

## CHILDREN AGES 2-5

### SKILL ASSESSMENT

The following questions will help you identify the skills in which you excel and target those which you need to develop. By yourself or with your team, try to answer each of the questions as honestly as possible. After completing this independent living skill assessment, review it with your team and identify those skills you would like to strengthen.

	<i>I do not know about this</i>	<i>I need to know more about this</i>	<i>I know about this</i>
1. Know about the many developmental milestones children in this age group will achieve.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Know why children this age continue to need lots of love and attention.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Know that children will learn to perform many tasks more independently, e.g., feeding and dressing themselves.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Know how and when to approach potty training with my child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Know that all children learn at their own pace.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Know at what age children usually begin to reason and often engage in imaginary play.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Know that children begin to distinguish right from wrong.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Know children enjoy physical activities, such as jumping, running and playing with a ball.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Know how to keep my child safe.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Know why routines and traditions are important.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Know why consistency and appropriate limit setting are important in teaching a child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Know how to discipline my child by using time out.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Know why it is important to provide explanations for limits.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Know how to support my child's fine and gross motor skill development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Know at what age children begin to enjoy playmates and play cooperatively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Know how to teach my child values, such as non-violence and kindness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Know why it is important to play with my child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. Know why it is important to read to my child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Know how to plan for my child's educational need, i.e. pre-school and kindergarten.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Know what kind of toys, games and field trips children ages 2-5 enjoy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Know why my children should not watch too much TV.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Know how to deal with frustrations and stress and whom to ask for help if I need a break.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Know how to have fun with my child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

You have now completed the assessment section for “Children Ages 2-5” and identified those skills that you would like to strengthen in order to make better decisions on your own. The following guide can help you in planning how you can learn about and practice these skills. Choose a few skills that you want to develop and, with your team, write down your plan of action. Remember, once you accomplish these goals you can go back to your assessment tool and select new goals to build on your new skills.

**EXAMPLE**

**GOAL:**

**IMPROVE PARENTING**

State Skill 1:

Plan:

When:

Who:

To engage in fun and educational activities with my child



To read to my child.



Every day for the next 2 years



Myself, father and day care provider.

To play with my child.



Every day for 1.5 hrs for the next 2 years



Myself, father, day care provider and my friend.

To go on outings to playgrounds, parks, museums, etc.



Three times a week for 2 hrs for the next 2 years



Myself, father and day care provider.

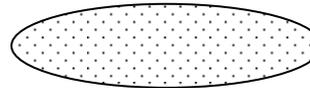
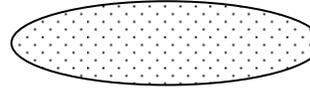
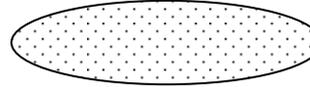
**GOAL: WORK ON PRE-NATAL CARE SKILL**

State Skill 1:  
To be developed  
and/or improved.

Plan:  
How do you plan to learn,  
develop and improve this skill?

When:  
When, where, and how often will you  
work on this skill and by when will you  
have mastered this?

Who:  
Who will assist you?

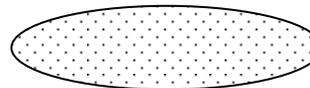
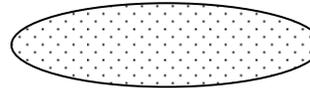
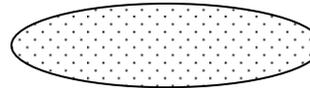


State Skill 2:  
To be developed  
and/or improved.

Plan:  
How do you plan to learn,  
develop and improve this skill?

When:  
When, where, and how often will you  
work on this skill and by when will you  
have mastered this?

Who:  
Who will assist you?



# **CHILDREN AGES TWO THROUGH FIVE**

## **APPEARANCE AND COMMON BEHAVIORS**

Children ages two through five learn a wide variety of new skills and seem to explode in their development of language and motor skills. Their vocabulary increases significantly and they learn to communicate in simple sentences by age 2 ½-4 and more complex sentences by ages 3 ½-5. They continue to be very curious and will explore their environment and learn the cause and effect of events. They will learn from role models and will ask many questions as to why things are happening and how the world functions. Often, they will develop their own perspective of their environment and come up with very funny statements and misconceptions. They are very impressionable and will think about and process events and information. Children in this age group begin to learn right from wrong. By the age of three, children can usually begin to reason and to understand more abstract concepts.

