

Child Development During Corona Times: Working with What We Have

The first years in every child's life are critical for development. The experiences your children go through and the things they try during these years form the adults they will be when they grow up. Even if it seems like the isolation and lockdown during corona times provide us with less options to challenge our kids and help their development, we can still take advantage of the home environment to do a lot for them.



Ten Little Fingers: Improving Hand Skills

One of our most important abilities is the ability to use our hands for different activities in daily life. This ability accompanies the baby from the first months of their lives and through their entire development during their childhood years, and it evolves with time.

Our babies discover their hands in the first months of their lives - they look at them and observe them and then start reaching for objects in front of them. To help them develop their motor skills, bring different objects closer to them and let them try holding on. You should start with relatively big objects, that will be easy for them to hold on to. It isn't surprising that they'll usually prefer colorful objects or ones that make noise.

When they are close to one year old, we can challenge our toddlers and let them try catching on to smaller objects (but not too small! We wouldn't want them swallowing them or putting them up their nose...). This is also the time to let our children try eating on their own (not only can they, but it's actually preferable for them to eat with their hands...) and allow them to hold food of different sizes and textures.

You should let your children try **different activities and experience different textures**, harder and softer - drawing with markers, drawing with oil pastels, sticking stickers, plasticine, play dough, etc. Different textures activate different arm and hand muscles and teach the child different actions. Yes, sometimes this means letting them get dirty - with food and colors. This is a very important developmental stage, even if it creates some mess in the house...

With older kids you should expose them to puzzles, drawing with different types of colors, stringing beads; anything you have at home can be useful for developing these abilities. You don't need to buy expensive toys. Putting rice or peas in a box can be a delightful activity. We can challenge our children and let them try things we think might be hard for them; frustration is part of growing up. If we're there for them, the frustration turns into an interesting and fun learning experience.

If we continually help them develop this ability, they'll use it more and more in every-day skills such as eating on their own - with their hands and later with utensils - getting dressed, bathing, and in a few years, drawing and writing.

Kids learn best from daily activities. If we let them experience and do things on their own and with us, the parents, like cooking together, fixing things in the house together, building together, we'll find that it does wonders for their development, abilities and self-confidence.

Coming and Going

One of the most important abilities that develop in children's first few years is the ability to use their muscles and move from one place to another.

All babies develop in the same order, but each one develops at their own pace, and that's ok, usually there's nothing to worry about.

To help our babies progress and develop, we should offer them the right stimulants and allow them a variety of experiences in the space. All this while playing- because this is the most fun and rewarding way for us and the baby to work muscles, practice and try moving forward.

It's important that already during the first few days of the baby's life we **expose them to a variety of positions** - lying on their belly and on their back, lifting them on our shoulder or laying them down on our stomach, belly to belly. We should also allow them to lay down on and feel different surfaces with different textures - a carpet, a thin mattress, a blanket etc. Each of these positions is a chance for them to experience the world from a different point of view and allows them to move different limbs in different ways.

Doing the above will contribute to their future movement and mobility.

Just like us, babies also need motivation and rewards. So when we're putting a baby on their stomach (and this can be on a carpet or on us), place something interesting in front of them so that it will "be worth" picking their head up for. **The most interesting thing for them is us, the parents!** So, give them a smiling face, an encouraging voice, song or movement.

When the babies are close to turning over or crawling, place interesting games a little out of their reach, to their left, right and in front of them. In order to get what they want, or to hear the toy's music or our cry of joy, they will make a greater attempt and move to reach it.

You can use anything you have in the house to attract their attention- noises from dishes, pots and pans, noise from a closed container with rice or lentils in it, open colorful books near the baby- are all great ways to motivate movement and develop muscles. And most importantly... Together! While talking, singing, moving and smiling.

When the kids are older and can already walk, we can play together while improving their movement: build an obstacle course from pillows, or crawling tunnels from cardboard boxes and chairs, we can go up and down steps, climb high chairs, jump like frogs, walk like elephants, or any other idea you can come up with.

Don't forget to encourage them with kind words, a smile, an excited voice and a kiss when the kids reach the goal. There's no better motivation!