

CDC's
“Learn the Signs. Act Early.” Campaign

Go Out and Play! Kit

**A resource to help early educators
monitor development through play**



www.cdc.gov/actearly



Learn the Signs. Act Early.

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About This Kit

Warm weather not only signals a change of season, but for many young children it also signals days of endless exploring outdoors, as well as games of kickball, tag on the playground, and “Red Rover” with friends. And, when the sun comes out and the temperature rises, it seems teachers (and parents) just can’t wait to say, “Go out and play!”

As an early educator, you know the importance of play and that, for a child, to play is to learn. In fact, play is so essential to optimal child development that it has been recognized formally by the United Nations as a right of every child. But did you know that play also offers a perfect opportunity for you to observe a child’s development? It’s true! Encouraging developmentally appropriate indoor and outdoor play is a great way to observe social, emotional, and cognitive milestones that mark a child’s development. Watching for the developmental milestones that are appropriate for a child’s age provides clues to a child’s development and can help you identify a child who might be at risk for a developmental delay or disability. As a trusted caregiver and educator, you can play a vital role in helping that child reach his or her full potential by sharing what you observe, and any concerns you might have, with that child’s parents and encouraging them to talk with their child’s doctor.

To help, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” campaign offers this **Go Out and Play! Kit**, a resource for fun and interactive activities designed for children 3 through 5 years of age, as well as other important information about development and how to share concerns with parents.

In this kit, you’ll find:

- Sample activities for children 3 through 5 years of age.
- Information about monitoring developmental milestones.
- Suggestions for how to make your activity day successful (and fun!).
- Tips about talking to parents if you suspect a child has a developmental delay.
- A special pullout section with activities to share with parents for at-home play.

The **Go Out and Play! Kit** also is available on the campaign website (www.cdc.gov/actearly), where you can find a variety of other free tools to help you monitor the development of young children, including fact sheets about key developmental milestones and a complete Child Care Provider Resource Kit.

Now, “go out and play!”

Let us know how you played:

Did you “go out and play?” Let us know how you used the **Go Out and Play! Kit** by e-mailing us at actearly@cdc.gov.

Planning To Make a Day of It?

Engaging young children in developmentally appropriate activities can be fun and educational for both children and teachers. If you are planning a dedicated activity day or event, we've pulled together a few suggestions to consider as you plan. If you are using this kit as a resource for daily activities, please follow your usual outdoor play plans and move ahead to the **Safety First** section.

- Get consent from parents for each student before the event. Invite parents to volunteer to help children enjoy the activities and manage the day.
- Develop a plan that outlines the roles and schedules for teachers and volunteers. Keep in mind that you might want to have more than one person assisting with each activity.
- Think about the materials and resources you will need during the day. You might want to ask parents to bring in materials or partner with another organization to help make your event happen without a lot of money. For example, if you will need snacks and drinks, you might consider asking a local supermarket for a donation.
- Keep the children in mind when planning the activities. What do they enjoy doing? Try planning similar activities with a twist to make it a fun new experience. Do you have students with physical limitations or other disabilities? Make sure to adapt activities so that everyone can participate. For more information on adapting play for children with disabilities visit: <http://tinyurl.com/ACFadapt4disabilities>
- Decide how many activities you want to have during the day and how they will be organized. For instance, will children move from activity to activity in an assigned team? This might work well if you have multiple relay activities. Or, will you set up different stations and let children select the activities they most want to participate in? This might require additional volunteers to guide the children through the activities.
- Pick activities that are hands-on and educational. Young children love to experience things that help them learn new concepts in a fun, interactive way. The sample activities in this kit are a few ideas to get you started.
- Consider expanding the day by working in other special activities. For example, the event can be combined with a family cookout to thank parents for their support. Or, the students can create a banner that will hang in a common area to mark the occasion.
- Decide if and how children will be rewarded for their accomplishments. For example, you might give children colored ribbons for each completed activity or give them a "passport" with all the possible activities and a star for each activity completed.
- Measure your own success in changes in children's attitudes, knowledge, or behavior. By talking to parents and teachers, you can learn a lot about the activities that had an effect and ideas to improve for next year's event.

Safety First!

As an educator of young children, the safety of your students is your first priority. Before organizing any outside event, it is important to consult your school's safety and security policies and procedures. Following is a list of a few suggestions to help ensure that your event—and everyday play—is safe and healthy.

