



Parenting

as a

learning

journey

A booklet full of resources
and guidance for families
with young children

2nd edition



I am very excited to be sharing with you all this second edition of our parenting booklet, which has been designed to support families with young children so that we can learn how to navigate this journey together.

This time we have structured the booklet in line with the three Prime Areas of Learning of the Early Years Foundation Stage – which is the statutory framework for Early Years education in England.

- Communication and Language
- Physical Development
- Personal, Social and Emotional Development

The prime areas are essential because they contribute to building a solid foundation for our children's experience in developing, growing and ultimately living a healthy life. We have collected ideas and suggestions in these areas, but as every child is different, it is up to you to translate these ideas into practice and adapt them accordingly.

We have also included some information from other organisations and services.

The journey of parenting is a rewarding one, but can also be overwhelming at times, especially if we feel isolated or lacking necessary support. I hope we can continue to build community and strengthen the connections amongst families in our borough. This will not only contribute to our children becoming more confident, resilient and empowered, but can also help us as parents to find the village around us.

Thanks to the Parish of Becontree South for sponsoring the printing of this booklet.

Thanks to all those families I have had the pleasure of working with over the last few years.



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Becontree South

Three crosses make a church

www.becontreesouth.org.uk



Early Years Cocoon is a friendly and supportive educational community group for families of young children (under 5s) based in Barking and Dagenham.

We like sharing resources, supporting each other, learning together and growing stronger.

Contact us at earlyyearscocoon@gmail.com or find out what is available at

www.earlyyearscocoon.co.uk

Letters & sounds



The following are some ideas you could try with your children, knowing that if they start school at some point, you will have contributed a lot to their development and understanding.

Pay attention to the sounds you hear in the environment

Ask 'Did you hear it too?'. Noticing sounds is an exercise that only requires our ears.

Children are usually sensitive to sounds, so use their interest to expand on it.

Explore different musical instruments

Play with them, notice their sounds and experiment with soft and loud instructions. Sing nursery songs while playing the instruments. Have a go at playing different styles of music and observe how your child responds.

Explore the sounds you can create with your own body

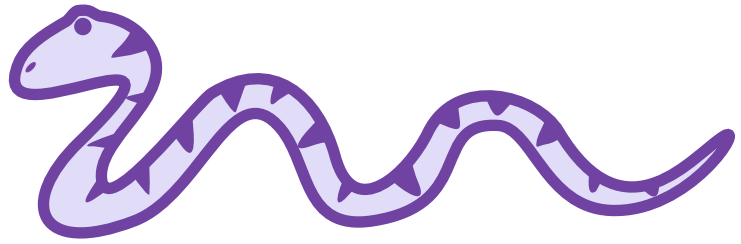
Clapping, stamping, clicking fingers and patting are some examples. Create rhythmic patterns with them. There are plenty of songs that include actions with the body.

Reading

When reading, point at some of the words you see and exaggerate the initial sound of the word. You can say 'Ssssss for snake, Mmmmmm for mountain'. Be spontaneous about it and whenever you see the chance to highlight a letter and the sound, do it.

