

**win!**

TICKETS TO  
ESPLANADE'S NEW SHOW  
FOR CHILDREN

# THRIVE



## Get Creative

How the arts help even the littlest ones grow and shine



## Taste Of The Tropics

Juice up dragon fruit for a vibrant and refreshing drink



## Learn By Heart

Explore colours and textures with this fun sensory craft



**BRAND NEW DAY**  
Are you all set for school?

# Beanstalk

JAN-MAR  
2024

## THE FIRST STEPS

Making the most of the key infant and toddler years

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**5 WAYS**  
TO BOOST  
children's  
vocabulary





# STARTING STRONG IN THE EARLY YEARS



so that our children can grow, learn and play in a safe and conducive environment.

The Early Years Development Framework (EYDF) was updated last year, offering infant and early years educators with refreshed strategies to transform preschool experiences for our very young ones. EYDF calls for educators to build upon their professional knowledge, deepen their understanding of child development and broaden their pedagogical skills.

Research shows that there are significant benefits to children from low-income families and those with developmental needs when they have more years of regular preschool attendance to supplement a loving home environment. Hence, the Government will continue to step up efforts to provide targeted support to these families and encourage more centres to prioritise early enrolment of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child in the United States noted, "Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development."

Let's keep this in mind as we strive towards a close partnership between parents, preschools and the community. When each of us is empowered to do our best, together we can shape the tomorrow of our children.

On behalf of ECDA, I would like to wish all our Early Childhood (EC) educators, parents and community partners a happy and great start to 2024.

Let's welcome the new year with optimism and embrace changes as opportunities for our personal and professional growth. Recognising the complementary roles of parents and educators, we must continue to strengthen home-preschool partnerships to provide the best for our children.

As we usher in the new year, it is timely to focus on our youngest — the infants and toddlers. This resonates well with new beginnings and ensuring every child has a good start in life. Very young children thrive in safe and nurturing environments. It is important for their development to have warm and positive attachments with parents, caregivers and educators, coupled with ample opportunities to play and explore.

Safety continues to be of paramount concern. ECDA will work closely with preschools, training providers and educators to enhance child safety practices

**MR TAN CHEE WEE**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)



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Beanstalk clinched the APEX 2023 Award of Excellence in the Print Media (Education & Training) category!

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# BRINGING UP BABY

TIPS AND STRATEGIES TO KEEP PACE WITH INFANTS AND TODDLERS.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The average child's brain doubles in size in the first year and reaches about

**80%**

of its adult volume by age 3, and 90% by age 5. Although it stops growing in size by early adolescence, the brain continues fine-tuning itself and fully matures around age 25.

Attachments and relationships formed with caregivers — including parents and educators — during these early years have a far-reaching influence on children's development. For infants and toddlers to thrive and learn, caregivers must provide a nurturing environment tailored to their individual needs, says Ms Phua. "It is about understanding and appreciating that their developmental journey unfolds at a pace unique to them. Rushing them to achieve quick results beyond what they are capable of diminishes curiosity and motivation to learn, and creates stress," she adds.

*Beanstalk* speaks to Ms Phua, parents and educators about the strategies, challenges and issues related to supporting children from birth to age three.

### WHAT MATTERS MOST DURING THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF LIFE?

**Sherlyn Ho:** Foremost is the relationship adults build with children. Children feel valued and appreciated when we are present in our interactions with them. Each conversation and exchange presents opportunities for adults to support young children's holistic development and well-being.

**Annie Tan:** Provide a safe space for infants and toddlers to play, exposure to a language-rich environment, as well as responsive caregiving and secure attachments. It is about laying the groundwork for their learning and development during this three-year window of opportunity.

**Karyn Phua:** To create a supportive environment for young learners, we need to allow them the freedom to move and explore. Setting up safe and stimulating spaces with age-appropriate toys, textures and colours can enrich children's sensory experiences and foster their natural curiosity. This encourages infants and toddlers to explore and discover, so that they develop problem-solving skills.

Over one million neural connections are formed in the brain every second in the first three years of a child's life. This means early experiences, interactions and environments affect the way a baby's brain develops and learns. These can significantly shape all aspects of development including language development, cognition, motor skills and emotional regulation during this sensitive period, says Ms Karyn Phua, a lecturer at the National Institute of Early Childhood Development (Temasek Polytechnic Campus).

“Children feel valued and appreciated when we are present in our interactions with them.”

**MS SHERLYN HO, 33**  
Vice-Principal (In-Training),  
St. James' Church  
Kindergarten (Gilstead)



**WHAT ARE SOME KEY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PLANNING ACTIVITIES AND CHOOSING MATERIALS FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS?**

**Annie:** Select safe and appropriate materials and activities that align with children's interests and developmental stages. This will enable them to learn at their own pace. Engage children in activities that encourage back-and-forth interaction, such as simple games like peek-a-boo, and action songs that invite mimicry and participation. Provide choices in play and respect their decisions and preferences, as this helps build autonomy and confidence. Also, choose materials that reflect diverse cultures.

At our centre, we implement a plan-do-review cycle to ensure that activities are thoughtfully planned, executed with intention, and evaluated for effectiveness.

**Sherlyn:** Infants and toddlers learn through hands-on and concrete experiences. When planning activities, I provide opportunities for children to explore their environment or materials. As this age group needs sensory stimulation to process the world around them, I choose tangible objects and materials with varied textures.

It is also important to observe how children respond to what I have planned for them, and make changes where needed. For instance, I wanted to show the children in my class how their movements affected their shadows. However, they all decided to move to a shaded area. So, I modified the activity and asked them to think about why they couldn't see their own shadows in the shade.

“As every child is unique in their temperament and needs, we had to observe James closely and guide our responses accordingly.”

**DR BENJAMIN LUI, 31**  
Doctor, father of James Lui, 6 months



**PRESCHOOL VS HOME**

Which environment exerts a more important influence on infants and toddlers? It is not an 'either-or' situation, but the stability and quality of caregiving that makes all the difference, says lecturer Ms Karyn Phua. Positive, nurturing and responsive interactions that build an emotional connection with the child contribute significantly to their healthy development.

**Karyn:** A well-structured curriculum should be sensory-oriented. Create experiences that trigger the sense of sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch, while being flexible enough to meet children's diverse preferences. Educators need to modify activities or deliver differentiated instruction to accommodate each child's learning pace and developmental level. A positive attitude towards learning is created when the environment promotes exploration while respecting individual autonomy.

**PARENTS, WHICH STAGE OF YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT TO DATE DID YOU FIND MOST CHALLENGING?**

**Ng Ru Yin:** When Raphael turned two and was learning to speak, he struggled to communicate with limited vocabulary. He would say "no" to everything or throw tantrums as a result of not being understood. In recent months, Raphael — now three — has been wanting to do things on his own, such as putting on his clothes, even though he sometimes can't get it right. I have to be patient as Raphael explores his feelings and tests his boundaries.

**Benjamin Lui:** James just turned six months old. The toughest stage so far would have to be when he was two to three months old, when my wife and I were still figuring out his non-verbal cues. As every child is unique in their temperament and needs, we had to observe James closely and guide our responses accordingly.

**EDUCATORS, ANY TIPS ON HOW TO STRENGTHEN ADULT-CHILD BONDS DURING THIS EARLY STAGE?**

**Annie:** Notice a child's cues and respond promptly. For example, when playing with an infant, adults can imitate the child's sounds and actions. By acknowledging children's communication efforts with attention and interest, adults signal to children they are understood and valued, which

then builds trust. Establish routines and rituals such as reading bedtime stories or having breakfast together. Predictability fosters a sense of stability and safety, which are crucial for strong emotional bonds. Above all, enjoy activities together; shared happiness is a powerful connector.

**Sherlyn:** Speak to children at their eye level. This creates safe and respectful two-way communication, which nurtures relationships. Also, show empathy when children cry. It matters to them when adults put in the effort to listen and understand them.