During this developmental stage children may develop imaginary friends and scenarios. They begin to be able to remember and describe dreams and some children will experience nightmares. Their memory is developed and they can recall events. They can dress and feed themselves. They also can recite simple nursery rhymes and songs. Children this age are learning colors and shapes and how to draw realistic pictures. By the time they turn five, many children know their ABC's, can write their name and count to ten. By this age, children also should have learned many basic safety rules, such as looking both ways before crossing the street and not playing with electrical outlets.

Potty training is another big milestone during the earlier phase of this developmental stage. Few children are trained at two years of age. Many learn how to use the potty around 2 ½ years of age and some will continue to try to master potty training until they are four.

Children's gross and fine motor skills also increase significantly during these years. In addition to running and jumping, children between 2 and 3 years learn new skills, such as riding a tricycle and kicking a ball. They are enjoying lots of active play and take delight in trips to the playground and the park. They like slides, swings and playing with sand. As they grow, they'll learn to ride their bicycles with training wheels and engage in activities such as jumping ropes. As they develop more coordination and a greater ability to concentrate, they'll be able to participate in the many sports activities, such as dancing, swimming, soccer, gymnastics, etc. that are offered to four and five year olds.

With each passing year, a child's fine motor skills will continue to develop. As their eye/hand coordination improves so will their ability to complete puzzles and build with blocks.

A child's attention span also increases with age, but do not expect your three or four year old to concentrate on one kind of activity for prolonged periods of time. Children this age will become fidgety and frustrated if they have to sit still for a long duration.

Between the ages of two and five, children's social and emotional development advances, too. They can acknowledge emotions such as anger, happiness, and sadness. From about three years of age children also can begin to articulate what causes that emotion. They may develop fears of certain things, such as darkness or may have scary dreams. Their personality begins to emerge and parents may detect certain traits, such as shyness, in their children. Particularly at the younger end of this age group, children may experience separation anxiety from their primary caregiver, and may cry when being left at daycare by a parent. They will continue to venture out to explore new things but will always return to their caregivers for security check-in's.

Around age three to four, children will begin to develop the ability to delay gratification and look forward to a special event or treat. They can anticipate special events, such as birthdays and holidays, and by the time they are about four and five, may expect certain routines, such as a cake and presents to come along with these special occasions. This is also a time when children's interactions with their social environment become much more sophisticated. While previously toddlers would spend time exploring their playmates like things or play predominantly side by side with other children, now they can begin to play cooperatively. They enjoy being around other children and can engage in similar kinds of activities e.g., building a sandcastle together. However, such interactions are still dominated by self-centered and exploratory actions for those children in the younger end of this age group. While children may begin to share toys, most three-year-olds still have no understanding of things like friendship. As they grow they will form bonds with friends and often prefer to play with some children over others. By the time children are four and five years old, many can accomplish task working together with other children.

During this time, many very special and wonderful things will happen in your child's development. You will hear your child telling a funny story or receive your first mother's day and father's day picture. Your child may ride a bike for the first time or sing you a song. These are memories that will last a life time and, just as in the younger years, should be recorded and treasured for you and your child.

### **ACTIVITY**

Use the following pages to record the many developmental milestones, special things and events your child has experienced that you would like to remember. You may want to create a memory book for you and your child that will also contain photographs, stories, and pictures of your child between the ages of two and five. It also may be fun for you to include your own messages and decorations.