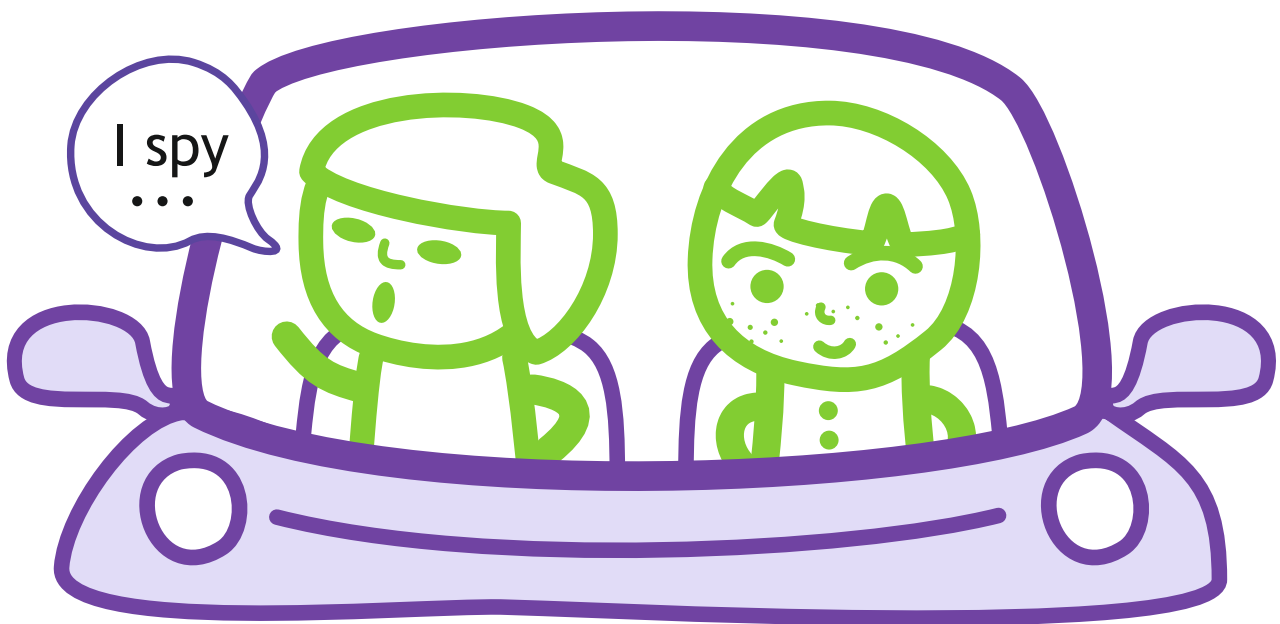


sssssss for snake



Games

Play the game 'I spy with my little eye, something beginning with 'T'...'. You can also say 'C for car' and invite them to find the object. This is a great game when you go for a walk or if your child is in the buggy or even travelling.



Online resources

If you are not familiar with the sound of the letters (it's not the same as the name of the letter), check online videos. Some educational videos can be useful but moderation is the key. Having a set of alphabet cards can support the recognition of letters.

In order to learn how to read and write, children need to develop some listening and speaking skills. As parents and carers, we have a great influence on this process and it is very important to help them build a solid foundation.

“The way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice.”

Peggy O'Mara

Singing together!



Singing nursery rhymes and playing instruments are activities that children usually engage in easily and learn a lot from. They develop listening skills, learn new words and strengthen hand-eye coordination.

Make a list of nursery rhymes

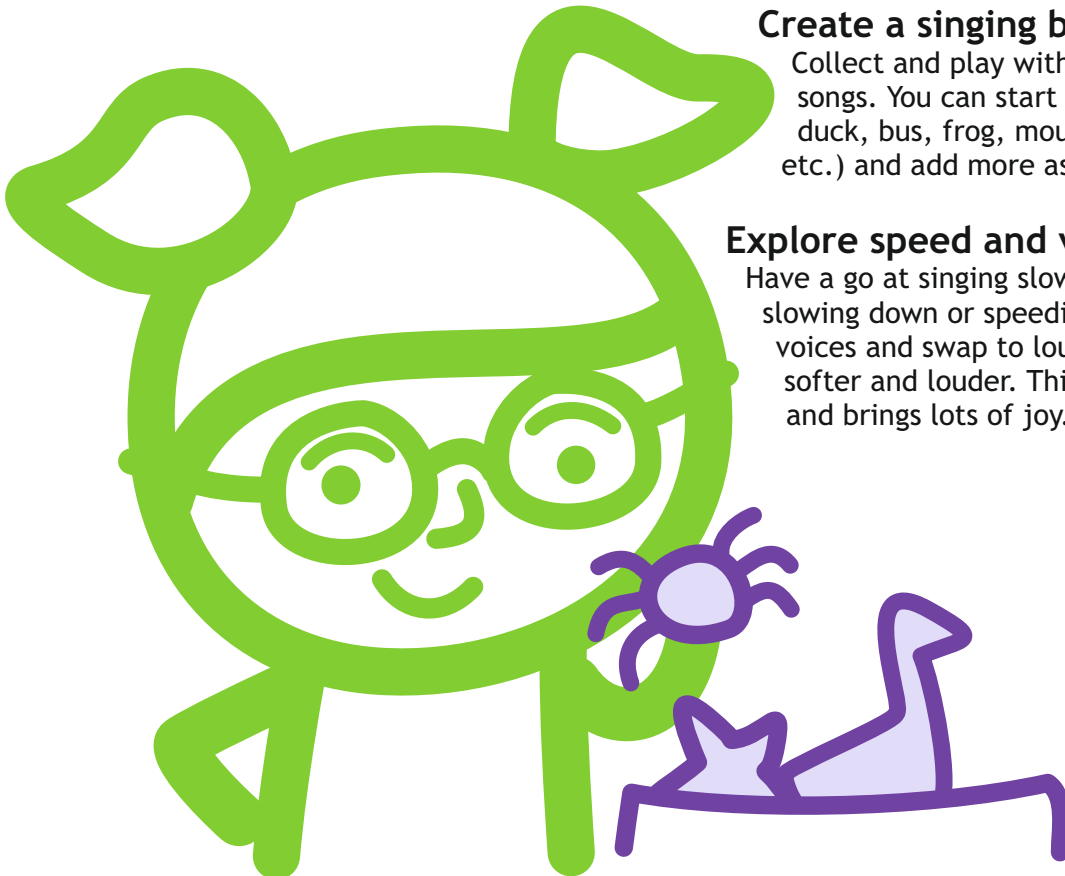
Learn songs including some from other cultures or languages. This will be an additional enriching element that your child will be exposed to.

Create a singing bag

Collect and play with items related to songs. You can start with 10 (spider, duck, bus, frog, mouse, boat, monkey, etc.) and add more as your child grows.

Explore speed and volume

Have a go at singing slowly and then fast, slowing down or speeding up. Sing with soft voices and swap to loud voices, going softer and louder. This is very engaging and brings lots of joy.





Have a few instruments available

You can even make some with recycled resources. Shakers can be easily made with plastic bottles and small items inside, such as rice, beans, buttons, lentils or dried pasta. Make sure you reinforce the lid for safety reasons. Even pots and pans can make a lot of noise, and can be great fun too.

Listen to all sorts of music

Offer a variety of rhythms for them to appreciate and explore depending on the mood. Sometimes you can have soft music in the background while they are playing.

Visit charity shops or libraries

Look for nursery rhyme books or you can also download lyrics and learn new songs together. Visual supports such as videos can be added according to the child's age, but it's much better to sing together while having eye contact.

List of familiar songs

Twinkle twinkle

5 little ducks

5 little monkeys

Row your boat

Incy Wincy spider

Old MacDonald had a farm

Humpty Dumpty

Hey diddle diddle

1,2,3,4,5 Once I caught a fish alive

Miss Polly had a dolly

Jack and Jill

Hickory Dickory Dock

Music is a powerful tool and contributes to building a stronger relationship between parents and their children. Often, music is able to enhance our emotions, as well as promoting a sense of community. Music can be very helpful in dealing with transitions or new experiences, allowing children to express themselves in a healthier way.

Reading with your child



Sharing a book with your child can be a magical experience. By building story time into your bedtime routine you and your child will be:

- Entering a shared world to explore and learn together
- Letting your child's imagination run free
- Introducing your little one to new words and meanings
- Giving them the chance to ask questions
- Helping them to relax and soothe sleep
- Having fun together!



The Department for Education's **Hungry Little Minds campaign**, delivered in partnership with the National Literacy Trust, has lots of ideas to make your story time special:

Repeat, repeat, repeat

Reading the same book again and again will help your child to get to know the story. Once they know it well, ask them about what's happening in the book and praise them when they respond.

Look at the pictures

The beauty of children's books is that it doesn't matter if you don't read all the words – you can tell a story from the pictures! If your child knows the book well, or even if they don't, let them have a go at becoming the storyteller just from looking at the pictures on the page. It will help them to improve their speaking skills and grow more confident.

Let them choose

Your child will enjoy choosing books for themselves from a bookshelf they can reach or a book box at home, or even ebooks on a phone or tablet. This will help you both to discover the kind of stories they enjoy the most.

Listen up

Your child might prefer to listen to audiobooks. Why not listen together for a completely immersive and relaxing experience?

Take a trip to the library

Visit your local library with your child to find loads of new stories and activities together!

Top tips for happy family mealtimes



Get into a regular routine of sitting down together for meals away from distractions such as TV, toys and phones – at a table, picnic-style on the floor or wherever works for your family.

Involve children in planning a healthy meal that everyone will like – and helping to prepare it.

Try to create a positive atmosphere – by smiling, chatting and showing interest in what everyone has been doing, rather than just concentrating on whether the children are eating and getting through the meal.

Set age-appropriate limits for mealtime behaviour – while accepting that young children will make a mess at first.

Offer healthy food choices – and then let children decide how much they can eat and when they are full.

Eat with your children: when young children see you eating and enjoying healthy food, they are more likely to try it – and decide they like it.

Praise children for trying new food, even if they don't eat much of it.

Depending on their age, **gently encourage children to eat independently.**

Allow children to eat at their pace rather than rushing them to finish or urging them to hurry up.



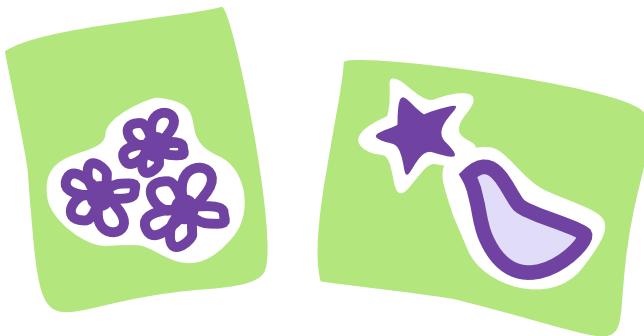
HENRY is a programme designed for parents of children aged 0-5 and pregnant women who are passionate about giving their babies and young children the best possible start in life.

It supports the whole family to make positive lifestyle changes, creating healthier and happier home environments.

