



Young Children: 5 Year Olds

Your young child is meeting more people and going to new places. As they start kindergarten and form new relationships, they'll learn more about getting along with others. They'll begin to feel more comfortable and confident on their own, with other children, and in new surroundings. As they explore further from home, your child will still need your loving support when they come back to you with their new thoughts and questions.

In this chapter, you'll learn about your young child's development which allows them to participate more in taking care of themselves and engage in more complex play on their own and with others. There is information on eating, playing with others and problem-solving. You'll also learn about how to keep them safe as they become more independent and about your changing role as a parent.

Your Young Child's Development

As your young child reaches the age of 5, they're eager to learn, do new things and begin to develop a longer attention span. Your child can move with more purpose and skill. This chart gives you information about the developmental milestones and tasks your child is working on between the ages of 5 and 6 years. In this chapter, you'll learn what you can do to help your child as they grow and change.

| 5 year olds: The 'identity' and 'power' stage | |
|---|--|
| Tasks | Milestones |
| <p>During this time, your child is continuing to practice earlier tasks as well as learning to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ form an identity: start to know who they are and how they fit into the world ▪ recognize personal power: learn that they have control over their actions and that their behaviours have an effect on others ▪ develop industry: begin to enjoy the process of figuring things out and solving problems | <p>Physical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> develops more coordination and complex skills <input type="checkbox"/> has stronger muscles <input type="checkbox"/> moves with more purpose and is more accurate <input type="checkbox"/> enjoys being active <input type="checkbox"/> draws and starts to print letters <input type="checkbox"/> may need more sleep due to the demands of school |
| | <p>Emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> has a better sense of right and wrong <input type="checkbox"/> begins to talk to themselves out loud to get calm <input type="checkbox"/> may not like being corrected <input type="checkbox"/> is easily upset by things that are not fair or 'not right' |
| | <p>Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> becomes more competitive <input type="checkbox"/> enjoys games with rules <input type="checkbox"/> feels more empathy for others <input type="checkbox"/> has a best friend <input type="checkbox"/> has more adults in their lives that influence them, such as their teachers and coaches <input type="checkbox"/> likes to please |

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5 year olds: The 'identity' and 'power' stage

| Tasks | Milestones |
|-------|--|
| | <p>Cognitive (thinking and communicating)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> has a longer attention span<input type="checkbox"/> talks with more detail, using sentences and correct grammar<input type="checkbox"/> says most words correctly<input type="checkbox"/> is easily understood by you, siblings, friends and strangers<input type="checkbox"/> tells longer stories on the same topic<input type="checkbox"/> tells stories with a beginning, middle and end<input type="checkbox"/> likes telling jokes and riddles<input type="checkbox"/> begins to understand death and may ask many questions about it |



To use an interactive tool about your young child's development, visit the **Tools** section at healthyparentshealthychildren.ca/resources



If you have questions about your child's development, call Health Link at **811** or talk with your health care provider. You can also go to a Parent Link Centre and ask about the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)*. To learn more, visit the **Links** section at healthyparentshealthychildren.ca/resources

Young Children

This is a year of change for you and your child. Even if children are used to child care or preschool, starting kindergarten is a big step. Your child is developing a longer attention span and craves answers and information. At this stage, they not only ask, "Why?" but also, "What if?"



“*Being a parent has made me a better person. I'm way more patient and empathetic than I was before. It has made me a better sister, daughter, partner and friend.*”

~ Kim, mom of two children

Each child grows at their own rate and their growth pattern may be different from their siblings and friends. In addition, you can expect that they'll:

- grow in spurts—they may seem to stay the same size for weeks and then grow taller almost overnight
- get stronger and want to test their new abilities as their body grows

If you have concerns about your child's growth, call Health Link at **811** or talk with your health care provider.

Feeding Your Young Child

A healthy feeding relationship helps develop healthy eating habits for life. When you take time to eat meals together as a family, it also supports healthy eating and builds stronger relationships.

To help keep your young child healthy, offer:

- 3 regular meals and 2–3 snacks spaced evenly throughout the day
- a variety of foods from *Canada's Food Guide*
- water throughout the day

For more information about the feeding relationship, eating together and healthy eating for your child, see page 49.