**MY CHILD AGE TWO THROUGH FIVE**

*Special stories I want to tell about my child:*

*Funny things that happened during this time:*

*Some of the most endearing things my child did were:*

*Our holiday and birthday routines included:*

*My child's favorite toys and games were:*

*My child's favorite field trips were:*

*My child's friends were:*

*My child's favorite—least favorite foods were:*

*My child learned things and skills such as:*

*When my child was happy, sad, or angry he/she would:*

*My child's favorite color, book and song were:*

*My child did not like:*

*My child was afraid of:*

*My child was surprised to learn that:*

*My child would imagine that he/she...:*

*My child was disappointed when:*

*If was difficult for my child to:*

*My child's day care provider/baby sitter was:*

*My child liked me to:*

*My child's day to day routine included:*

*I would like to let my child know that:*

## NEEDS

Just as they did during the younger years, children in this age group need lots of love and positive attention. Also, routines continue to be very important to children. You will need to adjust your routines to each age level, but the concept that routines provide a great sense of security and stability remains valid for children in this age group as well. While some routines will stay the same throughout the childhood years, others, such as naps and bedtimes, will change.

Use the space below to record what your child’s routines will be like at different ages.

Age	Daily Routines	Weekly and Occasional Routines
2		
3		
4		
5		

### Traditions

Traditions continue to be of great importance to children and adults, too. By the age of four, children are usually familiar with how holidays and birthdays are celebrated in the family. Often they excitedly anticipate these events and will talk about them well in advance. Many small things associated with such events like pumpkin carving at Halloween or baking cookies at Christmas time will turn into great childhood memories for your children. Other traditions you may want to establish can include family nights during which all members of the household spend time together playing games or doing arts and crafts. Or you can center traditions on helping other people, implementing yearly family picnics or special ways that you celebrate the fourth of July with your family/friends and your child.

List traditions you have and/or will be establishing with your child:

Event	Tradition

All children will learn at their own pace. If you have any questions or concerns about your child’s development, you should talk to you pediatrician. Most children reach developmental milestones within a certain timeframe, but some will be faster or slower than others. Therefore, while it is important to encourage and support your child in learning new skills, it is equally important not to pressure your child or to have unrealistic expectations. To find the best ways to support your child’s learning, it is important to evaluate your knowledge and expectations regarding child development. Utilize the following chart to establish age appropriate tasks, skills and achievements for your child.

<b>AGE</b>	<b>TASK</b>	<b>SKILL NEEDED</b>	<b>HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD?</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
<b>2</b>				
<b>3</b>				
<b>4</b>				
<b>5</b>				

In addition, it is important to evaluate your own personality and expectations regarding your child's achievements. Some parents are very "laid back" while others are competitive. Some parents also have conscious and unconscious expectations, hopes and dreams for their children and will encourage their children to meet those. Some parents, for example, would like their children to be very smart and to achieve intellectual milestones as soon as possible. Other parents may dream of their child becoming a famous athlete and may enroll him or her in sports activities, while some parents just want their children to do whatever makes them happy. These expectations will influence the ways a parent will support her/his children's learning, and an awareness of his/her expectations will increase the likelihood that the parent can provide the best support for a child's learning.

For example, a competitive parent may expect too much and overwhelm and frustrate a child with those high expectations. On the other hand, a parent who expects very little from his/her child may not provide enough stimulation to the child.

What are your expectations, hopes and dreams for your child's future?

How would you characterize yourself? Are you competitive, "laid back," ambivalent, etc. in your expectations of your child? How will those characteristics and expectations influence your child's learning?

As children get older they will have to learn to become more independent and be able to perform certain tasks without immediate help from their parents. On the other hand, children will need continued close supervision and guidance with many tasks. It is one of the more difficult aspects of parenting to keep these two factors in balance-to facilitate growth and development while never compromising a child's safety.

Evaluate how you would address that balance at age two, three, four and five. What kind of things do you think your child can do independently and what kinds of things will he/she need help with and/or close supervision?

**Directions:**

Complete the following chart by marking an **I** for independent and an **H** for help and a **S** for supervision.