Topics include nutrition, physical activity, emotional well-being and parenting skills and it is facilitated by trained, friendly and supportive practitioners.

To sign up go to **Eat healthier | LBBD** and select “sign up to our free programmes”.
<https://www.lbld.gov.uk/eat-healthier>

Activities to strengthen fine motor skills



Collage = use magazines and recycled boxes from packaging to cut out small pictures and stick them on a piece of card.

Painting = use paint brushes, cotton buds, sponges, old toothbrushes, strings or even hands for drawing and exploring marks.

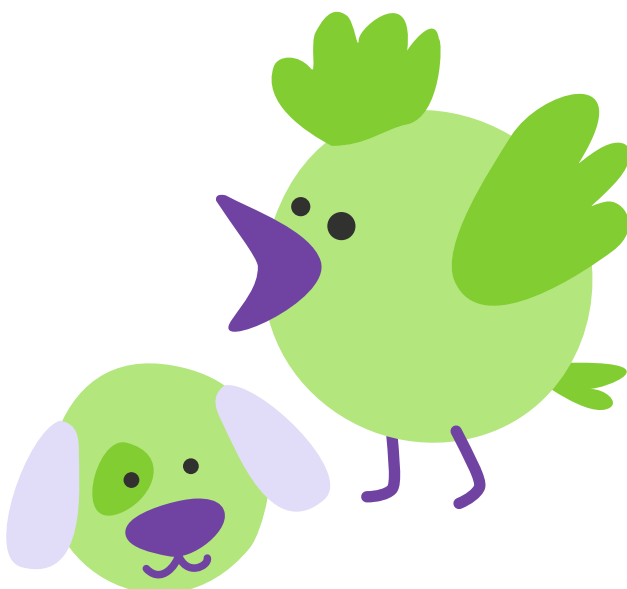
Pipe cleaners = create shapes, letters, numbers and small models like sunglasses, animals and flowers.

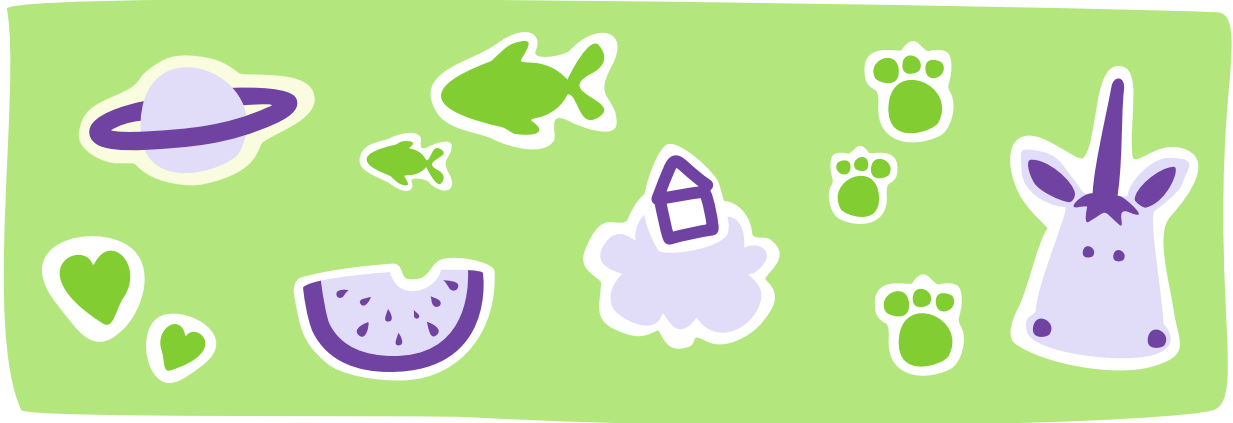
Threading shapes = use string to go in and out of the shapes. You can create new shapes by cutting card and using a hole puncher.



Tape = cut long pieces and show how you can hold things together, such as straws, wooden sticks, pictures, card and even big boxes. Assist with cutting if required.

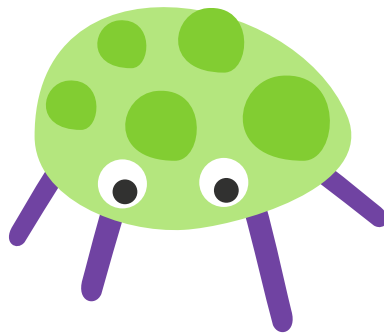
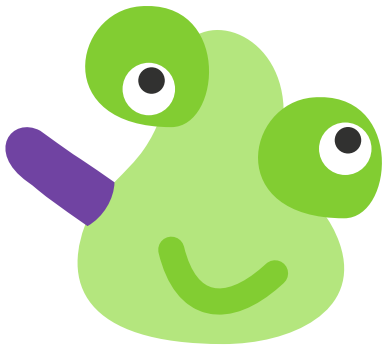
Paper plate crafts = use plates as a base for a human or animal face. Add buttons, pom poms, wool or any other material to design the different parts.



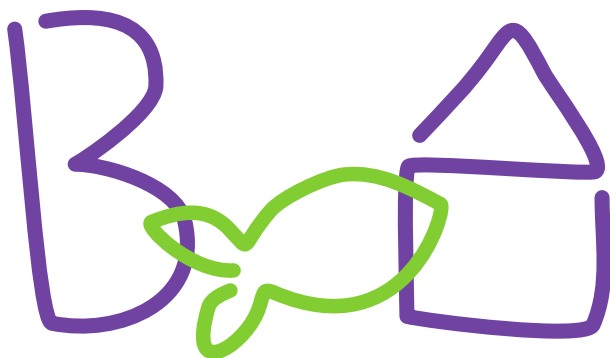


Stickers = use them to decorate pictures, create patterns or shapes, make your own designs, use for colour recognition or for counting.

Fairy wind streamers = collect some sticks from the park and add a few strips of old material, ribbons or string. Move them around and make magic spells.



Play dough = make some play dough and create models with other resources, e.g. bugs or monsters by adding googly eyes, pipe cleaners, plastic lids or wooden lolly sticks.

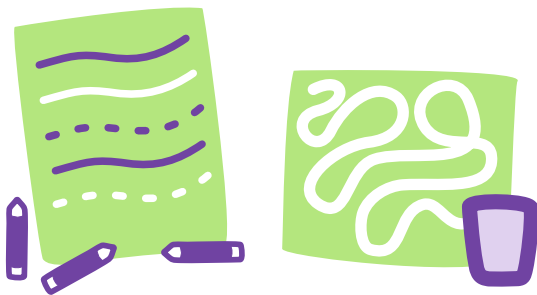


Cooking = small tasks to be explored when cooking a meal, like chopping some soft vegetables, unwrapping food, adding ingredients to a bowl, mixing and any other tasks, with the safety and supervision that is required.

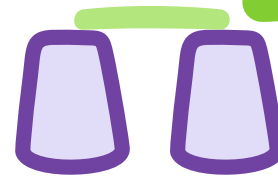
String = use long pieces for dancing by shaking up in the air, tracing big letters or shapes on the floor, making knots around items.

These are some ideas but as you know your child better, feel free to adapt to their needs and interests.

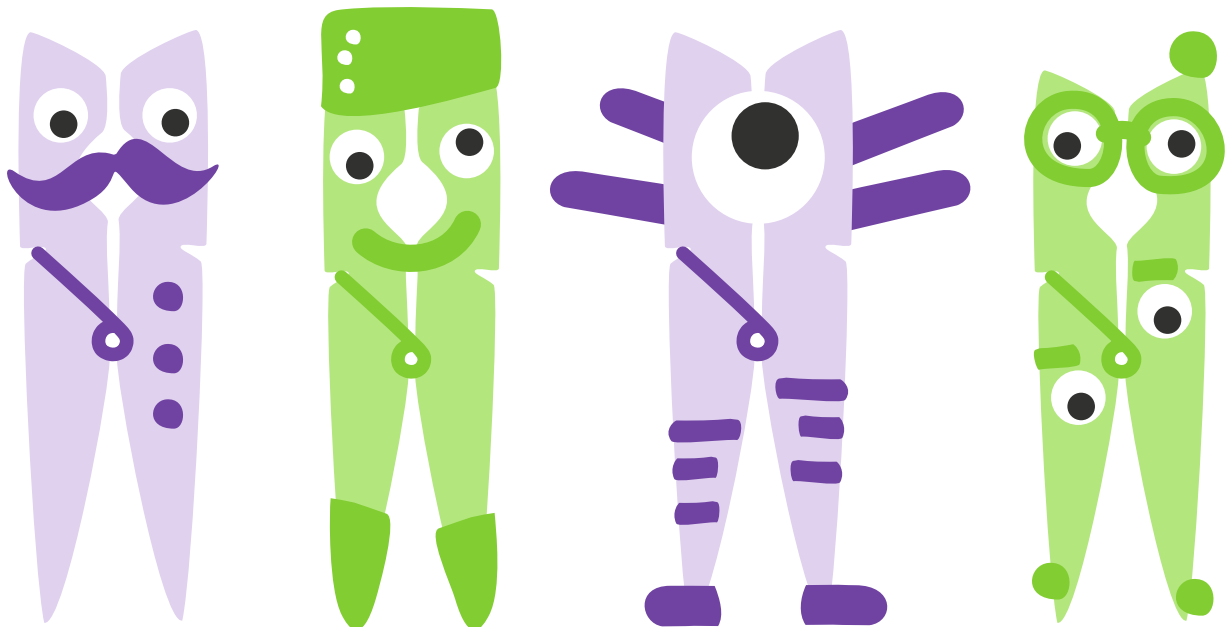
Activities to strengthen gross motor skills



Mark making = draw on the floor with chalks – even on your driveway – paint with water and see how it evaporates, use big sheets of paper with crayons.

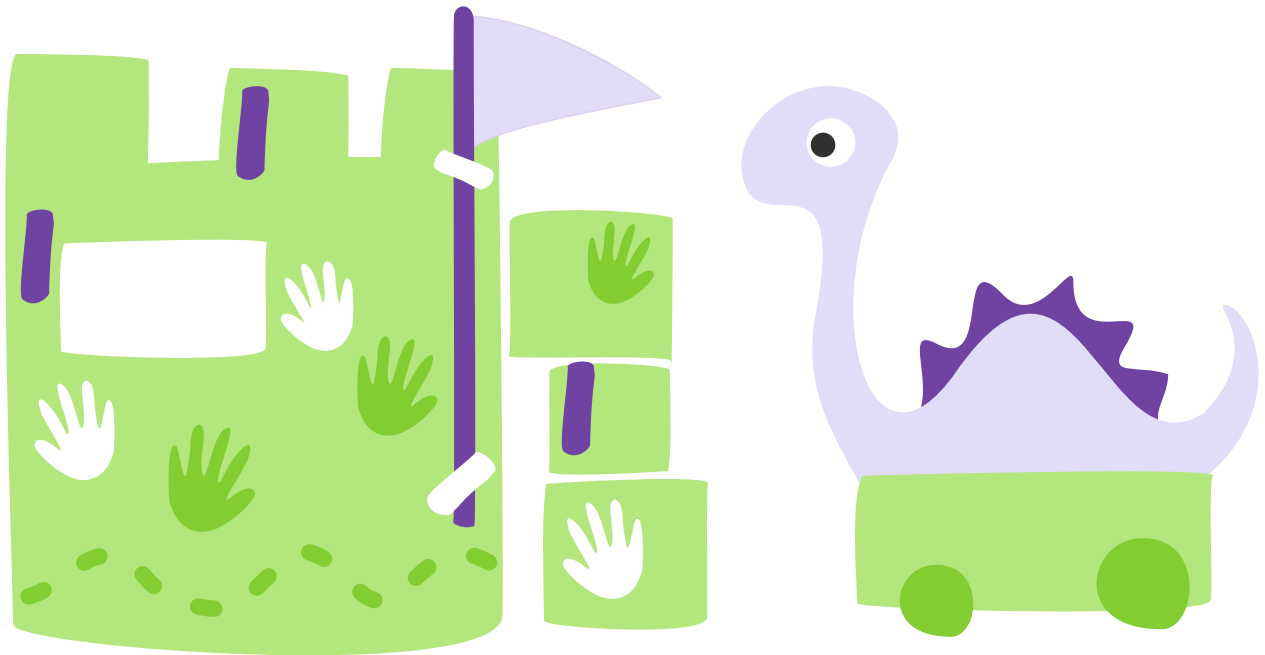


Plastic cups = explore building towers, houses, bridges and all sorts of models by stacking cups.



Imaginary play = engage in their stories, dressing up and acting out, pretending to be any character and following their lead. Make use of wooden pegs as little people.

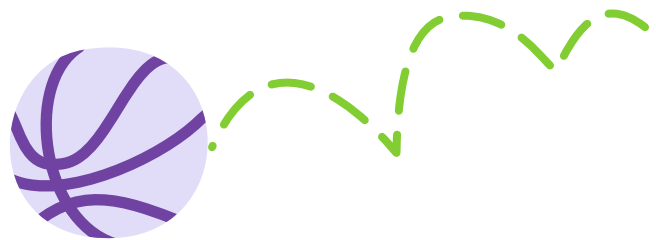
Walk = go to the local park or just walk a few blocks around your area. If possible, don't take the buggy so that your child is encouraged to exercise.



Fun with boxes = collect boxes of different sizes from deliveries and packaging. Bring them out and explore painting, decorating, building, hiding and any imaginary game.

Use large equipment = at the park, in the garden or at home, encourage your child to use climbing frames, slides, swings, balancing, hula hoops, scooters and bikes.

Dancing = play different types of music and move the body, exploring rhythms, adding props like scarves or instruments, and using the space available with awareness. Use the 'fairy wind streamer'.



On the spot = give instructions for actions to be done on the spot, such as running, skipping, star jumps, stretching, turning around, hopping and dancing.

Ball games = use a ball to develop skills such as catching, rolling and throwing. Model how to do it and keep trying many times. You can count to make it more enjoyable.