Breakfast

Breakfast is important for children going to school. Children have trouble learning when they're hungry. If your child doesn't like to eat in the morning, look at the rest of your routine and decide what you might be able to change. It might help to:

- think of ways to make your morning less rushed, such as getting up 10 minutes earlier or getting things ready the night before
- eat breakfast with your child

- get rid of distractions such as TV, cell phones or toys
- make sure your child is getting enough sleep
- provide a variety of healthy food choices

Vitamin D for your young child ★

Your child needs a daily supplement of 400 IU vitamin D to help meet their needs. Continue to give this supplement all throughout childhood and adult years.

Lunches and snacks at school

For many children, going to school means eating lunches and snacks at school. It may take time for your child to get used to this. They may find snack time or lunch time too busy, exciting or stressful to focus on eating.

Check your school's policies about the types of food children can bring to school and when they can eat.

Prepare your child by explaining to them what these rules are and why they are in place, so they'll know what to expect. Encourage your child to help you make and pack their lunches and snacks. They may be more interested in eating the foods they make and help to pack.



To help your child get the nutrition they need:

- pack a variety of foods in separate containers for lunch and small snacks—foods such as fresh vegetables, fruit, cheese, whole grain muffins or yogurt make good snacks
- ask them to let you know what food they like eating and talk to them about it—do not punish them for not eating everything
- pack hot or cold foods in insulated containers
- send a water bottle



If you have questions or concerns about your school's food policy or about food programs at school, talk with your child's teacher. To learn more about healthy snacks and lunches, visit the *Links* section at [healthyparentshealthychildren.ca/resources](https://www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca/resources)

Everyday Care

As your young child develops and grows, they're able to take a more active role in their care. They'll need your help to develop daily habits for grooming, hygiene, getting ready in the morning, and going to bed at night. They can now dress themselves and might want to choose their own clothes.

Your child may be able to use the toilet on their own. They may still need some help wiping after a bowel movement. Remind them to always wash their hands every time before they leave the bathroom.



Some children don't like to use the toilet when they're away from home. Prepare your child for what to expect if they have not used a public bathroom on their own. If they're worried, try to find out why, reassure them, and teach them which adults they can ask for help. Talk to your child's caregivers or teachers to find suggestions to help if your child has these fears and is not using the toilet.

Sleeping

School is hard work for children. They may feel very tired after being in a classroom for a half or full day. Getting a good sleep every night can help your child adjust.

Your child needs sleep to restore their energy, to help them focus and learn. During sleep, the brain sorts through and stores memories. Not getting enough sleep can lead to problems with thinking, reasoning and memory. It affects your child's health, behaviour and all parts of their lives.

If your child is having trouble waking up in the morning or getting used to school, try putting them to bed 30–60 minutes earlier for a week. Try not to have late nights when your child has school the next day. Most school-aged children need about 9–11 hours of sleep a night.

Growing pains

Many children in elementary school have growing pains in their legs and arms at times. Growing pains are most often felt in the legs. Children often have them at bedtime and during a growth spurt. The pain is usually gone by morning. Growing pains are believed to be caused by a growth hormone released in your child's body. They're not a sign of anything serious. To ease your child's pain, try gently rubbing their legs.

If the pain is constant, there is redness or swelling, or if you're concerned about your child's growing pains, talk to your health care provider.

Teeth and mouth

Baby teeth will begin to fall out when your child is between 5–8 years old. As your child's adult molar teeth appear at the back of their mouth, their baby teeth at the front of their mouth will get ready to fall out. Their baby teeth will be replaced by permanent teeth.

Their front teeth will fall out and will be replaced by permanent teeth around the same time as their first permanent molars (6 year molars) come in. Their permanent teeth will keep growing in until they're a teenager.

You'll need to help your child brush and floss (see page 347) their teeth until they have the skills to do it themselves, about the time when they're able to write their name. With good nutrition and dental care, most children will keep their permanent teeth for a lifetime.

For more information about teeth and mouth care, including preventing tooth decay, see page 61.