**Karyn:** Offering undivided attention during routine activities is crucial, as divided attention can lead to confusion and feelings of isolation in children. Caregivers need to be sensitive and respectful of the child's signals and cues, finding a balance between interactive activities and calming moments to avoid overstimulation. Slowing down to match the child's pace is also key, as hurrying them to learn or achieve developmental milestones can have a negative impact on the bond with the child.



**HAND IN HAND**

**Mrs Elsie Tan-Chua, ECDA Fellow and Centre Leader at Living Sanctuary Preschool, offers tips on how educators can cultivate effective home-preschool partnerships.**



A strong home-preschool partnership is one where educators and parents work together to cultivate a shared understanding of the child. As a result, appropriate provisions can be made to support the child's learning and developmental milestones.

While parents bear the main responsibility of shaping and influencing their children's development, a collaborative approach with their children's educators deepens the impact on children's learning, growth and well-being. For example, when a toddler is going through toilet training, parents and educators can discuss the appropriate strategies and methods to use, update each other about the child's progress, and fine-tune their approach where necessary.

To strengthen the partnership, educators must:

- **DEVELOP GOOD COMMUNICATION SKILLS.** Use accurate, appropriate and respectful language, in written or verbal form, with parents. Get to know parents well and understand their expectations. Doing so will help educators know what to focus on when giving feedback or updates.
- **DEMONSTRATE ENTHUSIASM AND EXCITEMENT** when communicating with parents, be it face-to-face, over the phone or in writing. This motivates parents to do their part in supporting children's learning. Weekly reports or updates give them ideas on what they can do with their children at home and encourage parents to share their experiences.
- **FRAME FEEDBACK IN A CONSTRUCTIVE AND POSITIVE WAY** rather than giving negative remarks or reports.
- **EARN PARENTS' TRUST.** Parents may express extra demands or question their children's well-being. This is natural as they have their children's interests at heart. Explain in a respectful manner why things are done a certain way. Suggest alternatives and work out a mutual solution to address any issues. Reassure parents and reiterate your intention of providing good, safe care and enjoyable learning experiences for their children.



“I have to be patient as Raphael explores his feelings and tests his boundaries.”

**MS NG RU YIN, 33**  
Homemaker, mother of Raphael Kuah, 3



**PARENTS, HOW DO YOU NURTURE YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT?**

**Ru Yin:** I observed that Raphael enjoys music, so we play songs, sing and dance together at home. He's very good at physical activities too, so we let him cycle outdoors. My top priority is to support my children and build their self-esteem. I believe this will enable them to navigate life's challenges with confidence and resilience.

**Benjamin:** We have conversations with James. When we bring him to places such as the beach or fish farm, we describe what we see and hear to develop his language. At home, we introduce different languages through nursery rhymes and speaking to him in English and Mandarin. We try to improve his dexterity by encouraging him to grab dangling objects or play with shape-sorting toys that strengthen his fine muscles and cognitive skills. To meet James' social-emotional needs, we ensure he has a safe space to explore his surroundings and interact with other children so that he grows his confidence to build relationships with others.

**EDUCATORS, HOW DO WE SET LIMITS AND GUIDE BEHAVIOURS IN INFANTS AND TODDLERS?**

**Annie:** Be consistent and patient. If a toddler has a habit of biting others, respond firmly by saying, "We don't bite; biting hurts", then redirect him to a different activity. Patience is key as children need time to learn appropriate behaviours. Give clear, one-step directions that are easy to follow (e.g., "Please put the ball in the box"), accompanied by gestural cues. When a child follows instructions or plays nicely, give positive reinforcement by praising the specific behaviour (e.g., "Thank you for putting the toys back. You did a great job cleaning up!").

Adults can guide infants and toddlers by modelling positive behaviours and narrating the action (e.g., "I'm putting the toy away so that you can play again next time"). This encourages children to mimic prosocial behaviour.



**MDM ANNIE TAN, 57**  
Early Years Educator, My First Skool at 6 New Punggol Road

“Adults can guide infants and toddlers by modelling positive behaviours and narrating the action.”

**Sherlyn:** When a child throws a tantrum at the playground, first seek to understand the situation: did we give him ample time to prepare to leave the area? Next, address and validate the child's feelings. Tell him, "I know you are feeling angry because we have to leave the playground." Children can only learn the language of emotions and develop self-awareness when we verbalise the emotions. Then, lay out options and empower the child to choose for himself (e.g., "We can come back to the playground. Would you like to come back in the afternoon or tomorrow?"). Model what the child can do or say to express his needs (e.g., "If you would like to have more time, you can say, 'More time, please.'"). Affirm the child when he displays the appropriate behaviour during subsequent situations. Throughout the process, be consistent, patient and calm.

**HOW CAN EDUCATORS AND PARENTS WORK TOGETHER TO SUPPORT INFANT AND TODDLER DEVELOPMENT?**

**Karyn:** Supporting infant and toddler development is a collaborative effort between educators and parents. It requires trust. This involves respecting and valuing each party's role in the child's life. Besides establishing open and regular communication to share insights about the child's experiences, engaging in joint activities such as reading programmes can equip parents with skills to support their children and strengthen parent-educator relationships.

**Sherlyn:** I realise parents have their own needs. Sometimes the challenges they face are influenced by their home situations. I take time to listen to their challenges, understand their needs, and create shared goals that help me plan to meet the needs of both the parents and our preschool. Beyond the usual sharing of documentation and parent-teacher conferences, we invite parents to come to class once a week to read to the children. When children carry out inquiry projects, parents are encouraged to get involved as "experts" and conduct sessions at our centre to enrich discussions and further exploration.

# HEART WORK

**DR PETER MANGIONE SHARES INSIGHTS ON HOW SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING PLAYS A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN INFANT AND TODDLER DEVELOPMENT.**



**COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS**

Avoid these tendencies when caring for infants and toddlers.

- Seeing things only from an adult's perspective.** A child's desire to understand the world is sometimes misinterpreted as behaviour that needs correction. For example, an infant who persistently drops something on the floor is not doing so to bother the adult, but rather is likely exploring the effect of gravity.
- Overestimating children's ability to self-regulate.** Emotion regulation develops gradually during the birth-to-three period. For the first 15 months or so, infants are not ready to follow social rules. They need warm, gentle guidance from adults. As they grow into toddlerhood, they can learn simple social rules and follow well-defined social boundaries, provided adults continue to provide responsive and consistent guidance.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is about developing a sense of self and connection with others. The SEL competencies gained in a child's first three years are essential for learning in the other developmental domains — language, physical and cognitive — and provide the foundation for self-initiated exploration and learning.

Infants and toddlers who develop strong SEL skills are:

- Self-confident
- Friendly with peers
- Cooperative with adults and other children
- Empathic and prosocial
- Aware of frustrations, anger and joy, and able to communicate these emotions effectively
- Attentive and responsive to others

Research indicates that children who develop these characteristics early are more likely to succeed in future relationships, school and life.

**NURTURING SEL COMPETENCIES**

The attachment between child and caregiver is important for early SEL. An infant or toddler who has an emotionally secure relationship with an adult will trust that adult to provide guidance in social situations. Driven to make sense of the world, yet feeling vulnerable, the child looks to that adult for reassurance and to learn how to interact effectively with others.

To form secure attachments and promote SEL competencies in little ones, adults need to be attentive to children's cues and be mindful of the messages they themselves are sending. On one hand, being responsive to a child's interests and needs helps the child develop competence and manage feelings of vulnerability. On the other hand, adults need to be aware of how they respond or behave around children. Modelling prosocial behaviours has a much greater influence on children compared to direct teaching.

Here are some things children learn from their interactions with adults:

- > I am listened to or not.
- > What I choose to do is valued or it is not.
- > How I express my emotions is accepted or it is not.
- > I am allowed to explore or I am not.
- > My needs are mostly met or they are not.