- Perform a walk-through of the play area. Debris, rocks, water, and other hazards should be removed from play areas. If you are using a very large field, you might consider creating a smaller play area by roping or taping off the perimeter of the desired space.
- If any of your activities require the use of sports or protective equipment, be sure to inspect it to make sure it fits properly and is in good condition. Also, show teachers and volunteers how to use and sanitize the equipment properly.
- Create or review your emergency action plan. Every school should have a written emergency action plan. Make sure that individuals are aware of their roles in an emergency situation. For sample plans, visit www.cdc.gov/Features/BeReady/ or www.naccrra.org/disaster/.
- Keep an emergency medical authorization form on file for each child. This form gives parental permission for emergency medical care, if it is required. It should include contact names, addresses, telephone numbers, and health insurance information.
- Be aware of the weather conditions and prepared to move children, staff, and volunteers inside or to a safe area in case of bad weather.
- Encourage children to drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after activities. Fluid breaks should be offered at least every 30 to 45 minutes (or more often during warmer conditions).
- Have well-stocked first-aid kits available at all times. Every school should have a first-aid kit stocked with supplies for wound and injury care. Athletic tape, elastic wraps, gauze, bandages, and antiseptic ointment should be included. Ice for injury care should be readily available. Follow your state licensing requirements for this first-aid kit.
- Follow your state licensing requirements about sunscreen and insect repellent. Remember to get written permission from parents before applying either to children's skin.
- It is a good idea to remind parents of any specific dress preferences for your play activities (e.g., sneakers, loose-fitting clothing, etc.). You also might want to remind parents that young children often get dirty when playing, so it is helpful to keep that in mind when choosing what they will wear to school. You want to be sure the children have appropriate clothes to fit the activities and weather.
- If you are planning an activity day, try to have a nurse available on the day of the event.

Monitoring Milestones

As early educators, you spend your day working with, playing with, and watching children, and you are already familiar with many developmental milestones—such as pointing at objects, smiling, and playing with others. Each child is unique, but sooner or later you will see a child who is not developing typically.

You are a trusted resource for parents! They look to you for information on their child, so the “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” campaign has created a series of resources to help you educate parents on the full range of child development. The campaign website (www.cdc.gov/actearly) has a lot of helpful information as you monitor developmental milestones of children in your classes.

- **Download Materials**—View or download materials created for early educators.
- **Order Materials**—Order our free Child Care Provider Resource Kit, which includes a CD-ROM with fact sheets on child development that you can print out, along with 3 growth charts, 3 small posters, and 50 flyers for parents.

The CD-ROM contains fact sheets about developmental milestones for children from 3 months through 5 years of age; developmental disabilities, including autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), cerebral palsy, intellectual disability (also known as mental retardation), vision loss, and hearing loss; and developmental screening. It also includes milestones checklists you can print out and share with parents and tips for talking with them about child development. You also can order the “Outreach Resource Kit” if you need additional flyers to share with parents.

- **Hand Out Milestones Checklists**—You can print out our milestones checklists for parents or your staff, or both, to complete. These checklists note key developmental milestones to watch for as children reach different ages. Teachers (and parents) will find them helpful in monitoring a child’s development and identifying possible delays.
- **Share the Interactive Milestones Chart**—Our interactive chart is a great way to show parents how children develop. Consider mentioning this great interactive tool in your parent newsletter or bookmarking it on a parent resource computer at your center.
- **Link to the “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” campaign**—We have created a “linking kit” that allows you to link easily to the campaign and its resources from your own website. Instructions for how to do this can be found on our site.
- **Include “Learn the Signs. Act Early.” Print Advertisement in Your Newsletter**—We also have a print advertisement that would be great to include in your newsletter to tell parents about the campaign. Visit the campaign website to download the advertisement. All you need to do is download the PDF file and copy and paste it into a digital file in your newsletter.

Go Out and Play! Activities

Congratulations—you've decided to "go out and play!" Now, you want to choose activities that are developmentally appropriate. We've pulled together several sample play activities that are fun for young children, while giving you the opportunity to observe important developmental milestones. Although monitoring children's motor skill development is also very important, this kit focuses on helping you observe less familiar social, cognitive, and emotional milestones. Lists of all age-appropriate developmental milestones can be found at www.cdc.gov/actearly.