Protecting molars

The molars have deep grooves and pits that trap food so it can be hard to keep them clean, even with regular brushing. When permanent molars come in, the chewing surfaces can be sealed with a thin, plastic coating (sealant). This protects molars from tooth decay. While sealants protect part of the tooth, good dental habits are still needed for a healthy mouth and teeth.

Dental sealants are available from your dentist and are offered in selected schools in Alberta. To learn more, call your community or public health centre, talk to your dentist or visit the [Links](#) section at healthyparentshealthychildren.ca/resources

Injured teeth

As young children are active and adventurous, their chances of having tooth injuries increase. If your child plays a sport, ask your dentist to suggest the right type of mouth guard to use. If your child injures, breaks or knocks out a tooth, take them and the pieces of their tooth to the dentist right away.

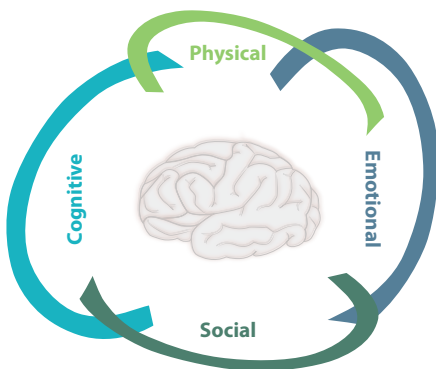
Is your child still sucking their thumb?



Sucking their thumb beyond this age may affect how your child's jaw and teeth grow. Help your child to stop sucking their thumb before their permanent teeth come in—when your child is about 5 years old. For more information, see page 389.

Growing and Learning Together

Your young child will go through many changes in just a short time, develop many new skills, and enjoy being active. They're thinking in new ways, experiencing complex emotions and learning how to get along with others. All areas of your young child's development are interconnected and the development in one area affects development in all other areas. Your child's development is guided by their brain.



When you know how the brain works, it's easier to understand what you can do to support your child.

Your young child's developing brain

The thinking part of your young child's brain is really developing now and the brain cell connections are becoming more complex. Positive relationships with you and other important people in their life have created a strong base.

The brain is now developing executive function skills that are essential for learning and getting along with others. Although it takes time for these skills to fully develop, your child is starting to be able to:

- notice when their body is responding to stress and can sometimes cope with those feelings on their own



- remember information so they can use it when they need it
- be able to focus on a task and not get distracted
- cope with their impulses
- adapt their thoughts and feelings as situations change

Being able to self-regulate when they're feeling stressed is one of the most important skills you can teach your child. It's the foundation for executive function, life-long learning and health. For more information on self-regulation, see page 27.

There are many fun ways that you can teach your child to build executive function skills—things like having to wait, using their memory and teaching them about emotions. For more information on executive function, see page 21.

Brain cell connections also become stronger when you and your child engage in serve-and-return interactions. Here are some examples of what typical serve-and-return interactions might look like with your 5 year old:

| Examples of serve-and-return interactions 5 year olds | |
|---|---|
| Your child serves when they: | You return their serve when you: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ write notes and stories with scribbles that look like writing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ let them help you make a shopping list using drawings or pictures from a flyer |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ want to dress and undress themselves and start to tell you what clothes they want to wear | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ plan extra time to get ready in the morning so they can have the time they need to get dressed by themselves |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ play games that need more physical skills, such as tag, hide-and-seek and hopscotch | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ give them lots of chances to play and be with other children |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ask questions about what's happening and start to predict what will happen next | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ look at the book cover before reading and ask your child to guess what the book is about. Then, pause once in a while as you read and ask them what they think will happen next |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ are frustrated when they have to figure out what to do when they have a problem | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ acknowledge their feelings and work with them to think about solutions |

For more information about your child's developing brain, see page 19.

Other things you can do to help your child learn



Communicating with your young child

Your young child is starting to sound more like a grown-up. They use simple sentences that are often 5–6 words long. When they tell a story, they may combine their sentences by saying “and” or “and then.” They may say things like “mans,” instead of “men,” and “fum,” instead of “thumb,” but other people can usually understand what they’re saying.