It is important to convey messages of warmth, understanding and support to infants and toddlers. They then learn from adults how to show interest in others, take the perspective of others, and express empathy.



**DR PETER MANGIONE**  
Senior Director for Early Childhood Strategic Initiatives & Senior Managing Director, WestEd, USA  
Dr Mangione leads the development of comprehensive training resources for the early childhood (EC) workforce, particularly infant and toddler care providers. A co-founder of the Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC), his contributions played a major role in making it an internationally recognised model for the professional development of EC practitioners.



# GUIDING LIGHT

**THE UPDATED EARLY YEARS DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK PROVIDES A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON CREATING CHILD-CENTRED LEARNING EXPERIENCES.**

**T**he Early Years Development Framework: A Good Start for Every Child (EYDF) was updated in 2023 to take into account recent advances in early years research and practice. The framework provides a guide for early childhood (EC) educators working with children from birth to three years in centre-based childcare settings. Research shows when parents and educators adapt or modify their behaviours in response to a child's cues and interests, and engage the child in quality interactions, this positively impacts brain development.

"Respectful, responsive and reciprocal (known as the '3Rs') interactions build positive relationships with young children. These have far-reaching implications for the babies' overall development and well-being," says Dr Melinda Eng, the EC consultant for the updated EYDF.



Care routines like mealtimes offer opportunities for learning and development

Although the framework is intended for infant and early years educators in centre-based childcare settings, it can also offer parents insights on how to be active participants in their children's learning journey at home, adds Dr Eng. "It helps parents make informed decisions, set realistic expectations, and respond

appropriately to their children's needs at different stages of development. Parents will then be able to discuss their children's progress more effectively with educators, engage in quality conversations with their children, and plan activities to enhance learning experiences at home," she says.



Point out and talk about play objects with children for them to explore

## C.H.I.L.D. FIRST

The updated EYDF continues to emphasise the notion of children as joyful, curious, active and competent learners.

Dr Eng elaborates, "If educators adopt a deficit-based approach (i.e., children are viewed as having limited abilities to think, decide and learn), they tend to focus on the children's weaknesses and challenges. On the other hand, if educators believe infants and toddlers are competent learners and thinkers, they will plan experiences based on the children's strengths and interests, and create opportunities to empower them and optimise their potential."

This child-centric approach is encapsulated in the following five C.H.I.L.D. principles that offer practical strategies for bringing out the best in infants and toddlers, as well as the professional best in infant and early years educators.

### Caregiving and Routines

"Caregiving is more than just meeting children's physical needs. It meets higher-order needs, like a sense of belonging or connection, and offers a meaningful context for learning and development to happen," notes Ms Cynthia Tan, a Curriculum Specialist at NTUC First Campus and a member of the EYDF Review Committee.

Remember to smile, make eye contact, and chat about the surroundings with babies during routines such as diapering, bedtime and mealtime. These actions support little ones in their communication skills, social-emotional development,

and cognitive skills such as sequencing and cause-and-effect which are also pre-numeracy skills. For instance, during care routines, describe each step (e.g., "We're going to take off your shirt first. Then we're going to put on a fresh diaper."). Everyday interactions, including games such as peek-a-boo or hide-and-seek, also build their working memory and attention span.

### Holistic Development

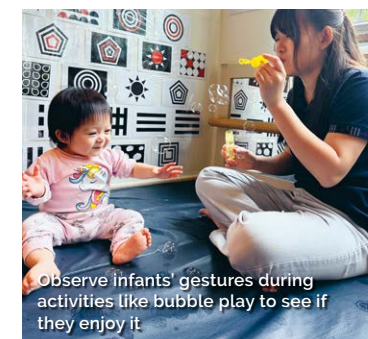
Provide varied learning experiences that address all four areas of development. For instance, educators can incorporate more outdoor exploration into the curriculum, on top of encouraging imaginative play by leveraging items found in the surrounding environment and role-playing.

"Educators can bring leaves, stones and insects into the classroom for infants and toddlers to observe and learn about the natural world," says Ms Lotus Lai, Cluster Principal of Agape Little Uni., who also sat on the EYDF Review Committee.

### Intentional Planning

Activities that cater to children's interests and abilities stimulate their curiosity and motivate them to explore and discover the world around them. Parents and educators can share information and discuss their observations of how children play and behave to have a better understanding of the children's development and to provide appropriate play materials.

Think about what questions to ask children. While questions like



Observe infants' gestures during activities like bubble play to see if they enjoy it



Interacting with the natural world spurs holistic development

"What is this colour?" or "How many are there?" are important, open-ended ones such as "I wonder why...?" or "What if daddy adds another block...?" can facilitate thinking and extend play.



### Learning through Exploration and Play

"Provide a wide variety of tools and opportunities for children to practise and acquire skills," says Ms Lai. "Crayons and building blocks support fine motor skills, while balls and bean bags help toddlers build gross motor skills." Surround children with objects that appeal to their senses, such as those with textured surfaces and in different sizes; plastic bottles containing materials like beads, sand and pebbles that produce different sounds; and scented playdough.

### Developing Secure Attachments

Children who form secure attachments with adults are better at regulating their emotions, engaging in social interactions, and coping with stress. It starts with building positive relationships, says Dr Eng, who urges educators and parents to adopt the 3Rs when interacting with young ones.

NTUC First Campus employs a primary caregiver system where every child has a key educator responsible for his or her development. Smaller group sizes also enable educators to nurture more intimate connections with each child. "With infants and toddlers, it's really about prioritising your relationship with them, not what lessons you are going to teach them," says Ms Tan. ●

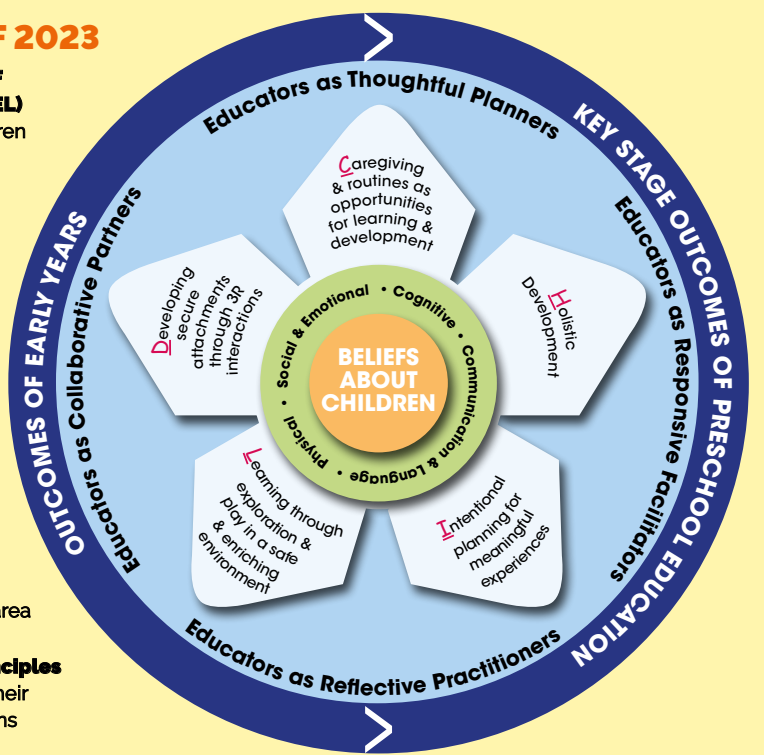
## KEY CHANGES IN EYDF 2023

➔ Greater alignment between EYDF and Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) Framework (for educators of children aged 4 to 6) in terms of:

- Beliefs about children
- Importance of warm and responsive interactions
- Benefits of active engagement with families and the community
- Role of educators as thoughtful planners, responsive facilitators, reflective practitioners and collaborative partners

➔ Emphasis on 4 areas of development (cognitive, communication & language, physical, social & emotional), with developmental goals within each area

➔ Introduction of 5 new guiding principles (C.H.I.L.D.) to guide educators in their planning, processes and interactions with children





# THE 'RIGHT' CHOICE

SIX THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN PICKING A PRESCHOOL.