<b>Tasks/Situation</b>	<b>Age 2</b>	<b>Age 3</b>	<b>Age 4</b>	<b>Age 5</b>
Brush teeth				
Eat with utensils				
Clean room				
Get dressed				
Climb stairs				
Walk to the store				
Play in the yard				
Color				
Play with blocks				
Play with a playmate				
Take a bath				
Watch a video				
Pour juice into a cup				
Go to the bathroom				

Parenting is an endless stream of decision making. Particularly in areas that could potentially compromise the safety and well being of a child, it is important that parents always use their best judgment possible. Making decisions and using a good judgment always involves many different steps. Parents have to weigh the pros and cons of a decision, anticipate the impact a decision may have and evaluate what might get in the way of good decision-making, such as stress. Parents must also make decisions that are in the best interest of the child and often have to put their own desires and feelings on the backburner. Many decisions parents have to make are very difficult.

**Consider the following:**

**Nancy**, 17, lives with her two year old son, Lisle, in a Teen Living Program. Lisle’s father, Tyrone, disappeared when Nancy was eight months pregnant. Two weeks ago, Nancy received a letter from Tyrone stating that he was very sorry that he had disappeared but that he had a lot of time to think and now he wanted to take responsibility for his son. He said that he feels awful that he had not been in contact earlier but that he wants to get involved now. He also stated that he has a pretty decent job right now and will send them a check every other week. He actually enclosed a money order for 80 dollars. He also wanted to know when he could come for a visit. Nancy is not sure what to do. She is very angry with Tyrone for abandoning her before the baby was born and feels that he does not deserve any contact with Lisle. She also feels that she made it this far without him and does not need him. In addition, she thinks it is “pay-back” time for all the suffering he caused her. On the other hand, Lisle has begun to ask her about his dad and she does not know what to say. She thinks that it may not be fair to deprive him of his father.

*What do you think? What advice would you give to Nancy? What would you do?*

At times parents need to deal with difficult situations and solve problems that may impact their child's safety. **Consider the following:**

**Allison**, 19, was up with the stomach flu all night. Today she still feels sick and weak. She is very tired, but her three-year-old son needs her attention. She tried to call her mother and her babysitter to come and help her out, but nobody was home. She tries to play with her son, but after lunch she can hardly keep her eyes open. She is afraid that she's going to fall asleep and that her son may get into something that is harmful.

*What advice would you give to Allison? What would you do?*

*Evaluate how you usually make decisions regarding your children? Do you weight the pros and cons? Do you follow your feelings and instincts? Do you ask somebody for advice or gather information on a particular subject? Record your findings below.*

Children of all ages need to know that their parents love them unconditionally. They need to know that even if they make mistakes or misbehave, their parents will always support and love them. A parent's love must never depend on a child's performance and achievement.

**Consider the following:**

**Selina**, 19, receives a telephone call from her daughter's kindergarten teacher stating that her five year old daughter, Brielle, was misbehaving in class and got into a fight with one of the other girls. When Brielle gets home from school, her mother tells her that she is a bad girl for getting into fights and misbehaving. She warns Brielle that if she does something like that again she won't love her anymore.

*What do you think about Selina's way of dealing with the situation?*

*Do you think Selina's reaction will help Brielle address her problem in school?*

*What advice would you give to Selina?*

**Matthew**, 20, always was an exceptional athlete and currently plays football for his college. He tries to get his five-year-old son, Derrick, interested in team sports and has signed him up for soccer. On the first day of practice Derrick does not want to play, and while the other children are practicing, he hides behind his father. Matthew tries to convince him to go out onto the field, but Derrick says that he wants to go home. His father tells him: "Go out there and play or I won't love you anymore. I want a son who is an athlete and not a wimp."

*How do you think this makes Derrick feel?*

*What advice would you give to Matthew?*

## Limit Setting

As children's cognitive abilities increase with age, parents can reason with children and provide them with explanations for restrictions and limits. By age four and five, most children will actually want their parents to give them the reason for limits. Providing explanations and information related to events and behaviors will also help children learn the relationship between cause and effect. In addition, it will help children transfer that knowledge to other similar situations independently. **Consider the following:**

**Megan**, 17, and **Christa**, 18, are at the playground with their children James and John, both age-four. James and John are swinging on the swing set and are jumping off the swings before they come to a stop. Both Megan and Christa tell their children to stop jumping off the swings. James and John both ask their mothers why they cannot jump off the swings. Christa replies that John cannot continue because she said so. Megan explains to her son James that she does not want to spoil his fun, but that she does not want him to get hurt. She goes on to tell him that she sets limits to teach him and to keep him safe. She also suggests that she can help him to find another activity that he would like but is safer.