The following activities are designed for children 3 through 5 years of age; toddlers younger than 3 years of age might enjoy some of these activities as well, but might not be able to engage in outdoor play to the same degree as children a bit older. In playing any game or engaging in any activity with young children, remember that safety is the first priority. (See **Safety First** tips.)

Children often will adapt the game themselves; following their lead can be an easy way to make sure they like what they are doing and get the most from the activity.

1. Scavenger Hunt—A traditional scavenger hunt easily can be adapted according to the age of the children. It also can be adapted so you can track milestones you normally might not be able to track during a traditional scavenger hunt.

- *Sorts objects by shape and color:* Tell the children to collect something green, something blue, and something red. When they bring the objects to you, have them make piles of the items according to color. You also can substitute shapes for colors.
- *Understands concept of "2":* Instruct half the class to find two of one thing and half to find two of another. While they are looking, start a pile for each object. When students return, have them place their objects in the correct pile.
- *Recognizes common objects or pictures:* Show children pictures of items to collect, but do not tell them what the item is. For example, hold up a picture of a flower and say, "Find one of these" instead of saying, "Find a flower."
- *Follows 2- to 3-step command:* Before the children begin their search, tell them what items to find and where to put the items once they've been found. When the children begin to return, do not repeat where they are supposed to place their items.

The Development of Play Milestones to watch for at different ages:

At age 3: Imitating, turn taking, playing make believe, sorting objects by shape and color, understanding the concept of "2", following a 2- to 3-step command, and recognizing common objects or pictures

At age 4: Cooperating with other children, negotiating solutions to conflicts, following 3-part commands, and engaging in fantasy play

At age 5: Agreeing to rules; enjoying singing, dancing, and acting; and wanting to please or be like friends

- *Cooperates with other children:* Pair the children or place them in small groups before sending them on their search. If you have pictures of the items they are looking for, give all the pictures to one child in each group and tell these children to give pictures to their team members.

2. People to People—This is a game for kids who are learning their body parts.

Divide the children into pairs. Call out, or have a child call out, a body part in the following manner: “toes to toes”, “arm to arm”, “knee to knee”, etc. Children then stand with their partner with these body parts touching. At any time, the caller can call out “people to people”, when that happens, the children should all run together into a group. Divide the children into new teams, and start over.

3. Three Little Pigs—You can engage children’s skills in imitation, pretend play, and storytelling with this role-playing game.

Divide the class into roles from the story “The Three Little Pigs”. Several children might need to perform the same role. While the teacher or another student tells the story, the children act it out, using areas designated by the teacher as the three houses (e.g., an area behind a bench could be the house of straw, behind a tree could be the house of sticks, and so on). Each time the wolf “blows down” the “house”, all the little pigs run to the next house with the wolf chasing them. Each child caught by the wolf becomes another wolf. At the end of the story, the pigs can chase the wolves away.

4. Follow the Leader—This classic game builds on a child’s ability to imitate and the development of the concepts of “same” and “different”.

Put a new spin on this familiar game by instructing the children to do something different than the child in front of them.

5. Crazy Ball—This game helps children demonstrate and develop skills such as direction following, imitating, turn taking, and being able to differentiate between concepts.

Have the children form a line, leaving a few feet between each child. Using one playground-sized ball, have each child do something silly with the ball while passing it down the line. You can change the direction to alter whether the child with the ball does the same thing or something different than the child before him or her.

6. Duck, Duck, Goose—In this classic childhood game, you can build on a child’s ability to follow directions, awareness of being a boy or girl, and ability to take turns.

Making slight changes to this old favorite can help you keep an eye out for some specific milestones. Tell the children that “it” can pick another child of the same (or opposite) sex only. Instead of running, instruct the children to hop, skip, or march

when chasing the “goose”. Have the children make up and agree to some new facet of the game.

- 7. Playground Equipment**—The playground provides many opportunities to see children engaging in imitating, taking turns, engaging in fantasy play, wanting to please and be like friends, and cooperating with friends.

A great time to encourage children to use their imagination is when they are playing on playground equipment. Children on swings can fly to the moon, children on slides can sled down a hill, and children on a jungle gym can be monkeys in trees. Pull out your milestones lists, put on your thinking cap, and give children some hints that will start games that allow you to see if they are meeting their milestones.