**W**ith more than 1,900 preschools to choose from in Singapore, how do parents pick the one that best suits their child? Apart from cost and accessibility, it is also important to think about how the child's experience will be shaped by the educators as well as the preschool's environment, programmes and curriculum.

**1 LOCATION**  
A preschool's proximity to one's home or office, or the home of the child's grandparents, allows for convenient drop-offs and pick-ups. That said, it is worth looking beyond the distance, as our well-connected public transport network can offer manageable commuting times to preschools that are further away.

“My children are enrolled in a preschool near my workplace so that I can quickly respond to teachers' calls, like when they feel unwell. It's also more convenient if I need to work late.”

**LIN HUI**, mother to Lucas, 6, and Lewis, 2



**2 TYPES OF PRESCHOOLS AND FEES**

There are three main types of preschools:

- Privately-run preschools
- Ministry of Education (MOE) Kindergartens
- Government-funded Anchor Operator (AOP) and Partner Operator (POP) centres

Eligible families can defray part of the preschool fees with the help of a Basic Subsidy, a means-tested Additional Subsidy, the Kindergarten Fee Assistance Scheme, and other forms of financial assistance. The subsidy type and amount depend on the service selected (i.e., infant care, child care or kindergarten), the parent's employment status, and household income.

**3 PRESCHOOL HOURS**  
If both parents work, they can consider infant and child care centres with full-day programmes that cater to the holistic development of children. Parents who prefer non-full-day programmes can consider kindergartens or half-day care programmes for their children.

	Infant/Child Care	Kindergarten
<b>Age group</b>	<b>Infant care:</b> Between 2 and 18 months  <b>Child care:</b> Between 18 months and below 7 years  <i>Larger preschools often provide both infant and child care.</i>	Between 18 months and below 7 years   <i>MOE Kindergartens cater only to K1s and K2s (ages 5 and 6).</i>
<b>Programme length</b>	Full-day (7am to 7pm on weekdays)   <i>Some centres also offer half-day and/or flexible options (at least 12 hours a week, 3 hours per session).</i>	Half-day (morning or afternoon session on weekdays)   <i>Full-day service is available, including at MOE Kindergartens.</i>

**4 POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND CURRICULUM**  
There are different types of quality early childhood curriculum. Some learning approaches include HighScope, Montessori and Reggio Emilia. Parents should select a preschool whose philosophy and learning approach resonate with their personal beliefs and expectations. Consider the child's specific needs, as well as how the centre's programmes and activities cater to their holistic development including the physical, cognitive, language and social-emotional domains. Find out how the preschool assesses and tracks children's learning and development (e.g., learning stories, portfolios, observations), and what programmes it offers to engage parents.

Talk to the centre about the policies and strategies it has in place to guide young children's behaviour. Positive behaviour management practices provide children with a supportive environment to thrive socially and emotionally. "Regular conversations between parents and educators help build a consistent environment to support children's emotional well-being and nurture sound values," says Ms Wan Hill Kuan, a preschool principal, who stresses the importance of strong home-preschool partnership and its positive impact on a child's preschool years, particularly in the transition to formal schooling.

“Enrolling Harisa in full-day child care benefits both of us. She gets to interact with other children as well as trained educators who stimulate her learning and development. I can focus on my career and professional development without interruptions during working hours.”

**NURASHRIKIN BINTE KARIM**, mother to Harisa, 5



“I actively looked for a preschool with more outdoor play opportunities for my son. At his age, I want him to get more exercise, develop motor skills, and be exposed to more sunshine.”

**JONATHAN KAY**, father to Eli, 2

**5 FACILITIES AND ENVIRONMENT**  
Look at the centre's equipment, materials, spaces and surroundings. Are they safe and developmentally appropriate? Is the classroom well stocked with books, art supplies and educational resources? Are gardens, parks and other community places easily accessible for educators to conduct outdoor learning activities? "The learning environment must be safe and well-designed with a variety of learning materials and resources for children to engage in small- and large-group activities comfortably, without distractions from surrounding high noise levels," says Dr Karuna Marthenis, Senior Lecturer, Early Childhood Education Programme, Singapore University of Social Sciences.

**6 TEACHER-CHILD RATIO**  
The Early Childhood Development Centres Regulations (2018) stipulate a staff-child ratio of at least one teacher to five children in infant care, and one teacher to 25 children at the K2 level. Smaller class sizes mean that educators can spend more time and attention on each child, tailor their teaching approach, and spot any learning challenges.





# OFF TO A GOOD START

RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING AND OFFERING CHOICES DURING PLAY CAN BOOST INFANT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT.



Ms Mungmai uses storytelling to boost a baby's focus and language development

## BABY STEPS

Ms Mungmai makes a list of the developmental areas for each child under her care, based on her observations and discussions with fellow educators. She also researches ways to support infants — something she was trained to do while undergoing the three-year Professional Development Programme (Educators).

The emphasis on empowering infants also comes through in the choices she gives to infants during playtime. "When infants are allowed to choose, it acknowledges their worth, empowers them and builds their confidence," explains Ms Mungmai. "For example, if a child does not like messy play, I offer an alternative and let the child explore that first before introducing messy activities."

Patience and a calibrated approach — undergirded by respectful, responsive and reciprocal relationships — are key. With one child who was afraid of grass, Ms Mungmai took small steps over a few weeks to help him overcome his fear. First, to fuel his curiosity, she made a simple peek-a-boo toy using a flip-top lid and fake grass. Next, she encouraged him to feel the texture of a patch of fake grass set up inside the preschool. Finally, she brought him outdoors to touch the grass. It was a rewarding feeling when he eventually stepped on the grass.



Leading toddlers in hands-on activities like pretend play

“As first-time parents, we didn't know when or how to wean Enzo onto solids. Teacher Nat suggested meals we could prepare. As Enzo makes the next step to playgroup, she has also shared with us what to expect.”

MR NEO JIA JUN, father of Enzo Neo, 16 months

## PARENTS ARE LEARNING TOO

Being sensitive to parents' concerns and expectations is part and parcel of Ms Mungmai's job. She works closely with parents to address issues, be it showing them articles on how babies learn or recommending fun activities to do as a family.

Mr Neo Jia Jun, whose son Enzo is in infant care, believes Ms Mungmai has made a difference. "We've seen significant improvement in Enzo's social behaviour and willingness to try different things. He learns things quickly because of the exposure to different learning opportunities that Teacher Nat provides." ●



Sensory play with paints and sponges strengthens infants' physical and cognitive skills

Listen to Ms Natsuda Mungmai's chat with a parent!  
[go.gov.sg/2023-ecda-awards-outstanding-infant-educator-natsuda-mungmai](https://go.gov.sg/2023-ecda-awards-outstanding-infant-educator-natsuda-mungmai)



Close partnership between parents and preschool educators can help children develop the skills needed for a smooth P1 transition

# MAKE THE GRADE

GETTING PRESCHOOLERS READY FOR PRIMARY 1.

The transition from preschool to Primary 1 is a big milestone for children. Some may find it difficult to adjust to a different environment, new faces or new routines.

"Change can be stressful and uncomfortable," notes Ms Wong Wei Sum, Principal of Little Seeds Preschool (Church of the Ascension). "However, we can reduce stress by better preparing children and their parents."

## LEVEL UP

Focusing on children's holistic development, rather than prioritising academic skills, is the linchpin to a successful transition to primary school. To that end, Little Seeds emphasises fostering children's love for reading, instilling values, as well as developing social-emotional skills and learning dispositions, among other aspects outlined in the Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) Framework.

These skills are cultivated through the preschool's "Values Matter!" core programme. Teachers use songs, stories and activities to instil and reinforce values such as respect and perseverance. For example, children are taught to deal with challenging situations by using positive self-talk statements like "It's okay to make mistakes" or "I can do things that are hard".