Collection = go to a local park and bring a bag or bucket for collecting any interesting objects, such as feathers, leaves, twigs or flowers. Make a collage.

Water play = use buckets or any containers to have a go at pouring, washing toys, watering plants and observing sinking and floating.

These are a few ideas, but as you get to know your child better, feel free to adapt to their needs and interests.

How to become an Eco-champion



Whenever making choices about something you buy, use or throw away, always think of the 3Rs.

REDUCE★REUSE★RECYCLE

Here are our top ten green tips...

- 1 **Reduce food waste** – create a weekly meal plan. Use this plan to write your shopping list and only buy what you need.
- 2 **Reuse** – from shopping bags to reusable bottles, reusing is a great way to reduce.
- 3 **Get crafty with rubbish** – Collect used cardboard boxes, scrap paper, plastic bottles, etc. and make exciting things with your little ones.
- 4 **Swap** clothes, toys, books and more with friends and family, or donate to charity; reducing waste and saving money by not buying new.
- 5 **Recycle!** Card, paper, plastics (bottles, pots, tubs and trays), cans and tins can all go in the recycling bin. You never know, the plastic you're recycling might be turned into a football shirt!
- 6 **Family litter picking** – teach your little ones to keep the community clean by litter picking. Child and adult litter picking kits are available for free loan from Recycle for Your Community.

7 Grow your own food – Reduce the packaging waste by growing your own. Simple salads like watercress or tomatoes are a great place to start for beginners and fun for all the family.

8 Compost – You can reduce your black bin bag waste by up to 50%. It's a great opportunity to teach your little ones about minibeasts too, as there are lots of composting creatures that are busy working away in the compost bin.

9 Walk or Cycle – Getting out in the fresh air is great physically and mentally. What's more, it reduces the amount of traffic on the roads cutting down on the air pollution.

10 Reusable Wipes – make your own wipes from flannel material and keep them in a plastic container with some essential oils. Once used, simply wash and they're as good as new!



Song – fill a plastic bottle with rice and use it as an instrument while you sing!

(Sing this to the tune of 'The More We Get Together')

Reduce, reuse, recycle,
recycle, recycle.
Reduce, reuse, recycle,
it's easy to do.

For your world is my world,
and my world is your world.
Reduce, reuse, recycle,
it's easy to do!

Storytime – our Eco book recommendation

Finn, the Fortunate Tiger Shark and his Fantastic Friends by Georgina Stevens

Free interactive story sessions available from

www.eastlondonwaste.gov.uk/recycle-for-your-community/

Mental health



As a local community group we are aware of how mental health impacts our families and how the pandemic made it even more challenging. We are a caring and resourceful group, aware of the importance of collective wisdom; we value the voices of residents and local organisations, so we asked them for resources and tools to support and look after our mental health. We hope you find these ideas helpful and relevant.

I believe that nature is very important to a child as well as the mental health of adults. I have seen firsthand how much my children love going outdoors to explore. It helps them to be more creative and opens up their minds.

Shoma



We live in a flat so we take our bikes and cycle in the area we live. We also say hi to everyone we know from a distance just to know if everyone is OK or need any help.

Kanwel

One thing I have learnt is that the saying 'blow away the cobwebs' really does help. A slow stroll or a brisk walk out in the open air is so beneficial to our mental health and that of our children. It is great to get out into nature and appreciate the flowers are blooming, the animals around us are amazing to watch through the seasons.

Becky



Nature is a great healer, going for walks in the forest or to the local park with your family/friends or by yourself to help clear your mind and find clarity always helps me relax.

Lauren

Our mental health is very important, once we become parents, spouses we tend to put others first. But who will look after them if we don't look after ourselves first? Don't feel guilty for taking time out, talking about your feelings or doing something that makes YOU happy.

Sumayyah

I'm lucky that I am able to keep two dogs and a cat – all of them are friendly and loving. Whenever I or my children feel down, a stroke or cuddle from any one of them makes you feel so much better – they instinctively know that you are unhappy and are non-judgemental. They are always there for you. Animal therapy is the best pick me up!

Alison

Using music can improve your emotional well-being. I am listening to music, or playing music, or being a part of a choir to enhance my own well-being. Music helps me process my emotions both positive and negative, gives me energy but also can provide support psychologically when I am feeling low.

Matina

To appreciate divine beauty in all its forms. Mother Nature brings it so close to us. It is there to be seen in the stars in the sky, to be heard in the chirping of the birds, to be smelt in the fragrance of the flowers, to be tasted in the sweetness of its waters and felt in the freshness of its wind. I find nature inspiring and beautiful, refreshing and nourishing my body, mind and soul.

Sumit

We love our children, but we need a space for ourselves too. We have to find the things we really like to do – for myself the seaside is best, a relaxing and calming place.