Your child is now using language to:

- tell people what they want and need
- make friends and express their feelings and emotions
- share and learn more about their interests and their world
- share their stories and jokes
- read and print
- solve problems

Have any questions or concerns about your child’s speech, language and hearing answered before they start kindergarten by calling Health Link at **811** or talk with your health care provider.



Speech and language development



If you’re concerned about your child’s speech and language development, act early. They can receive speech and language services at any age at no cost.

Encourage your child's language and literacy



- **Encourage them to explore** and explain how things work. Take time to answer their questions or ask what they think the answer might be.
- **Do things together.** Talk about what you're doing while you cook, set the table or make family meals together.
- **Share their interests.** Go on adventures together. Look at books or magazines at the library.
- **Look at family photos and keepsakes.** Share stories about family memories and events. Use lots of describing words. *"The big, yellow moon was so round when we went camping!"*
- **Sing and play with words.** Sing songs, listen to music, play word games and have fun making up silly rhymes.
- **Read together every day.** Take turns reading to each other. Talk about what you've read.
- **Encourage them to draw and print.** Ask them to tell you what they've drawn. Write the words they say on the page. When they start to print words, ask what they've written.



Call Health Link at **811** or your health care provider if your child:

- acts like they're not paying attention—especially in group settings like a classroom
- appears more frustrated than other children
- has a hard time with learning
- cannot follow instructions
- trips or falls a lot
- has any other signs that concern you



Let's play

Play builds healthy bodies and minds and is important for your child's growth and development. Young children learn through everyday experiences. They can help with simple chores—they'll enjoy feeling like a grown-up while doing them. You may want to walk to the store together to get milk or rake the leaves in the yard. They also need lots of time to play with others and on their own.

Your young child will explore and play in a new environment once they start kindergarten. They may be tired from the change in routine and being active in new ways. They'll need time for both play and rest when they get home.



Active play

Your child needs lots of time to play freely—to climb, swing, run and jump. They understand directional words such as left, right, up and down. You can support their learning about directions by playing action games like 'Simon Says'.

Young children need to be active through energetic play. This includes ball games, riding a bike or water activities. Depending on your child's interests, they may enjoy playing at the park with their friends. They may also want to be in community sports or activities. At this stage, non-competitive physical activities are best. They help your child develop skills without the fear of failing or not being good enough.

Your child may:

- throw and catch a ball that's bounced or thrown gently to them
- jump over low objects and skip
- learn to ride a bike with or without training wheels

Internet safety and screen time



Keep computers, TVs and other electronic devices and games out of your child's bedroom.

Limit screen time to no more than 2 hours per day (see page 72).

Your child needs 60 minutes of energetic play that causes them to sweat and breathe a little bit heavier, such as running or bike riding. They also need several hours of being active each day, such as walking to and from school, playing hopscotch or playground fun.



Creative play

Your young child is learning to use and control many objects. They prefer to use one hand more than the other for complex tasks. The other hand will help support the objects or materials they're using.

Your child's hands need lots of practice using a pencil, scissors, knife and fork. Your child may enjoy building, fixing things, cooking and making crafts. They learn a lot about how to solve problems by creating and using objects. They may:

- fasten buttons, Velcro® straps or zippers
- draw or copy lines, simple shapes and stick people
- cut on a line with scissors
- tie shoelaces



Pretend play

Your child may enjoy acting out stories from real life, books, TV shows or movies. At first their stories may be mixed up. In time, they'll become more connected. Their sense of humour is really developing, so they may share the same funny stories over and over again. They may like to put on puppet shows or plays for the whole family.

Through pretend play, your child might try different roles and figure out what they would do, say or feel in different situations. Pretend play becomes more creative. Rather than acting out real-life situations, like playing house or restaurant, your child may pretend that they're from another planet or that they're a dog or a superhero.



Learning about emotions

Your young child has more complex emotions than before, such as confidence, empathy, frustration, jealousy, disappointment, pride or guilt. They may be confused when they have mixed emotions (e.g., feeling worried, excited or happy and sad at the same time).