Little Seeds children visiting SAJS's Eco Garden during their induction tour

Twice-yearly parent-teacher conferences allow both parties to collaboratively set goals for the children. Ms Wong gives a case study of a child who had trouble making friends. At their meeting, the teacher and parents mutually set goals to improve the child's social skills. They worked together over time to guide her to see things from another's perspective, develop self-awareness, and be more confident in approaching others. By the end of the school year, she had learned to make some good friends.

## PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

As Little Seeds is located in Saint Andrew's Village, the same premises as St Andrew's Junior School (SAJS), the K2-to-P1 move may be less challenging. The preschool partners SAJS to hold induction tours for K2 children and parent orientation sessions. Little Seeds alumni — who went through the transition themselves — usually participate in these events.

## TIPS FROM A PRINCIPAL

Mrs Elsie Poey, Principal of SAJS, shares ways to prepare preschoolers for primary school.



- **Teach social skills explicitly.** Remind them to say "please", "hello" and "thank you" with a smile, ask for permission, and take turns. Reiterate the importance of controlling their emotions and not throwing a tantrum when they do not get their way.
- **Teach simple coping phrases** when faced with an issue, such as "Teacher, I need help" or "Sam, can you help me, please?".
- **Let them know what to expect** such as a bigger class size, longer hours, and new routines and people.
- **Impart life skills.** Examples include how to use the toilet properly and buy food in the canteen.

Milan Tiwari, now in Primary 3 at SAJS, is one of them. He recalls how his preschool teachers prepared him for primary school. "We played pretend games. My teacher set up food stalls in the classroom and I used my pocket money to buy chicken rice. She showed us how to make friends and respect classmates. She also taught us about bullying and dealing with it by walking away and informing a teacher," he says. SAJS's buddy programme, which paired Milan with an upper primary student, also helped him settle in quickly.

The eight-year-old has this advice for his juniors: "Make friends, ask questions if you are unsure, and be kind. Primary school is about trying awesome and fun things!" ●



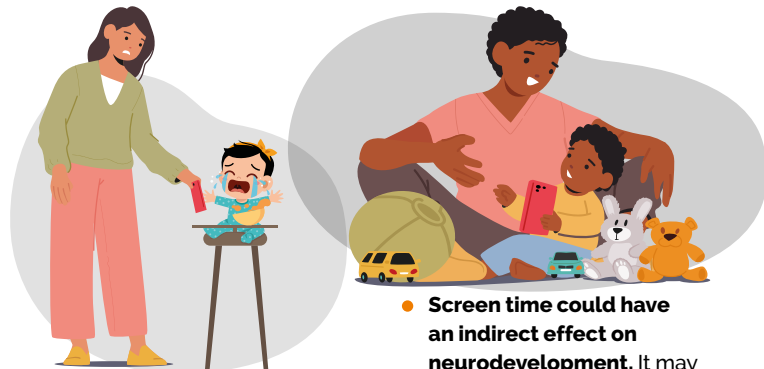
Practising buying food at the SAJS canteen



# WATCH AND LEARN

## THE SCREEN TIME DILEMMA: HOW MUCH OR HOW LITTLE IS IDEAL FOR CHILDREN?

Smartphones and tablets are so ubiquitous that it is impossible to avoid them. The challenge for parents is to strike the right balance — letting children keep pace with the digital world while protecting their eyesight, overall health and well-being. When parents are busy, it is tempting to rely on digital devices as virtual babysitters. This is a slippery slope, warns Dr Evelyn Law, a clinician-scientist specialising in developmental and behavioural paediatrics. She says, "A little bit of screen time at intermittent intervals is unlikely to be harmful. But unconsciously, the amount will gradually increase over time. Once a child has started using screens, it is hard to revert to no screens."



*Healthy Outcomes (GUSTO)*, her team found that infants who were exposed to longer screen time had poorer executive functions — such as difficulty regulating emotions, sustaining attention and persisting in hard tasks — beyond eight years of age. There are two possible reasons:

- **Infants have difficulty processing information on 2D screens.** Their brains have to work harder when bombarded with sensory stimuli (e.g., fast movements, blinking lights) to make sense of the information. This leaves inadequate cognitive resources for their executive functions to develop.



Dr Evelyn Law, paediatric specialist

- **Screen time could have an indirect effect on neurodevelopment.** It may displace quality parent-child interactions critical for facilitating holistic development. This includes building thinking and language skills in the early years.

While Dr Law plans to further investigate these explanations, her findings are consistent with other studies. A mounting body of evidence shows deficits in children's cognitive and problem-solving skills after excessive screen use. It can also put infants at risk of language developmental delay. She adds, "Unlike a parent or educator, screens cannot respond to a child's questions, nor can they interpret non-verbal answers such as a child looking at a correct object in the room."

exchanges which are critical for a child's development. She suggests some non-screen activities for parents with infants and toddlers:

- ➔ **If your child is crying to be picked up, strap him close to you as you go about your chores (unless it is cooking).** Talk about what you are doing (e.g., "Mummy is vacuuming the floor" or "Daddy is packing for our outing later").
- ➔ **Enjoy music together.** Sing along with actions. Give your child a rattle or drum to shake with the rhythm.
- ➔ **Bring your child outdoors.** Point out objects by name and add descriptive words. Use sounds or sing to enrich what he hears with what he sees.

For pointers on cultivating healthy screen practices, visit [go.gov.sg/moh-screenadvisory](http://go.gov.sg/moh-screenadvisory).

### HOW SCREEN TIME AFFECTS DEVELOPMENT

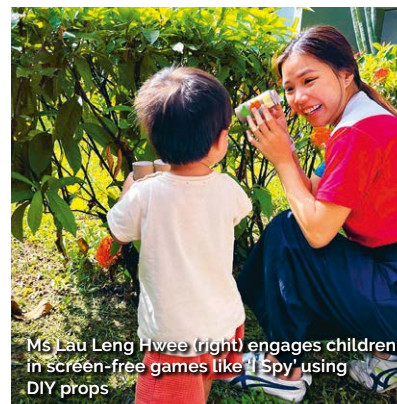
Dr Law led a multi-institutional study to examine the impact of screen time on children's brain activity and cognitive outcomes. Using data from the longitudinal birth cohort study, *Growing Up in Singapore Towards*

### Doctor's Orders

THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH ADVISORY, 'GUIDANCE ON SCREEN USE IN CHILDREN', RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING SCREEN TIME LIMITS DURING THE FIRST THREE YEARS:

Age Group	Recommendation
0–18 months	No screen time (unless it is for interactive video chatting)
18–36 months	Less than 1 hour a day (if co-viewing age-appropriate, educational content)

Dr Chong Shang Chee, a developmental paediatrician who co-chaired the expert panel behind the advisory, highlights that parents' responsiveness and reciprocity promote language development and social-emotional connections. Screens cannot replace the rich and sensitive language



Ms Lau Leng Hwee (right) engages children in screen-free games like 'Spy' using DIY props

### WHAT PARENTS AND EDUCATORS CAN DO

Educators can assist parents in setting screen time limits. Ms Lau Leng Hwee, Early Years Educator, M.Y World @ Sun Natura, says, "We can suggest meaningful activities for parents to engage their children in that do not involve screens, such as arts and crafts or practising songs learned in preschool. Share with parents the positive changes we observe in their children resulting from reduced screen time. This affirms and acknowledges parents' efforts."

A mother herself, Dr Law understands parents are caught in a quandary between the convenience screen time offers and its negative effects. Yet there is one consolation — even though increased screen time during infancy is associated with poorer attention span and executive functioning in later childhood, the brain does not mature until we are in our 20s and 30s. She emphasises, "Screen time is just one aspect of parenting; it does not determine one's efficacy as a parent."



### PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Ms Lau's advice to parents on managing screen time and meltdowns.

"My children rely on screen time, especially during mealtimes in restaurants."