Jolanta

Local mental health support services

www.lbdd.gov.uk/mental-health

www.nelft.nhs.uk/services-barking-dagenham

Talking Therapies, Barking and Dagenham IAPT

Church Elm Lane Health Centre,
Church Elm Lane, Dagenham, RM10 9RR

www.talkingtherapies.nelft.nhs.uk

Email: bdtalkingtherapies@nhs.net

Tel: 0300 300 1554 option 3

Mind in Havering, Barking & Dagenham

www.haveringmind.org.uk

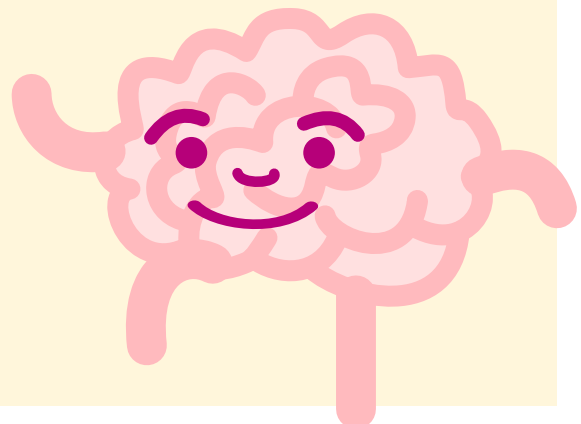
reach.us@haveringmind.org.uk

Tel: 01708 457040

Green Shoes Arts

Inspiring local people to make
positive changes through the arts

www.greenshoesarts.com



How to **nurture** self-confidence



One of the best things we can do for our children is to promote a strong sense of self-confidence.

Encourage their interests

Observe what your child enjoys and value it. It could be a particular topic, an art, a sport, a talent. Let them explore, learn and grow in something they love and have chosen for themselves.

Let them try things by themselves

Depending on your child's age, you should expect them to become increasingly independent with daily life tasks such as: dressing up, tidying up, having a meal, brushing their teeth.

Transmit optimism

Encourage them to be familiar with making mistakes – as this is natural – but most importantly, learning from them.

Let them make some choices

Children enjoy having a say in small decisions so they can feel they have some control. Guided choices – when you offer 2 choices – are useful when they are very young.

Give them affection

Plenty of physical and verbal affection will contribute significantly to ensuring that your child keeps feeling loved and valued by the people that matter the most.



Boosting confidence and self-esteem

Some people find it useful to say out loud or repeat in their mind some positive sentences that serve as a reminder of what we ultimately believe and would like to become.

Affirmations for parents and carers

- I am constantly learning and growing while making mistakes.
- I am trying my best in this parenting role, although it is full of surprises and unexpected events.
- I make choices about what is best for my family. I also review those choices.
- I am flexible and allow changes, as I am not always sure of things.
- I reach out for support if needed, embracing that vulnerability.
- I create shared memories by spending time with my children.
- I do experience all sorts of feelings and it is okay to express them.
- I look after myself, knowing that this is often forgotten but is essential for my own and my family's well-being.
- I don't always know what to do, but I can ask and find out.
- I have an opportunity to break old patterns and try out healthier ways of doing things.



Short phrases to use with our children

You have done that so well!

I'm sure you can have a go at it

You are so talented!

I love how creative you are

You have done all that by yourself? Amazing!

That's a good idea!

I enjoy spending time with you

You are very good at this

You are an artist!

You can make a choice

Wow, that was brave

What do you think?

How are you feeling?

You can learn anything

I will always love you

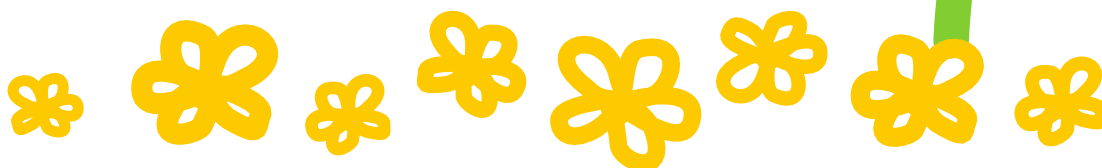


empowering our children

Early Years Cocoon C.I.C. is a company that was founded with the aim of benefiting the community and in particular families with young children. Our objectives are: to develop supportive services for families with young children; to promote positive parenting by focusing on the learning and development of the child; to strengthen social, artistic and communication skills in young children and their parents; to share creative and educational practice to ensure the well-being of children through a supportive family; and to create multidisciplinary stimuli for children by engaging with other local community organisations and individuals.

www.earlyyearscocoon.co.uk

earlyyearscocoon@gmail.com | Instagram: @earlyyearscocoon



Becontree South

Three crosses make a church

**Barking &
Dagenham**



Barking & Dagenham | Havering | Newham | Redbridge

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