*How would you have handled a situation like this?*

*What do you think John has learned from this situation?*

*What do you think James has learned from this situation?*

In explaining limits and situations, it's important to do so in a way that children understand. If parents talk to children using language and concepts that go over their heads and exceed their cognitive abilities, they will not get their message across.

*Think about how you would handle and explain the following situations:*

- Your three year old refuses to eat vegetables and you would like him/her to understand that eating vegetables is important and healthy.
- Your three-year-old does not want to go to day care and does not understand why you have to go to work every day.
- Your four-year-old continues to want to cross the street without looking out for oncoming cars.
- Your five-year-old wants to wear his/her favorite shirt every day of the week.
- Your four-year-old wonders why he/she only lives with her mom and not with a mom and a dad like some of the other children in preschool.
- Your three-year-old wants to know why you don't want to buy him all the toys and the candy in the world.
- Your five-year-old wants to know why he/she has to go to school.
- Your five-year-old wants to know if there is really a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.
- You are trying to explain to your two-and-a half-year-old that he/she should not hit other children.

While younger children have a need for immediate gratification, older children are able to delay gratification for short periods of time. By the time they are four, they can accept explanations for delays of gratification, such as "You cannot have candy right now because it will spoil your appetite for dinner. However, you can have some after dinner." Actually, children in that age group also begin to control their impulses and should begin to learn to deal with their emotions, including frustration. The good news is that temper tantrums, still common at age two and three, will become less frequent in four and five year olds.

Parents also need to help their children learn to deal with emotions and impulsive behaviors through continued and consistent limit setting and appropriate means of discipline. Experts recommend the time-out chair for children who are two years or older. Parents will need a chair and a timer. If it is necessary to discipline your child, sit him/her in a chair near you. Parents should not put their child in another room. Set the timer for a few minutes. Two-year-olds should not receive a time out that is longer than

one or two minutes. Parents can add a minute for each year. However, keep in mind that even one minute can be a very long time for a small child. When the timer goes off, his/her “time-out” is over. This way of discipline continues to be an effective, consistent and simple way that children can understand. **Children should never be disciplined for accidents, such as spilling milk.**

It is important to not overly discipline your child. Often it is helpful to pick just a few things you would like him/her to learn and to address those before moving on to the next ones.

**Consider the following:**

**Rebecca** is going to turn three in about one month. She is a very active young lady and constantly gets into things she is not supposed to. Recently, she has begun to try to climb on furniture. She also loves to turn the lights on and off and has discovered that it is great fun to flush objects down the toilet. While she has the skills to feed herself with a spoon, she often refuses and uses her hands instead. She is very interested in learning new things and loves attention. Rebecca likes to do things independently and enjoys dressing herself. However, she often mismatches clothes, but gets very upset if her mother or father wants to change them. She is very outgoing and friendly, but at times has problems with her playmates because she wants to dominate all situations. She enjoys many activities and never wants the day to end. Therefore, she has a difficult time going to bed and often cries and screams when it is bedtime.

*What kind of skills do you think her mother wants Rebecca to learn?*

*Which of these skills do you think may be a priority?*

*How do you think her mother should teach and discipline Rebecca?*

## MAKING CHOICES AND DECISIONS

Children in this age group also need to learn to make choices and decisions. Giving them choices will enhance their emotional, social and intellectual development and will increase their self-esteem. While children cannot make fundamental choices like whether or not they want to go to school, parents can give them ample opportunities to make small guided choices. For example, parents may ask their children “Would you like to wear your blue or green pants?” or “Would you like cereal or pancakes for breakfast?”