- 8. Hide and Seek**—This is a favorite game of many children. It is a great game that demonstrates a child’s ability to understand placement in space, follow directions, and cooperate with others.

Hide and Seek is a wonderful way to observe how children change their manner of play over time. Younger children often hide in obvious places—sometimes in plain view—and often hide in the same place a friend was just hiding. They also tend to give away their hiding place by saying things like, “You can’t find me” or giggling while they are being looked for. As children get older, their hiding skills become more advanced, and they begin to develop strategies to reach home base without being caught.

You can track milestones by adding a little more structure to the game. For example, tell children to hide under or behind something, or have the seeker call out where they see their friends (e.g., “Joe is behind the tree.”). Place children in pairs or small groups and have them decide where the group will hide before the counting begins. Have the children choose and pretend to be characters who might look for each other (e.g., a knight searching for dragons or a mother duck looking for her ducklings).

- 9. Animal Tag**—A few changes can turn this traditional game of tag into an easy way to monitor milestones. During this game, children will show their ability to follow directions and recognize common objects or pictures, and their awareness of which sex they are.

Separate the children into small teams. Assign a different animal to each small team and instruct the children to act and make sounds like the animal throughout the game. When a child is tagged, they are “frozen” (must stand completely still). Only another child of the same “species” can unfreeze a frozen child. Children can identify their teammates by the noises they are making.

Check on object or picture recognition by giving each child a picture of an animal instead of telling the child what animal to be.

Tag also can be altered to include identifying which sex a child is by allowing only a child of the same (or opposite) sex to be the “unfreezer” (e.g., only boys can unfreeze girls, or only boys can unfreeze other boys, depending on how you establish the rules).

10. Dance Party—Grab a CD player and head outside for a dance party! Dance Party will showcase children’s ability to imitate and cooperate with others and dress themselves. This game also gets children to participate in fantasy role playing, singing, dancing, and acting.

Play music and have the children dance and imitate each other. Watch the children imitate dance moves their friends are doing and cooperate as they dance together. Encourage children to take turns showing their friends their special dance moves. If possible, allow children to “dress up” before going outside, but make sure that their costumes are safe for moving around (e.g., clothes do not drag the ground and shoes fit properly and are safe for outside play).

For more information and resources related to engaging children in the outdoors, visit: <http://www.childrenatureandyou.org/onlineresources.html>.

Tips for Talking With Parents

If you suspect that a child has a developmental delay and believe a parent is unaware of it, this sample conversation can give you ideas of how to talk with the child's parent.

Good afternoon, Ms. Jones. We love having Taylor in class. He really enjoys story time and follows directions well. He is working hard on coloring, but is having a difficult time and gets frustrated. I also have noticed a few things about Taylor's social skills that I would like to discuss with you. Do you have a few minutes? [Cite specific behaviors and when they occurred.]

Have you noticed any of these at home?

Ms. Jones, here is some information that shows the developmental milestones for a child Taylor's age. Let's plan to meet again next week [set a time] after you've had time to read it and think it over. [Provide information such as the fact sheets.]

Ms. Jones, I know this is hard to talk about, and I might be overly concerned, but I think it would also be a good idea to talk to Taylor's doctor about this in the next few weeks. You can take this information with you when you go. The doctor can give Taylor a "developmental screening" that can answer some questions about his progress and whether you need to do anything else. Maybe there is no problem, but getting help early can make a big difference if there is, so it's really important to find out for sure. Let me know if you need anything from me for that doctor's appointment!

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. We'll all do our best to help Taylor. He is a great kid!

If a parent approaches you with concerns about his or her child, this might help you respond.

Mrs. Smith, you wanted to speak with me privately about Taylor? [Listen to her concerns. See if she has noticed the same behaviors you have, and share examples that are the same as or different from hers.]

I am glad to know we are both on the same page. I have some information that might help you when you're watching Taylor at home this week. This fact sheet shows the developmental milestones for his age. Each child develops at his or her own pace, so Taylor might not have met all these milestones; it's worth taking a closer look. Let's meet again next [set a date] after you've had time to read this and think about it. I also think it would be a good idea to talk with Taylor's doctor about this in the next few weeks. You can take this information with when you go. The doctor can give Taylor a "developmental screening" that can answer some questions about his progress and whether you need to do anything else. Let me know if you need anything from me for that doctor's appointment.

