



Ring in the New Year with the ABCs of Child Development

Tips for boosting your child's growth and brain development

*Susan True, Executive Director
First 5 Santa Cruz County*

The New Year is a time for renewal and an opportunity to make a fresh start. While young children can't set their own goals, parents and caregivers can resolve to focus on fostering their children's healthy growth and development. Infants start learning and exploring from the day they are born – and 90 percent of their brains develop in their first five years! As your child's first teacher, you play an important role in helping him or her grow up to be healthy and ready to learn.

First 5 Santa Cruz County offers a few tips to help parents and caregivers foster healthy child development as we ring in the New Year.

Start a Conversation

Develop your infant's language skills by talking with him or her often. Not only is language the foundation for your child's thinking and communication skills, it also helps to nurture bonds of love and trust between parent and child.

- Encourage your baby to make sounds and be sure to respond.
- Talk, sing and rhyme to your infant – it helps him or her learn new words.
- Read daily to your baby and repeat stories to stimulate language and listening.

Make the Most of Teachable Moments

Whether you're running errands or driving to school, make the most of opportunities all day to teach toddlers and preschoolers new lessons.

- Involve your child in activities like shopping at the supermarket – learn shapes when choosing fruits and vegetables in the produce section.
- Point to signs and traffic lights to teach words and colors while you're driving.
- Guide your child to say "please" and "thank you" when asking for help at the library or checking out books.

Encourage Curiosity and Creativity

Being curious is important because it's how children learn new ideas. By asking questions and finding answers, kids discover ways to solve problems and how the world works.

- Ask your toddler questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer – this fosters thinking and communication skills.
- Play with your child and encourage imagination.
- Try new activities, like gardening or cooking, to stimulate children's minds.

For more information about healthy child development and information on First 5 Santa Cruz County programs, call (831) 465-2217 or visit www.first5scc.org.

About First 5 Santa Cruz County

Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically in the first five years and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child's growth will have a meaningful impact throughout life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to support programs for expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5. First 5 Santa Cruz County distributes approximately \$3 million per year in Prop. 10 revenues to programs and services that meet local needs.