By the time children are 5 years old, they're usually able to control and express their emotions better. They may still struggle to find the exact words to describe their feelings. Your child now understands that they can show their emotions in better ways than pushing, hitting or other physical actions.

At this age, your child may:

- fear things that could really happen, such as getting hurt, someone dying, or having their home broken into
- start to use self-talk to calm down. You can help by making suggestions. *"Let's take some deep breaths."* Model calming down by using self-talk when you're upset, for example *"I want to calm down. I'll take some deep breaths so I can relax and think about what I can do to feel better."*
- feel empathy. They may offer to comfort or help you when you're sad.
- become overwhelmed by frustration or disappointment at times. They may have tantrums once in a while.

Support your child's emotional development



- **Talk about and accept their feelings.** To help them cope with mixed feelings, you could say *"It seems like you're excited about skating with your friends. You're also feeling worried that you might get too cold. Sometimes I feel excited and worried at the same time. It's a little bit confusing, isn't it?"*
- **Help them think of ways to show their emotions.** *"Sometimes we feel disappointed when things don't work out the way we want them to. It's okay to feel disappointed. It's not okay to yell and throw things. What can you do instead?"*
- **Do not make fun of their fears.** Listen carefully and tell them that everyone is afraid sometimes. Reassure them that you'll not let anything hurt them. Help them think of things they can do to cope like taking deep breaths, keeping a flashlight close by or playing soft music.
- **Notice when they help and care for others.** They're showing that they understand other people's feelings and needs. Encourage and thank them for being helpful and caring.
- **Help them solve problems** by suggesting words they can say to themselves, such as *"I can do this,"* or *"I'll be okay,"* or *"It's okay to be mad, but hitting can hurt someone."* For more information on problem-solving, see page 400.

Talk with your health care provider if you have questions or concerns about your child's behaviour.

“ The best thing about being a parent is seeing things from a bigger perspective. It allows you to realize how life is larger than any of us. It's humbling and easy to forgive the past with this new perspective. ”

~ Toni, parent of two children

Living in a social world

Some young children want to spend a lot of time with other children. Others would rather spend more time alone putting things together or looking at books. This is part of a child's temperament (see page 24). Work with their temperament to help them find a balance. Your child needs time with other children, with you, and on their own.

Usually, children at this age:

- are naturally curious and eager to learn
- like to be helpful
- want to be with more people
- enjoy group games and activities
- like games with rules—although at times they may want to change the rules as they go or get very frustrated when someone is not following the rules



Helping out at home

Your young child may be eager to help you around the house. Be patient—it may take more time and they may not do things perfectly. It may sometimes be easier for you to do these tasks yourself, however letting your child do them today will help them develop their skills and make a big difference later.

Here are some ideas of what your child can do to help:

- clean up their toys
- pack their school bag
- help with setting the table
- put their lunch containers into the sink or dishwasher
- help you cook or bake



Your child learns to help when you involve them and let them help. They know that they belong and that they're an important part of the family when they have their own special jobs to do. As their skills and interests change, they may enjoy helping with more complex jobs. This builds their sense of capability, knowing that *"I can do it!"* A sense of belonging and a sense of capability are the two most important ingredients for developing a healthy self-esteem.

Take time to teach

When teaching children to do household chores, break the task down into small steps to gradually build their skills:

1. You do it, they watch.
2. You do it, they help.
3. They do it, you help.
4. They do it, you watch.

Playing with others

At this age, children are meeting and getting to know more people. They're learning that they can influence others. They can use words to reason and negotiate or to hurt and exclude others. They co-operate with others to play fun, active games or to be aggressive. The way you and other adults act towards each other has a powerful influence on watchful children.



Your child is also learning how people respond to their words and actions. They need your support and guidance to learn to use their words and actions in positive ways so that they can get along with others.

Children usually enjoy being with other children, but they can also have disagreements. At times, your child will want to set the rules and so will their friends or siblings.



Instead of rushing in to solve the argument, try to wait and listen carefully. Let your child learn how to do it by themselves—they can learn how to problem-solve on their own. They will learn how to reason and negotiate fairly over time and with your help. Of course, you'll need to get involved if someone is getting hurt, something is being damaged or if you need to involve the other child's parents (see page 406).