**LIN CHI CHENG**, father of two, aged 6 and 4

- **Provide alternatives such as colouring sheets or books. Children will be more attentive when they can choose what they like.**
- **Engage them in conversation about the activity, the meal or their surroundings.**

"It almost always ends in tears even if we agreed on a fixed time together."

**JEANNIE LI**, mother of a 3-year-old

- **Acknowledge children's emotions but do not give in. Wait for them to calm down and reiterate your expectations (e.g., turn off at dinner time). Give a hug and move on to the next activity.**

"Controlling screen time is challenging in my household of four boys. The younger ones are exposed to screen time earlier because of their big brothers."

**SYAHIDAH JAMAL**, mother of four, aged 12, 9, 6 and 3

- **Tap the support of family members. Older siblings can serve as role models and help young ones follow the limits. Parents, too, must lead by example and refrain from using devices.**

"Our 5-year-old squints and has difficulty falling or staying asleep when screen time is too close to bedtime."

**CHIA SHUNYI**, mother of two, aged 8 and 5

- **Designate screen-free zones at home such as bedrooms and the dining area. Enforce this rule for adults too. Be consistent, firm and kind.**
- **Read a story to start a new bedtime routine to replace screen time.**

Both **DR EVELYN LAW** and **DR CHONG SHANG CHEE** are with the National University Hospital's Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children's Medical Institute (KTP-NUCMI) and the National University of Singapore's Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (NUS Medicine).

**DR LAW** is Senior Consultant, Division of Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics, Department of Paediatrics, KTP-NUCMI; Assistant Professor, Department of Paediatrics, NUS Medicine; and Principal Investigator, Translational Neuroscience Programme, Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences, Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A\*STAR).

**DR CHONG** is Head and Senior Consultant, Child Development Unit, Department of Paediatrics, KTP-NUCMI; Adjunct Associate Professor, Department of Paediatrics, NUS Medicine; and Deputy Director, Centre for Holistic Initiatives for Learning and Development (CHILD), NUS Medicine.



## Q&A HOW TO EASE TRANSITIONS FOR INFANTS AND EDUCATORS.

FOR PARENTS



### Q How do I address my baby's separation anxiety in starting infant care?

Babies form emotional attachments to their primary caregivers from birth. As infants grow aware of their surroundings and the presence of strangers, they get anxious when their primary caregivers are not around. During this time, they may become distressed, clingy or cry.

Separation anxiety is a normal experience between the ages of 6 months and 3 years, but it is important to manage it appropriately. Otherwise, the child may feel lost or abandoned, affecting their ability to trust and self-regulate.

- > **Gradually introduce infant care** to your baby. Visit the centre together in advance and start with short sessions before increasing the duration. Transitional objects such as a favourite stuffed toy may bring comfort to your baby.
- > **Show confidence** in the new caregiver/ environment. Maintain a relaxed body posture and facial expression during drop-offs. Be positive and do not show anxiety, as babies can sense this.
- > **Always say goodbye.** Do not sneak off as it can cause infants to become more anxious and less trusting of people. Establish a consistent goodbye ritual using the same words, gestures or song. It reassures your baby that you will be back to pick them up.

### Q What are some strategies to help teachers prepare for transitions at work?

Preschool educators experience many transitions, be it managing children as they go from one activity to the next, teaching a different age level, or adopting a new teaching approach. It is important for educators to be transition-ready so that they can be better prepared and connect more effectively with children.

Some issues for educators to consider:

- 1. Children's profile.** Check out the class you will be taking over to understand the children's development, family backgrounds, dispositions, as well as strengths and dislikes. This will help you get to know them better and design appropriate experiences from the outset.
- 2. Communication.** A good home-centre partnership influences the educator's relationship with children, so connect with parents early and build a trusting relationship. Send a friendly note to parents to introduce yourself, explain what you intend to do in the coming school year, and how they can be engaged in their child's preschool experience. It will be even more impressive if you personalise the message, such as highlighting an activity their child would enjoy, as it shows you care and have done your research.
- 3. Collaboration.** Connect with other educators regularly for professional growth and support. Also consider co-teaching your new class with your fellow teacher. It is easier to build rapport with children in a secure environment with a familiar classroom and caregivers.



FOR EDUCATORS



**DR CYNTHIA LIM** is the Deputy Head of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education Programme at the Singapore University of Social Sciences. Her areas of research include social-emotional learning, infant/toddler development, early years mathematics and reflective practice.



**ANG-OH CHUI HWA** is an ECDA Fellow and the Principal of Far Eastern Kindergarten. She believes character, construction, compassion and communication are key determinants of a good preschool programme.

# THRIVE

TIPS AND IDEAS FOR THE PHYSICAL, LANGUAGE, COGNITIVE AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CHILD



This is Esplanade's mascot PIP, who encourages children to learn through play, let their imagination take flight, and show politeness towards others, at its arts space that's free for all to join.

learn



18 | The sensory wonders of art in all its forms

grow



21 | Drink pink – this juiced-up recipe is full of goodness

play



22 | Make this heartfelt gift for Valentine's Day





Audience interaction is a key feature of Esplanade's PLAYtime! productions

# ARTS MATTER

Exposing children to the literary, performing and visual arts is vital to their holistic development.

Babies and toddlers appreciate being read to and watching actors play out a scene, even though they are not fully verbal and may only be able to show their enjoyment through facial expressions, gestures or vocalisations. Whether narrated from a book or performed on a stage, stories are more than just a form of entertainment. Literature and theatre are mediums that awaken children's senses, stimulate their imagination and much more.

"Active engagement in the arts helps foster social-emotional awareness, linguistic acquisition, movement and coordination, imagination and creativity — the list goes on. Interacting with the arts through play also encourages parent-child bonding," says Ms Sara Joan Fang, Esplanade's Head of Programming (Children & Youth).

## PAGE TURNERS

Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay has a dedicated arts space for children up to 12 years old that is free for families. Called PIP's PLAYbox, it has a reading corner stocked with children's books by local authors, including picture books for infants and toddlers. Parents can read to their children or attend storytelling sessions, spending quality time together while



Exploring shadow puppetry at PIP's PLAYbox

building their conversational skills and vocabulary.

PIP's PLAYbox also offers craft-making activities, simple toys, and interesting play structures that children can climb or crawl on. Ms Fang advises parents to let children set the pace. "Sometimes, all a child wants is to sit and observe or play hide-and-seek in the space. Be patient and let your children explore the space and materials in the manner they are comfortable," she says.



PIP's PLAYbox hosts storytelling sessions conducted by local children's book authors

## THE PLAY'S THE THING

PLAYtime! is an interactive theatre series for children aged 3 to 6 years that centres on the development of social and emotional competencies. The performing arts present values and emotions in ways little ones can understand. Through fictional characters and situations, children learn to appreciate and care for others, express their feelings in a healthy manner, and nurture a positive self-concept.

Esplanade's productions intermingle theatre with music, drawing and movement, exposing young audiences to a variety of stimuli at a time in their development when they are most receptive, says Ms Fang. PIP's PLAYbox offers activities that help to extend the arts experience for children after they have attended a PLAYtime! performance. For example, children can watch a performance and then participate in show-related craft activities and games.

## DRAWING INSPIRATION

When introducing visual arts to infants and toddlers, parents and educators should focus on "exposure and exploration", says Ms Wong Seet Fun, Founder and Partner of Art Loft. She shares tips on applying these two criteria to all aspects of the arts experience.

- 1. Materials.** Children learn through the senses, so provide visually and texturally appealing materials. If safety is a concern, make your own using non-toxic ingredients. Paste made from cornflour and water can be used as glue, or turned into paint when food colouring is added. Instead of commercial playdough, make your own with a mixture of salt, flour and water, adding varying amounts of food colouring to create different shades.
- 2. Space Design.** Set up a space where children are allowed to make a mess, which they can revisit at any time. Consider alternative spaces like parks and beaches, where they can create artworks out of natural materials such as leaves, twigs and sand.
- 3. Communication.** Refrain from guessing what children are making because they may feel hurt or discouraged if you guess wrongly. Instead, comment on the tools or actions (e.g., "I noticed you used your hands to roll the dough into a long noodle"). To invite exploration, say things like, "When you mixed the yellow and blue paint, you created green. I wonder what happens when you mix blue and red?"

