

Becoming a Teacher to Your Child

Your child has much to learn.

It may take a long time for him to learn skills. You can help your child's learning process if you work with him to learn.

**You are
your baby's
first teacher.**

Where do you start?

Watch your baby. What can he do?
Look at the developmental checklist on the first page of *Great Beginnings*.
What does Baby need to learn next?

If Baby is involved in therapy, the therapist can help you select one or two skills to help your child learn. A therapist can also help you develop a plan for teaching the skill to your child.

Know what you want to teach.

It may help you to have a chart listing the skill you are teaching, what you do each day, and how your baby responded.

Find the right time to "teach."

Do this at a time that is good for you and Baby. Look for a time when Baby is alert, not tired or hungry. It should be a time when you are patient and calm. This may be a different time each day.

If possible, fit the skill you are teaching into your daily routine. For instance, help Baby learn to eat at feeding times. Help Baby learn the names of body parts at times when you are changing clothes or bathing.

Ways that you teach:

Show Baby: Get your baby's attention and show him what you want him to do.

Shape the behavior: Break the skill down into very small steps. Look at the steps involved in learning to use a spoon.

Skills for using a spoon:

- Baby grabs for the spoon.
- When he grasps the spoon, guide his hand to his mouth.
- Help him pull the spoon away from his mouth.
- Guide the spoon down to his plate.
- Help him scoop up more food. It helps to use sticky food for this.
- Bring the spoon back up to his mouth.
- Help him get the food off the spoon. Show him how to close his lips over the spoon, lift the spoon up and out against the upper lip.

Prompt and talk: Move the baby's body to do what you want Baby to learn. If you want Baby to grasp the spoon, touch the spoon to Baby's hand. If that doesn't work, put the spoon in his hand

and move his fingers around the spoon handle. Describe what you are doing as you go.

As Baby learns the skill, he will know what to do when you hold up the spoon. Eventually he will know what to do when you ask him to do it. This is why it is so important to describe what you are doing in the early stages of your teaching.

Reward your baby often.

Tell Baby you are pleased with him that he has been trying. Hug him, cuddle him, and smile at him.

Steps in the learning process:

- 1. