

Helping Your Child Grow

Activities for 42 to 54 months



Spend some time playing with your child each day. Follow their lead and let them choose activities. When you play with your child, it lets them know you enjoy spending time with them. When you follow your child's lead, it lets them know you think their ideas are good ones. These things help support their confidence and positive self-image. Spend time talking and listening to your child: "What was the best part of your day?" "Any yucky parts?" Tell them about your day. These loving interactions reconnect you with your child and are especially important if you are away from each other during the day. Your undivided attention helps your child feel safe, secure, and valued.

Pretend Feelings

Your child is full of ideas and has a wonderful imagination. Pretend play helps children work out their own ideas, thoughts, and feelings. If your child is struggling with a fear or other big feeling, work this into your pretend play. For example, maybe they are suddenly scared of the dark. Pretend you and your child are part of a cat family where a kitten has this fear too. Your child could take the role of an older cat who helps the little kitten get over their fear.

Appreciations

At mealtime, have each family member say something kind or give thanks to another family member. You can talk about the word *appreciation*. Give an example: "I appreciated how you picked up your toys today. Thanks so much." Model gratitude so your child learns to appreciate others and the things your family has.

Faces and Feelings

Help your child find pictures of faces in old magazines that they can cut out and glue on paper. Ask them to guess how they think each person feels. Write the name of the feeling under each face. Help your child learn "fancy" words for feelings. For example, *mad* can also be *annoyed*, *frustrated*, *angry*, or *furious*!

The Story of Me

Tell your child the story of their name. Why was it chosen? What does it mean? You could also tell the story of other family names, or your child's birth or adoption story. This type of information helps develop your child's positive self-identity. Record the story on a phone or other device and play the recording at night like a bedtime story.

My Plant

Your child can practice taking care of a plant. Teach them what a plant needs to grow. Talk to your child about water, sun, and food. Ask your child questions to help them think about what the plant needs. "What would happen to your plant if you didn't water it?" Taking care of something teaches your child responsibility.

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Bath Time for Toy

When it's bath time, tell your child that one of their toys also needs a bath. Help them collect soap, a washcloth, a towel, and clothes for after the bath. You can make the toy speak using feeling words, and encourage your child to take care of the toy or help it if needed: "Uh-oh, Dolly's scared she's going to get soap in her eyes. Can you help her?" "Dinosaur is getting cold and looking sad. How can you help?" This activity begins to teach your child about empathy and how to respond to the feelings of others with care.

Flashlight Fun

Once your child is in bed, give them a flashlight. Play with the flashlight together in the dark room. Take turns shining the light on something. Ask them questions, and talk about what you see. Whisper together. Having fun makes the dark less scary. You can use this time at the end of the day to cuddle and relax. Having you there makes your child feel safe, secure, and calm.

Dinner Helper

Your child will feel good about helping make dinner. Think about what simple dishes they can help make. For mashed potatoes, your child can help wash the potatoes or measure and add the milk and butter. You can work together to mash the potatoes. "Yummy! You were a big help. I'm proud of you."

Placemats

Your child can make a placemat for each family member by drawing, painting, or gluing a photograph or picture from a magazine onto each placemat. Help them write each family member's name on the placemat. Cover with clear contact paper to make the placemats last—or have your child make new ones!

Big Feelings, Little Feelings

Read books about feelings together. Ask a librarian to help you find good ones. Reading about other children's feelings helps your child think about their own. It also helps them know that feelings—even big ones—are okay and normal. Talk with your child about the story: "What can you do if you feel mad? Sad? Worried?" Talk about ideas for calming down, such as breathing, talking about feelings, taking a break, or switching to a different activity.