Problem-solving when friends or siblings argue



1. Calm yourself and help calm the children.
2. Separate the children if they're hurting each other.
3. Once they're calm, let both children take their turn telling you the problem as they see it.
4. Repeat the problem back to them in a way that states both of their sides without blaming or judging. *"It looks like you both want to play with the same skipping rope at the same time."*
5. Tell them you know they can find a solution that will work for both of them, and you're there if they need help.
6. Stay close by to monitor the situation and give them time to work it out.
7. Step back in to help only if you need to.

Bullying

When a child is being hurt by someone else's words or actions, they're being bullied. When a child is hurting someone else with their words or actions, they're bullying. In either case, it's time for adults to act and step in.

Bullying is a serious problem in schools, communities and society. You can help prevent it by modelling healthy behaviour and relationships for your children at home and by working together with your child's school.

Here are some things that can help:

- **Set a good example.** Treat your child with respect and they'll learn to treat others with respect.
- **Monitor media.** Children are affected by the violence they see. Do not let them watch TV programs, movies or play video games that show violence. If they do see violence, talk about it with them so they understand that it hurts and it's not okay.
- **Have open communication.** Teach your child to tell adults if they or someone else needs help. Listen to your child when they come to you with concerns.
- **Work together.** Talk with your child's teacher or principal about what policies are in place at school and what they're doing to prevent bullying. Ask them how you can help.

Help your child learn to get along with others

- **Encourage them to spend time with other children.** It's through play that they learn about themselves and others.
- **Teach them about being kind** and help them to think about how others might be feeling.
- **Explain your family rules** and expectations when friends come to play.
- **Listen to the sound of play.** Children this age need to know that a caring adult is near. Check in with them from time to time, even when things are going smoothly. Be ready to step in if needed.
- **Encourage sharing and co-operation.**
- **Model problem-solving** to work out conflict. Let your child practice doing this on their own—help only if they need it.
- **Notice and comment** when children are getting along with each other.



To learn more about ways to deal with bullying, call the Bullying Help Line toll-free at **1-888-456-2323** or visit the *Links* section at [healthyparentshealthychildren.ca/resources](https://www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca/resources)

Starting school

Most children start kindergarten when they're 5 years old and start Grade 1 when they're 6 years old. Your child may be eager to learn new things and will likely be excited, nervous or a little of both.



Registering for school ★

Check with the school your child will be attending to find out when and how to register. You can find out details about the program, such as whether it's half- or full-day.

Help your child have a good start at school

- **Take them for health checkups.** Up-to-date immunizations and checkups such as medical, dental, vision and hearing will help your child be ready to learn (see page 76). Some health problems can get in the way of learning and a checkup may find a problem early.
- **Talk about what to expect** at school, like how they'll get there and what they'll do in class. Let your child know what you'll be doing when they're not with you.
- **Teach them self-care skills** such as putting on their jacket and shoes, going to the bathroom on their own, and washing their hands.
- **Take a school tour** and meet their teacher and principal. Your child will be able to see the classroom, front office, bathroom, library, gym and playground. Try to remember the names of one or two other children on the tour.
- **Start your new routine** a month or so before school starts. Shift slowly to a regular time for getting up, having meals and going to bed.
- **Read books about starting school.** This will help your child understand more about what school will be like. You can find these books at the library.
- **Respect your child's temperament** (see page 24). Children adjust to change in different ways. Your child may adjust to school differently than other children.
- **Be positive** with your child about starting school. Share fun memories of teachers you had and things you enjoyed doing at school. Your child will enjoy it more if they know school is important to you.



To learn more about being a partner in your child's education, what your child will learn in school and ways to prepare your child for school, visit the *Links* and *Printables* sections at healthyparentshealthychildren.ca/resources

Supporting your child in school

School is an exciting adventure for children. You've been your child's first and most important teacher. When your child starts school, their teachers will also become important people in their life.