## IT'S SHOW TIME!

Visit [www.esplanade.com/family](http://www.esplanade.com/family) to see what is in store for children at Esplanade. Upcoming highlights:

### ▶ PLAYtime! Fatimah and Her Magic Socks 1 to 17 Mar 2024

This is the first of two PLAYtime! shows this year. Dance and sing along with Fatimah as she embarks on an unexpected adventure and finds out the true meaning of friendship, the joy of laughter, and the power of mismatched magical socks! Tickets at \$23 each.

### ▶ March On

6 to 17 Mar 2024  
Esplanade's annual children's festival explores relevant issues for the young through multi-disciplinary programmes and participatory arts experiences. Ticketed and free programmes are available.

## ART SPACES IN PRACTICE

### Little Big Pre-School



A 'Messy Space' is designated for children to "engage in fun and meaningful artmaking, exchange ideas, explore and discover creativity", says Centre Head, Ms Jasmine Chai. "We ensure the right tools are available and declutter non-essential items. Visual cues and guidelines help ensure safe and proper usage of tools."



Children create sculptures from loose parts such as recycled odds and ends and foam blocks. "Visual arts materials should ideally be free, readily available, and relatable or familiar to children. We ask families to contribute recycled materials like toilet rolls, cereal boxes, jars, bottle caps, etc. A variety of materials provides opportunities for exploration," says Ms Chai.

### Adventure Tree Preschool @ Bukit Timah



Children have a choice of regular materials like paint and natural resources found in the outdoor art area. For example, they made rangoli art using leaves, pebbles and grass while learning about Deepavali.



A holding space puts children's art-in-progress on display, so they can resume when they feel like it.





→ Three lucky readers will each receive a pair of tickets to Esplanade's *PLAYtime!* production of *Fatimah and Her Magic Socks* that runs from 1 to 17 March 2024.

Simply answer this question:  
Name one way the performing arts can help young children's development.

Submit your answer online at [go.gov.sg/beanstalk-thrive-contest](http://go.gov.sg/beanstalk-thrive-contest) or scan this QR code.

Closing date: **23 February 2024**



# Zodiac Zest

Start the Year of the Dragon on a bright note.

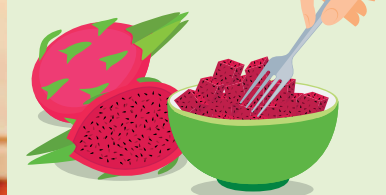
## Dragon fruit lemonade

SERVES 6



### Follow these steps

1. Mash dragon fruit cubes into a smooth puree with a fork or using a blender.



**TIP!** You can still get a pink drink with white-flesh dragon fruit – just leave a bit of the rind on when you cut it up.

2. Squeeze lemons and remove any seeds that fall into the juice.



3. Pour fruit puree and lemon juice into a large pitcher. Add water and stir thoroughly to combine.



4. Try a sip. Adjust the amount of water, lemon juice, and maple syrup or honey to your liking.



5. Serve over ice. Garnish with lemon slices or fresh mint leaves, if desired.



### Food For Weaning

This drink is not suitable for infants under the age of 1, who should stick to milk or water. Parents can feed dragon fruit to babies at around six months, or once they **start on solids**. Introduce small amounts in puree or mash form, or add it to soft foods like porridge. From nine months onwards, serve the fruit in large wedges or bite-sized cubes to **develop pincer grip**.

### → WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 2 cups pink-flesh dragon fruit, peeled and diced
- 1 cup freshly-squeezed lemon juice (about 6 medium lemons)
- 2 ½ cups water
- Pure maple syrup or honey, to taste



Dragon fruit



Lemon juice



Water



Maple syrup or honey

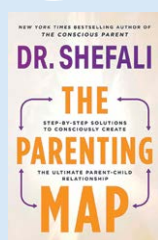
### Enter The Dragon

→ **Different-coloured fruits**, whether consumed whole or in juice form, contain different types of nutrients to boost your mood and immunity. For example, the red-purple pigment found in dragon fruit is anthocyanin, a plant-based compound with powerful antioxidant properties.

Find out more at [www.healthhub.sg/live-healthy/eat-the-rainbow-to-beat-the-blues](http://www.healthhub.sg/live-healthy/eat-the-rainbow-to-beat-the-blues).

## Sow The Seeds

How to bring up well-adjusted, curious children.

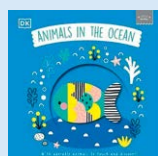


### > The Parenting Map: Step-by-Step Solutions to Consciously Create the Ultimate Parent-Child Relationship

By Dr Shefali Tsabary  
OverDrive link: [nlb.overdrive.com/media/9080881](http://nlb.overdrive.com/media/9080881)

Parents and children today face many struggles, from social media pressures to generational expectations. This book offers practical guidance to help parents actualise their deepest desires for their children. It is an evidence-based manual for disrupting toxic inherited patterns and forming authentic connections so that parents raise children who are happy, healthy and emotionally grounded.

Contributed by Li Lin Tan, Early Literacy Librarian, National Library Board



### > Animals in the Ocean

By Rachel Elliot

Introduce babies and toddlers to ocean creatures with this colourful, interactive board book filled with beautiful pictures and rhyming text. Little ones will marvel at the fascinating sea life such as stingrays, crabs, jellyfish and dolphins. There are also raised elements on the pages for curious fingers to follow, and plenty of bright colours and fun patterns to point to.

Contributed by Lisa Zuliana Zulkifli, Early Literacy Librarian, National Library Board



### IT RUNS DEEP

Connecting and bonding with babies is a surefire way to build their brains. To establish the ideal environment for your baby's brain growth, learning and development, it is important to spend quality time together and provide lots of love and attention.

Do these with your newborn:

- When your baby makes noises, respond to show you are listening. Even a smile or nod will encourage him to keep communicating.
- Calm your baby by stroking him, saying gentle words, or playing soothing music. It helps him develop emotional control.
- Look back into your baby's eyes when he deliberately catches your eye.

For more expert parenting tips, visit [familiesforlife.sg/pages/fflp](http://familiesforlife.sg/pages/fflp).



### FOR YOUR DAILY DOSE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD INSPIRATION...

Grow@Beanstalk is your one-stop early childhood (EC) resource portal for inspiring stories, useful tips and activity ideas, as well as the latest happenings from the EC sector.



Visit [www.ecda.gov.sg/growatbeanstalk](http://www.ecda.gov.sg/growatbeanstalk), or scan the QR code



Follow our Facebook page to stay updated and informed on the EC sector. You can also engage in healthy discussions with fellow educators and parents.



Connect with us at [www.facebook.com/BeanstalkECDA](http://www.facebook.com/BeanstalkECDA), or scan the QR code



It's not just work when you work with children. If you aspire to make a lifelong impact, join us as an Early Childhood Professional to shape the next generation.



Start a career in EC at [www.ecda.gov.sg/ShapeOurTomorrow](http://www.ecda.gov.sg/ShapeOurTomorrow), or scan the QR code



Check out our Instagram page for exciting developments in the EC sector. Be inspired by what educators say about giving a good start to every child.