Thank you for talking with me today. We'll all do our best to help Taylor. He is a great kid!

Tips for these conversations with parents:

- Highlight some of the child's strengths, letting the parent know what the child does well.
- Use materials such as the "Learn the Signs. Act Early." fact sheets. This will help the parent know that you are basing your comments on facts and not just feelings.
- Talk about specific behaviors that you have observed in caring for the child. Use the milestones fact sheets as a guide. Example: If you are telling the parent "I have noticed that Taylor does not play pretend games with the other children", you could show the parent the line on the milestones fact sheet for a 4-year-old that says that a child that age "engages in fantasy play".
- Try to make it a discussion. Pause a lot, giving the parent time to think and to respond.
- Expect that if the child is the oldest in the family, the parent might not have experience to know the milestones the child should be reaching.
- Listen to and watch the parent to decide on how to proceed. Pay attention to tone of voice and body language.
- This might be the first time the parent has become aware that the child might have a delay. Give the parent time to think about this and even speak with the child's other caregivers.
- Let the parent know that he or she should talk with the child's health care professional (doctor or nurse) soon if there are any concerns or more information is needed.
- Remind the parent that you do your job because you love and care for children, and that you want to make sure that the child does his or her very best. It is also okay to say that you "may be overly concerned", but that it is best to check with the child's doctor or nurse to be sure because early action is so important if there really is a delay.

For Parents: Fun in the Sun

During the warm weather months, many parents also like to “go out and play!” with their children. To encourage them to monitor their child’s development during play, we’ve included this special section for you to pull out or copy for parents. The next page is an easy tear-off page for you to send home with parents to encourage them to engage in developmentally appropriate play with their children outside of school. Just send a copy of these activities home and encourage them to enjoy spending time with their child and watching him or her grow.

Go Out and Play! Activities for You and Your Child

Play isn't just healthy and fun. It's also how your child learns! Time spent playing can be a chance to observe your child's development—how he or she plays, learns, speaks, and acts. You can even look for milestones during playtime. Milestones are the things your child should be doing at different ages (see some examples in the box below). Keeping track of milestones is really important. It helps you to see if your child is developing typically for his or her age or if your child could be at risk for a developmental delay. Noticing a delay and getting help for your child as early as possible can help ensure that your child reaches his or her full potential. If you are concerned about your child's development, don't wait. Talk with your child's doctor about your concerns. For more information about child development, tools for tracking milestones, and what to do when you are concerned, visit www.cdc.gov/actearly.

Following are a few activities that you can do with your child to observe his or her development. Remember to have fun and “go out and play!”

People to People—This game is fun for kids learning body parts. Call out, or have your child call out, a body part in the following manner: “toes to toes”, “arm to arm”, “knee to knee”, etc. Then stand in front of your child with the called body parts touching his or hers (your toes touching his or her toes, etc). Take turns being the caller.

Scavenger Hunt—A traditional scavenger hunt easily can be adapted according to your child's age. It also can be adapted for tracking different milestones.

Sort objects by shape and color: Tell your child to collect something green, something blue, and something red. When he or she bring the objects to you, have him or her make piles of the items according to color. You also can substitute shapes for colors.

Understands concept of “2”: Tell your child to find two of one thing and two of another. While he or she is looking for the objects, start a pile for each object. When your child returns, have him or her place the objects in the correct pile.

Dance Party—Grab a music player and head outside for a dance party! Dance Party will showcase your child's ability to imitate and cooperate with others and dress themselves. This game also gets your child to participate in fantasy role playing, singing, dancing, and acting.

Play music and dance with your child. Take turns imitating each other's dance moves. Watch your child imitate dance moves and cooperate by taking turns with you. If possible, have your child “dress up” before going outside, but make sure that the costume is safe for moving around (e.g., clothes do not drag the ground and shoes fit properly and are safe for outside play). This game is also great for a group of children. Have each child take turn being the leader while the other children imitate his or her movements.

Milestones to watch for at different ages:

At age 3: Imitating, turn taking, playing make believe, sorting objects by shape and color, understanding the concept of “2”, following a 2- to 3-step command, and recognizing common objects and pictures

At age 4: Cooperating with other children, negotiating solutions to conflicts, following three-part commands, and engaging in fantasy play

At age 5: Agreeing to rules; enjoying singing, dancing, and acting; and wanting to please/be like friends