Support your child's learning by showing them that education is important to you:

- Share your child's interests, strengths and challenges with their teacher. Ask what you can do to help them at home.
- Find out the best way to keep in touch with their teacher—by phone, email or sending notes with your child.
- Take time to talk to your child about their day. Ask them open questions like, *"What was the best thing that happened at school today?"* or *"What did you learn about today?"* Be sure to share things about your day too.
- Show them you value their work by asking them to tell you about it and if it's okay to hang it on the fridge or the wall so everyone can see it.
- Encourage them to tell the rest of the family and other important people in your lives about their school activities.
- Read and share stories with your child every day.
- Go to school events, learning celebrations and meetings when you can. This will help you find out how things are going for your child and the rest of their class. It also shows your child that you think school is important.
- Think about volunteering in the classroom or on field trips or joining the school council if you can.



Supporting their learning

Show your child that you think school is worthwhile.

When you support your child's learning, their teachers and their school, you help them to succeed.

Helping your child adjust to school

Children sometimes get tired of school once the excitement of starting something new wears off. Your child may come home from school very tired and need some time to relax. Your child might be anxious if they're not used to being away from you. They might think they're missing out on things at home.

Here are some ideas that may help:

- Make sure they get enough sleep (see page 423). Your child may need extra sleep, especially at first.
- Offer healthy meals and snacks.
- Spend extra time together on days when your child doesn't have school.
- Don't plan too many activities before or after school.



If your child strongly resists going to school or seems to always be complaining about something like a stomach ache or headache, find out more:

- Ask your child what they think might help.
- Talk to their teacher for suggestions.
- Talk to other parents to see if their children have similar problems.
- Arrange for them to have a checkup with your health care provider.

Young children and overscheduling



Organized activities like child care, preschool and kindergarten need a certain level of attention from children. A young child uses a lot of energy staying focused in school. They need free time once they get home to burn off some physical energy and reconnect with the ones they love. Try not to schedule too many activities and appointments in your child's free time.

Health Checkups

Keep seeing your child's health care providers as scheduled and as needed to help your child and family thrive.

Your health care provider or public health nurse can help if you have questions or concerns about your child's health and development or other family issues.

For more information about keeping children healthy and safe at any age, see page 76.



Well child clinic visit

Your child's last immunization in the early years is due at 4 years old. If their immunizations are not up to date, talk with your public health nurse about how to get back on schedule. Keeping immunizations up to date protects your child and family from many communicable diseases. Immunization becomes even more important for preventing outbreaks once your child is in school and organized activities. During your visit, your public health nurse also checks things such as your child's growth, asks about their health, as well as about how you're doing and answer any questions you may have (see page 78).

For more information about immunizations, see page 82.

Oral health

Regular visits to the dentist are important as your young child's baby teeth are falling out and adult teeth are coming in.

Vision

Visit your child's optometrist once a year to have their vision checked—you don't need a doctor's referral and there's no cost to you.

Financial support ★

You may qualify for financial support for health costs for your child through the Alberta Child Health Benefit plan. You may be able to get eyeglasses, prescriptions and dental visits for your children at no cost to you. To learn more, call toll-free at **1-877-469-5437** or visit the *Links* section at healthyparentshealthychildren.ca/resources



Recommended checkups

| | Birth-2 months | 2 months | 4 months | 6 months | 12 months | 18 months | 2 years | 3-4 years | 5 years and beyond |
|--|--|---|----------|---|--|---|--|---|--------------------|
| Doctor | ✓ | Check with your doctor to find out the checkup schedule at their office | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Immunization with public health nurse | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ (at 4 years old) | |
| Dental | | | | | ✓ | Regular checkups as recommended by your dentist | | Regular checkups as recommended by your dentist | |
| Vision | Early vision checkups with your optometrist, as needed | | | ✓ Eye exam with your optometrist at 6-9 months old | Early vision checkups with your optometrist, as needed | | ✓ Eye exam with your optometrist at 2-5 years old | | |
| Other health care providers | As needed | | | | | | | As needed | |

Preventing Injuries

As your child moves into their larger world of friends and school, they still need to be supervised by an adult, but not as closely as when they were a preschooler.