Follow us at @beanstalkecda, or scan the QR code







→ WHAT YOU'LL NEED



Sturdy paper (e.g., paper plate, card stock, recycled cardboard)

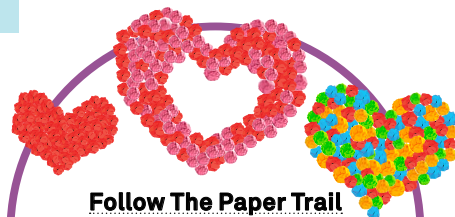


Coloured crepe or tissue paper



Scissors

Glue stick



Follow The Paper Trail

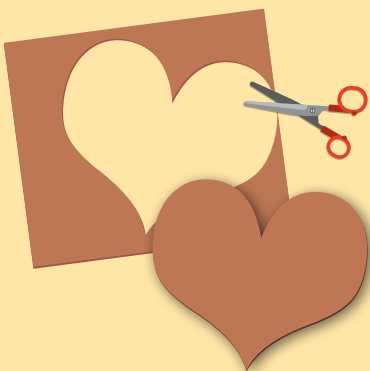
**HEY PARENTS!** This activity offers multiple benefits for children. When they tear, crumple or glue on crepe/tissue paper, it activates the **senses** and hones **fine motor skills**. Babies and toddlers can develop **finger strength**, while older children can practise **counting and sorting** the different colours. To nurture **creative expression**, let children choose what colours and patterns to use.

# Heart In Hand

Don't just tell family and friends you love them — show them.

## Follow these steps

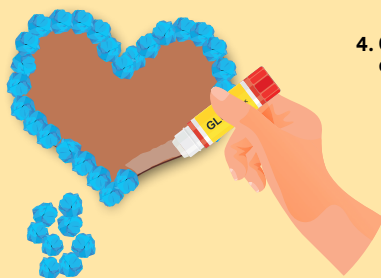
1. Cut out a heart from sturdy paper.



2. Tear crepe or tissue paper into small pieces. Crumple and roll each piece into a small ball.

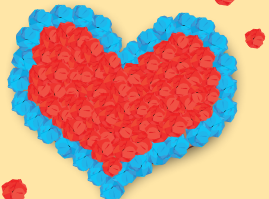


3. Apply glue onto the heart shape and press the balled-up pieces down firmly. Keep them close together, leaving no gaps between them.



**TIP!** Working in sections prevents glue from drying too quickly. Cover the outer edge first and move inwards, or from left to right, or from top to bottom — it's up to you!

4. Continue until the heart is completely covered.



### Snap & Show

Your child's masterpiece could be featured in the next issue of *Beanstalk!* Submit a picture of your child with his/her crumpled paper heart online at [go.gov.sg/beanstalk-craft-submission](http://go.gov.sg/beanstalk-craft-submission) or scan this QR code.



# 5 TIPS TO BUILD YOUR CHILD'S WORD BANK

HOW TO GROW CHILDREN'S VOCABULARY DURING THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF LIFE.

**H**ear the language, learn the language — studies show that the more words a baby hears, used multiple times and in different contexts, the better he or she will understand the meaning of those words and begin using them.

Early communication and language development is the basis for learning to read and write, which predicts better outcomes in school and beyond. It also supports the development of cognitive and social-emotional skills, including the ability to solve problems, express feelings and form relationships. Here are some fun ways to incorporate language into children's daily routines.



## 4 SPEAK 'PARENTESE'

Unlike the meaningless "goo-goo-ga-ga" of baby talk, 'parentese' is a communication style that uses real words and is characterised by a high-pitched, sing-song voice and long vowel sounds (e.g., "Hiiii, bayybeee!" or "The dog is sooo cuuute!"). This exaggerated way of speaking holds children's attention and helps them remember words better. Make eye contact when speaking 'parentese' to your baby. Pause and give your child a chance to respond in his or her own way.

## 1 MAKE READING A DAILY HABIT

Choose books with illustrations. Point out and describe the pictures while reading in an animated tone. It is okay if babies want to hear the same story, as repetition helps with understanding and acquiring new words. Babies will respond with coos, gestures and facial expressions. As they gradually become more familiar with the books, ask them questions about the pictures (e.g., "Where is the moon?").



## 3 USE SONGS AND GAMES

Babies and toddlers love nursery rhymes. Besides the catchy melodies and repetitive lyrics, songs like 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' have accompanying actions to help children understand what the words mean. Pretend play is another good vocabulary-building activity. Act out parts of a story, pretend to chat on a play phone, or host a tea party with soft toys.

## 2 SAY THINGS OUT LOUD

Narrate what you are doing (e.g., "Here we go into the bathtub" or "I'm putting on your socks"). Be attentive to infants' gestures, facial expressions and sounds, and respond verbally. For example, when your baby coos, coo back. When he reaches for a toy, you can say, "Do you want the toy?". This introduces children to the back-and-forth nature of conversations.



## 5 WEAVE NEW WORDS INTO EVERYDAY CONVERSATION

During mealtimes, talk about the flavours, textures and colours of food. When your baby notices a family photo at home, tell him where it was taken and about the persons in the photo. While travelling, describe what you see outside the window. Once children start using words, build on what they say. For instance, your child might say "ball" and you can reply descriptively with "Yes, it is a big red ball!"



# WE'VE GOT MAIL!

Parents of infants and toddlers share how they nurture their children's holistic development through everyday adventures.

Boost babies' self-esteem by praising and acknowledging their efforts



✉ Our baby Cara likes to grasp objects around her and touch different textures and shapes. We let her do so, as it strengthens hand muscles and coordination and stimulates her sensory receptors. Holding familiar items also gives her comfort and security, thus easing her separation anxiety and promoting emotional well-being. For example, Cara likes to hold her milk bottle cap and pass it from one hand to the other. She smiles whenever she does it. We praise and acknowledge her efforts, and this positive reinforcement boosts her self-esteem.

**HO YING YING**, mother of a girl, aged 10 months

✉ Every day is full of love, play and discovery for our twin girls. We create a nurturing environment with cuddles and routines that make them feel safe and emotionally supported. We use fun toys, puzzles and brain games to get them thinking. We take them on exciting learning adventures where they explore colours, shapes and textures. We also visit places such as the National Library, where we read stories and take part in play programmes with them. This helps our daughters learn new words, so they can better express their feelings.



Reading to children nurtures self-expression and a sense of discovery

**DIVYA JAWAHAR**, mother of two, both aged 2

✉ We believe spending time outdoors engages the senses in a richer way and teaches us to face things that are unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Hence, we bring our son Jordan out to interact with nature and animals as much as we can. Recently, we took him kayaking. Jordan is naturally reserved and refused to get on the kayak at first. But he eventually warmed



The great outdoors is a fantastic teacher for the young and curious

up and even wanted to help with paddling. Such outdoor play opportunities have helped Jordan step out of his comfort zone and overcome his fears.

**LAU ENG KEE**, father of a boy, aged 1½

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY

Parents, tell us how you teach your child about understanding and appreciating differences among people. Share specific examples of how your child has displayed empathy and respect for others. Attach a photo with your anecdote and your submission may appear in the next issue of *Beanstalk!*

Submit your story by **23 February 2024** at [go.gov.sg/beanstalk-mailbag](https://go.gov.sg/beanstalk-mailbag) or scan this QR code.



We have three Grab vouchers to give away to the best letters!



## BAG OF FUN

We showed you how to make a paper plate bag in the Oct-Dec 2023 issue. Here are some of you with your cute totes!



**JULES AND CAMILLE**, 5 and 3



**SAANVIKA AND SHIVESH**, 8 and 5



**JAYYVIS AND JAYYDEN**, 3 and 4

# fun times



## RISE AND SHINE

How do you get ready for preschool in the morning? Have fun talking about your routines with this board game!



**HOW TO PLAY:** Children can play this game with a parent, sibling or friend. Each player starts with a marker (anything small and light, like an eraser) on the bottom of the board and takes turns to flick it up. When a player's marker lands in a hexagon, colour it in and elaborate on the action (e.g., "I wake up at seven o'clock" or "Mama walks you to school"). The one with the most coloured hexagons wins.

### Hey Parents!

Having a consistent routine sets children up for a good day. It provides them with a sense of stability, security and comfort. This game is a fun way for children to know what to expect before leaving for preschool. Coupled with their growing independence and self-help skills, they eventually learn to get ready on their own.

