s spelled d-o-g.”)
- Continue to talk to three-year-olds about print that is in their surroundings and ask them to talk about what it says and means (“It’s Tevin’s birthday. What do you think this birthday napkin says?”)
- Recognize three-year-olds’ pride in their knowledge and ask them to tell you which letter names and sounds they know
- Continue to have conversations with three-year-olds as you write together and be more specific about how you write (“I’m going to start our letter at the top of the page. What should I write first?”)
- Involve three-year-olds in frequent writing activities in which you have them help you decide what message to write
- Count how many syllables there are in three-year-olds’ names by clapping for each syllable
- Say simple sentences while clapping the words in the sentence



Cognitive Development

The Cognitive Development domain includes four components that describe how young children develop and demonstrate abilities in:

- exploring the world around them
- solving problems
- remembering and retaining information
- pretending and using their imagination

Cognitive development is often thought of as growth in children's thinking, reasoning, and understanding. Positive early experiences that support cognitive development contribute to lifelong traits such as curiosity and independence. When considering how to support cognitive development overall, remember that young children are very curious about their world! They learn through repetition and opportunities to freely explore their environment.

Exploration and Discovery

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Pays attention and exhibits curiosity in people and objects
2. Uses senses to explore people, objects, and the environment
3. Shows interest in colors, shapes, patterns, or pictures
4. Makes things happen and watches for results and repeats actions

Three-year-olds might

- Talk about and ask about objects in nature
- Observe and discuss changes in weather
- Name basic colors and shapes
- Copy simple patterns
- Experiment with different objects during play to compare their effects (pushes toy cars down different types of ramps to see which car goes faster)
- Repeat actions, such as blowing bubbles or pumping legs on swing, to improve results

As a caregiver, you can

- Take notice of three-year-olds' interest in the natural world and call attention to details of nature or use a magnifying glass to help children focus on details of rocks, leaves, etc.
- Take time to answer three-year-olds' questions about their world (discuss daily changes in the weather or ask them to predict what might come next)
- Describe basic colors and shapes and begin teaching more complex colors/shapes
- Give three-year-olds opportunities to repeat and explore simple patterns (blue block, red ball, blue block, red ball)
- Notice when three-year-olds experiment with their toys and other objects and ask them questions about their play ("Why do you think that green car moves so much faster than the blue car?")
- Praise three-year-olds as they repeat actions

Problem Solving

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Experiments with different uses for objects
2. Shows imagination, creativity, and uses a variety of strategies to solve problems
3. Applies knowledge to new situations
4. Begins to develop interests and skills related to numbers and counting

Three-year-olds might

- Like to play “hide and seek”
- Show more thought in problem solving (use a bucket to move toys from one place to another)
- Complete simple jigsaw puzzles
- Negotiate turn-taking with other children
- Compare and sort objects using one or two features (put all the large red cars together)
- Use tools to measure items (scoop into bucket, string to determine length or height)
- Apply numbers and counting concepts to daily life (count the number of children at school today)

As a caregiver, you can

- Play “hide and seek” games with people and with toys (hide a toy under one of several cups or cloths and let child find it)
- Set up your surroundings to allow new ways of problem solving, and notice when three-year-olds solve problems
- Give three-year-olds simple jigsaw puzzles (six-eight pieces) and help them learn to connect parts of the picture by fitting correct pieces together
- Ask questions related to sorting and measurement while three-year-olds are engaged in those activities (“So all the blue ones go over here and all the red ones go here? Where do all the yellow ones go?”)
- Give three-year-olds materials to practice measuring, comparing, and sorting
- Celebrate counting and include counting during daily routines (“Do you see the crayons? How many do you see? 1-2-3! Yes, there are three crayons!”)

Memory

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Shows ability to acquire and process new information
2. Recognizes familiar people, places, and things
3. Recalls and uses information in new situations
4. Searches for missing or hidden objects

Three-year-olds might

- Tell what will happen next in a familiar book
- Answer simple questions about past experiences (“Who took you swimming yesterday?”)
- Recognize familiar driving routes and locations in neighborhood (says, “That’s where Grandma lives!” when approaching her house)
- Talk about how common objects, such as spoon, hair brush, or pencil, are used

As a caregiver, you can

- Ask three-year-olds what songs and books they would like to sing/read
- Ask three-year-olds to tell you what they think will happen next in familiar book or story
- Ask three-year-olds simple questions about past experiences and respond with interest to their answers
- Point out landmarks and signs as you drive or walk around the neighborhood
- Ask three-year-olds questions that use their memory (“Which way do we go now?”, “Do you remember who lives in this house?”, “Do you see the library?”)

three-year-olds
recognize familiar
locations in the
neighborhood



Imitation and Make-Believe (Symbolic Play)

Important skills your child is developing in this area:

1. Uses objects in new ways or in pretend play
2. Uses imitation in pretend play to express creativity and imagination

Three-year-olds might

- Reenact actions that have multiple steps that they have seen at an earlier time, such as pretending to get ready for work by making breakfast or putting on jewelry
- Have pretend play scenarios that include different roles (“I’ll be the mommy and you be the baby.”)
- Plan what they are going to pretend before play, such as saying “Let’s play baking!”
- Play with imaginary objects, such as serving an invisible slice of pizza on a plate

As a caregiver, you can

- Provide a variety of toys and objects for pretend play, such as hats, clothes, purses, briefcases, phones, dolls, and blocks
- Pretend play with three-year-olds (for example, enjoy pretend breakfast with three-year-olds; talk about how “yummy” the “eggs” are)
- Pretend with three-year-olds when they assign you a role to play (“Am I the baby? OK. Mommy, can I have my blankie?”)
- Notice three-year-olds’ pretend play and try to keep their imagination going (if served a pretend slice of pizza say something like, “Oh no, my pizza has pepperoni on it. I don’t like pepperoni. Could I have another slice, please?”)

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Many individuals contributed to the creation of the Texas Infant, Toddler, and Three-Year-Old Early Learning Guidelines and this early learning guide.

The Texas Early Learning Council worked with researchers at Children's Learning Institute to write the Guidelines, with help from a diverse group of early childhood stakeholders.

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The Texas Infant, Toddler, and Three-
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**Texas
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