Your child needs a little more freedom to explore and play, but they're still too young to know all the dangers around them or how to protect themselves. Stay nearby, pay close attention and think

about ways to reduce possible risks. Remind your child about safety rules often. They may remember simple rules, but may not always follow them when they get excited. Make sure that your child follows the rules when they're with you. This will make it more likely for them to follow the rules when they're on their own. Situations involving safety are not a time to offer choices at any age.





Being safe on the playground ★

Keep play safe by not allowing your child to wear clothing with drawstrings. Take off helmets and scarves, and tie back loose hair. Be sure your child has proper footwear on, such as running shoes.

For their age and stage of development, here are some areas that need attention to keep your child safe from injuries.

- **Playing outdoors**, see page 114
- **Playground safety**, see page 121
- **Helmets and bike safety**, see page 118
- **Trampolines**, see page 122
- **Pedestrian safety**, see page 120
- **Car seats**, see page 123
- **Poisoning**, see page 107
- **Head injury**, see page 102
- **Playing safe in rural areas**, see page 122

For more information about how to prevent injuries in the early years, see page 104.

School bus safety ★

The biggest risk to children riding on a school bus is when they're getting on and off the bus. To learn more, visit the **Printables** section at healthyparentshealthychildren.ca/resources



Taking Care of Yourself

How quickly the years fly by. As your child begins school, their world expands and a new adventure begins. You may find yourself celebrating this new chapter in their life, or you might find their growing independence a challenge. It might be hard for both of you to learn how to be separated from each other. You may worry about them eating their lunch or how they're going to manage with taking the bus. It may seem hard to believe, but your young child will learn to do all these things and more. All the time and effort you have spent with your child in the early years has prepared them to be ready to move into the bigger world.

Your changing role

Your role as a parent is changing too, and the next few years will be a time of adjustment. As a parent, up until now, you've been your child's protector, nurturer and teacher. Now you also become their advocate, coach and counsellor.

As your child becomes more independent, it may seem like they challenge you more and listen to you less. They have more people who influence them now, including new friends and teachers. As they learn about other people's ways of doing things, it's natural for them to question more things. They're developing ideas of their own.

“ *When our son was first born, it seemed like each day was a year, but these early years went by so fast! I know the changes are just beginning, but I feel like we are prepared knowing that he is off to a good start!* ”

~ Hope, mom of one child

Throughout their life, your child will benefit from warmth and structure (see page 11). Your child still needs to be shown how important they are to you, although the way you show them may change as they grow. Your child still needs comfort and direction from you. You're still a very important person in their life.

Once your child starts school, they'll need to think things through and solve their own problems using the skills you've taught them during these first 5 years. You can help them continue to build on these skills when you provide loving guidance so they can figure out their own solutions. They may need a lot of help coming up with ideas at first, but with practice, they'll soon be solving small problems on their own. Let them know that you'll always be there when they need you.

You can support your child as their world expands by:

- talking to them about what interests them
- meeting their friends
- getting involved in their school and other activities in whatever ways you can—get to know their teacher, read newsletters, go to school and sports events or volunteer in your child’s class, on their sports team or in the community
- connecting with love and being interested in what they have to say when they return home
- being there to comfort them when they need you
- helping them figure out how to solve problems on their own

Take time for yourself:

- Enjoy having some extra time to focus on yourself and your interests.
- Take a class or go for coffee with a friend.
- Meet other parents at your child’s school—talk about your new experiences.
- Check to see if flexible work arrangements are possible for you to be able to drop off or pick up your child from school, to attend school events, or for sick days.
- Try not to let your work commitments take over family time outside of school and work hours.
- Continue to explore ways to self-regulate (see page 27) for more effective parenting, better relationships at home and work and for your own health and happiness as well.

“*If there’s one piece of advice I would give it would be that, while you’re taking care of your family, don’t forget to nurture the relationship with your partner. Your children will benefit just as much as you both will.*”

~ Shalla, mom of two children





The Journey Continues

What an amazing journey you have undertaken. Raising and caring for another human being is one of the most important things you can do in life. As you look back and think about the day you brought your new baby home, consider all the changes you have gone through and the skills you have learned.