*Can you think of guided choices that, without compromising safety or well being, would help your child make decisions and increase his/her self-esteem?*

While babies and younger toddlers are not too interested in interaction with other children, children in this age group of 2-5 years need exposure to other children. Many children play with others at daycare or in pre-school; those children who are not in a structured day setting can interact with others at play dates, playgroups and playgrounds. This will provide them with stimulation and interactions necessary to develop age appropriate skills.

Children also need to be exposed to an environment that helps them to learn. Parents can offer many learning experiences at home. They can teach their children colors, shapes, and numbers and provide them with opportunities to learn through play; they can also read to them, sing with them, play ball with them, etc. All of these activities will facilitate learning. Parents also have to teach their children about values, such as non-violence, sharing, and honesty. It takes an investment on the parents’ part to take time every day and actively play with their children. Play is important work for children.

***Consider the following:***

**Benjamin**, 20, is the single father of three-year-old, Anthony. Ben works a lot and is often too tired to play with his son when he gets home from work. He wants to watch TV with him instead. The weekends are kind of busy, too, because Ben tries to get the laundry and the shopping done before Anthony has to go to bed so that he is all done when his mother comes to baby-sit while he goes out with his friends. Today Benjamin’s mother is telling him that he does not spend enough time with his son and that he is selfish in his actions. She goes on to say that he decided to have a child and should take responsibility for him and spend a sufficient amount of time with him. Benjamin replied that she was being unfair because he works very hard to be able to pay for rent, food, and daycare and that he needs a break. His mother replied that working to meet his son’s basic needs does not make him an adequate parent and that there is a lot more to parenting than providing for basic needs of a child.

*What do you think? Who is right?*

*What advice would you give to Benjamin?*

### **Educational Needs**

You also will have to think about and address your child's educational needs. Children can be exposed to positive learning experiences in daycare, pre-school, and public school. Daycare providers will usually offer activities and play options to children that help them learn. Also, children can enter pre-school at age 2.9 years of age, provided that they are potty trained. Preschool programs usually do not run for more than 2.5 hours a day and offer somewhat more structured and educational activities than in daycare. Children enter kindergarten when they are at least five years of age. Prior to being accepted into any kindergarten class, children are tested to determine if they should start attending that year or wait for the following year. The test does not so much evaluate specific areas of knowledge, but assesses a child's fine and gross motor skills, ability to communicate and understanding of basic concepts. Failing the test is most often not a sign of the child's future academic performance; it merely means that the child needs a little more time to develop certain abilities. Again, keep in mind that every child develops at his/her own pace. If you plan to sign your child up for any special educational programs, such as METCO or a charter school, you will have to do that as soon as possible, sometimes even right after your child is born. Signing them up is not a guarantee that they will get in, but it provides that option if you desire that kind of an education for your child.

*Think about what kind of preschools you might want your child to attend and evaluate different kinds of educational programs for your child. Record your findings in the box below.*

## STIMULATION/TOYS

Children in this age group enjoy many different kinds of games, play, field trips, toys and arts and crafts. As their skills and language become more sophisticated, they can enjoy a much broader range of activities. Children in this age group continue to be very curious and need to have many different opportunities to learn how the world works. They also need plenty of options to develop their motor skills through activities such as running, playing ball games, drawing, and playing with blocks. Expensive toys are not necessary and, just as with younger children, play and interaction with parents and caregivers is essential. Also any kind of play that involves fantasy and “make believe” is great for children’s intellectual development. Many children this age use imaginary things in their play; some may even have imaginary friends. Some children may tell fantastic stories while others may pretend to be a certain character or personality that often centers on heroes and figures from television. Unless such behaviors become excessive, there is nothing to worry about; it is all part of normal child development.

Again, expensive toys are not necessary and simple items, such as cardboard boxes, blocks and construction paper and crayons will provide hours of fun. You also can make toys yourself like paper airplanes. Many household items make great toys and cereal boxes, empty paper towel rolls, etc. make great art supplies. Simple outdoor games, such as hopscotch and jump rope, can be very entertaining as well. You can make your own bubbles and buy sidewalk chalk very reasonably. You can also invent your own games for your child. Simple word games are fun and educational. You can invent scavenger hunts and convert your living room into a pirate ship. You can make puppets with your child and put on performances using those puppets. You can cook gourmet meals in the sandbox and a great big ocean in your sink. Actually, all these activities are very healthy for your child’s development and often much better than any kind of an action figure or store bought toy.

