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Your child will change a lot in the first five years of her life. These changes happen in stages. If you understand these stages, you will understand your child better. This guide will explain the changes during each year: birth, age 1, age 2, age 3, and age 4. This is why we call it *Active Parenting: First Five Years*. We have given each of the five stages a name:

### Birth to 1 - The “Baby”

Age 1 - The Explorer

Age 2 - The Boss

Age 3 - The Pal

Age 4 - The Adventurer



Children are different at each stage, and at each stage they grow, develop, and learn. In fact, they cannot move on to the next stage until they learn certain things. Your job is to help your child learn these things and grow. You want her to learn to grow without hurting herself, other people, or anything else.

But remember, it isn't a race. All children go through these stages in order, but they go through at different speeds. If you push to make them go faster, you are more likely to cause problems than to help them. Support them, but don't rush them.

## Age-Appropriate Behavior

The idea behind these ages and stages is that certain behavior is normal or appropriate at certain ages and not at others. Here are four reasons why it is helpful to know what is normal behavior at different stages:

- 1. It helps you understand your child's job at different ages.** Being aware of ages and stages helps you understand that sometimes when you think your child is misbehaving, he may really just be trying to do his job. For example, when your



# Choices Worksheet



Write 3 commands you give your child, especially in problem areas such as bedtime or getting dressed in the morning. Then re-write these commands as choices. An example is included.

## Command

## Choice

Put on this shirt.

Would you like to wear this white shirt or the red one?

1.

2.

3.

**Give these choices to your child this week. After you try them, write down what happened. How did your child act?**

1.

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2.

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3.

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## Bonding with Babies

When you build a bond with your baby, you form an attachment that will have lasting impact for both of you. Though it is never too late to build this bond, the sooner you start, the easier it will be. And one of the most important ways to start working on that bond early is by responding to your baby's needs.

How do you know when your baby needs something? Very simple: she cries. Crying means the baby needs you. What does she need? Well, that takes a little learning. Sometimes your baby will need to be fed; sometimes her diaper will need to be changed; sometimes she will be cold or hot; sometimes her tummy will hurt and she will need to be rocked, patted, or burped; sometimes she will be colicky and she will need you to follow your doctor's suggestions for helping her with it. Sometimes she may want you to talk with her or play games with her. As you learn what soothes your baby, you will also learn to tell what her different cries mean (though not all the time. Nobody is perfect at this!)

When your baby is crying but she is not in pain, hungry, in need of a diaper change, too hot or too cold, or colicky, what can you do to respond to her needs? Try some of these as you learn how to soothe her:

- Gentle touches
- Hugs and kisses
- “Talking” to her (cooing and crooning in response to the sounds she makes)
- Singing to her while rocking or dancing.
- Your own special “recipe”

As you bond with your child and learn what soothes her, your child is beginning to learn some important things about herself. She is experiencing emotions—or feelings. Let's take a closer look.





If your child has difficulty learning, you may be tempted to take over for him when he has trouble. Or you may get frustrated with him and want to give up trying. Resist both of these temptations. Instead, find out what your child can do and focus on that. Work on your patience.

How do you learn what your child can do? You can ask professionals, such as your child's doctor. You can ask experts on your child's special needs. You can do research online. And you can use your own judgment. You might try a support group for people who have children with the same special needs as yours. The key is to learn how your child learns best.

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## Smart Thing #3: Read and talk with your child.

Reading may be the most important skill your child will ever learn. Even so, do not worry about teaching your young child to read yet. There will be plenty of time for your child to learn to read later on when he begins school. In fact, it is probably better for your child NOT to learn to read until his brain has had more time to develop. Between birth and age five, children's brains have more important work to do.

There are a lot of things you can do right now to help your child get ready to learn to read. One of the best is to read to him early and often. Even at seven months, a fetus in the womb can learn to recognize his parent's voice and be calmed by it. During a baby's first year, reading aloud to him can help him learn the sounds that will lead to language. The colors, textures, and sounds in books also help a baby's brain grow.

As your child gets older, he will start understanding some of what you read. He will begin to connect the pictures to your