### ACTIVITY

*What kind of games are you going to play with your child? What kind of supplies/toys will you use? What kind of toys could you make yourself and what kind of games could you invent?*

## The Importance of Reading

At this age it becomes very important that parents read with their children. Often parents create routines around reading, such as reading before bedtime. If parents can teach their children to enjoy books at this age, they will enjoy reading books for the rest of their lives. There are many wonderful and educational books available for children of all ages. Many younger children enjoy picture books with a few short sentences; while four and five-year-olds can begin to follow short stories. All libraries have a children's section and carry hundreds of books even for young children. Some libraries also offer video rentals free or for a small fee.

Go and visit the children's section in your local library. If you do not already have one, obtain a library card. Also establish a reading routine and/or schedule for your child and mark it on the calendar below.

	<b>TIME</b>	<b>BOOK/STORY/CHAPTER</b>
<b>MO</b>		
<b>TUES</b>		
<b>WED</b>		
<b>THUR</b>		
<b>FRI</b>		
<b>SAT</b>		
<b>SUN</b>		

Books are also great tools for teaching your children positive values and morals. Many fairy tales, for example, contain valuable life lessons and morals. Videos can never make up for the messages and stimuli a child receives from a book.

Remember that television and movie time must be limited for children of all ages. Too much television can be harmful for a child's social, emotional and intellectual development. Television cannot replace play, friends and parents and must not be used as a constant babysitter. Also, parents must carefully evaluate what kind of messages their children get from movies and television. Even children's movies can contain elements that may not be suitable for younger ones.

*How much time do you think a 2, 3, 4 and 5-year-old child should spend in front of the television in a day or in one week?*

*Why do you think parents let their children watch too much TV?*

*What can you do as a parent to limit your child's time watching TV?*

### **Outings**

Children in this age group love to go on outings and field trips, such as to the museum and playground. *Using the information from the previous chapter and information from your local park and recreation committee, establish a list of outings and field trips you would take your child age 2, 3, 4, or 5 on in the summer, fall, winter and spring.*

Also, there are many inexpensive and free programs offered through your local YMCA, library, and the playground commission. For example, your local library may offer story hours or invite popular book characters to sign autographs. Check out your neighborhood options.

## CHOOSING A CARETAKER FOR YOUR CHILD

Every parent needs some help and an occasional break from parenting. Many times parents will turn to family, friends and professionals for assistance with babysitting and childcare. Regardless of whom you choose, every parent always has to make sure that caretakers will keep her or his children safe. To leave your child with an irresponsible or abusive caretaker is dangerous and may impact your child's life forever. While it may be difficult to evaluate whether or not someone is a good caretaker of your child, there are certain steps and precautions every parent must take prior to leaving their children with someone. Parents also have to consider that not all friends or relatives are good babysitters just because of the fact that they are familiar to the parent and possibly the child. Choosing appropriate caretakers for your child requires thorough consideration and sound decision making.

### Consider the following:

**Jeremy** has his son Ray, age two, for the weekend. It is the middle of January and it is freezing cold outside. Jeremy is about to cook dinner when he discovers that he forgot to pick up the medication Ray's pediatrician prescribed for his ear infection. Jeremy does not want to take Ray outside in the cold. Just then the doorbell rings and a couple of Jeremy's friends come to visit. Jeremy has known these two guys for five months and has been playing football with them. Neither of them is a father or has experience with kids. As a matter of fact, Jeremy does not know a lot about them but thinks about asking them to take care of Ray while he goes to the pharmacy. He tells himself that it only would take about half an hour, but he is not sure if he can trust the guys.;  
*What would you do in Jeremy's situation? Why?*

**Paula**, 19, lives with her 11 month old daughter, Eliza, in a large apartment complex. She has been really busy and quite stressed out lately because she had to put in a lot of hours at work. Paula is a waitress in a restaurant that is always very busy during the summer months. Right after work she rushes to pick up her daughter from daycare and then does all the household chores. Tonight, however, Paula is looking forward to going to the movies and to dinner with her friends. She has been looking forward to this evening for two weeks. Half an hour before her friends are supposed to arrive to pick her up, her babysitter cancels. Paula is very disappointed. But her neighbor, who is over for a visit, offers to take care of Eliza. Paula does not know what to do. She has known her neighbor for two years and also knows that she baby-sits every Thursday for another woman from upstairs who has two little boys. The problem is, however, that she often hears her neighbor and her boyfriend fighting. Also, there are a lot of people going in

and out of that apartment. On the other hand, she feels that she really needs a break and would very much like to go out with her friends.

*What advice would you give to Paula? Why*

**Wilma**, 18, has to take an entrance exam for college. The day before the exam, her daycare provider lets her know that she will be closed for the rest of the week because of a death in her family and will not be able to take care of Wilam's daughter Emily, age three. When her Aunt Isabel calls, Wilma tells her about the problem with daycare. Aunt Isabel offers to baby-sit for her while she is taking the exam. Wilma is not sure what to do. Aunt Isabel has a history of substance abuse and often passed out when she drank too much. She went to a treatment program but relapsed. She is a good person when she is sober, but one never knows when she will start to drink.

*What advice would you give to Wilma? Why?*

**Emma**, 18, thinks she is in love. She met this great guy at a school dance two weeks ago and they have been dating ever since. He called her today and asked if he could come over. Emma agreed thinking that this would also be a great opportunity for Charles to meet her daughter, Brianna, who is two-and-a-half years old. When he comes over, he is great with Brianna and plays with her. At five o'clock Emma tells him that she will have to leave soon to bring Brianna to the sitter and then go to her night GED program. But Charles replies that she doesn't need to do that because he could stay and take care of her. Emma is somewhat surprised at that offer and not sure what to do.

*What advice would you give to Emma?*

*Do you think that being attracted or “in love” with someone may affect your judgment about choosing appropriate caregivers for your child(ren)? Why? Why not?*

**Harry**, 21, and his four-year-old son, Leif, live in a large inner city neighborhood. Harry often takes his son along when he goes to hang out with friends or when a bunch of guys play ball on the court. So, most of his friends know Leif well, and Harry tries to tell his friends that they cannot swear or do any kind of stupid stuff when his son is around. Today everybody, including Harry and Leif, are at the court when Harry’s best friend, Jack, shows up in his new sports car. He invites Harry to come for a test drive but tells him that Leif can’t come along because it’s a two-seater and he doesn’t have a car seat. Harry really wants to go for the ride because the car is so cool. He debates whether or not to leave Leif with the guys and tells himself that it would only be 10 minutes or so until he would return.

*What advice would you give to Harry?*

*Use the following space and think about dangerous and harmful things that could happen to children who are left with inappropriate caretakers.*

In order to avoid these kinds of devastating consequences related to inappropriate caretakers, you always must consider the following questions when thinking about leaving your child with someone. These considerations still apply even if you have difficulty finding a babysitter and/or in emergency situations.

## CHILD CARE/BABY SITTER CHECKLIST

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF	YES	NO	UNKNOWN
Is he/she a responsible person?			
Is the person nurturing?			
Will he/she be able to provide a safe environment?			
Does the person understand safety needs of children?			
Is the person even-tempered?			
Does he/she have any history of impulsive/violent behaviors?			
Does the person have any history of sexually inappropriate or offending behaviors?			
Does he/she have any history of substance abuse?			
Will the person have no more than six children in the home?			
Have you known this person for a period of time?			
Does he/she have good references?			
Will the person be able to offer age-appropriate interactions?			
Does he/she have experience with children?			
Does the person have a telephone in the home?			
Is the person of a mature age?			
Is the home free of guns?			
Does the person usually make good and reasonable decisions?			

*Use this check list to evaluate who may and may not be an appropriate caretaker for your child. If you're not entirely sure about someone, you should not let him/her take care of your child.*

Appropriate Caretaker	Inappropriate Caretaker	Questionable Caretaker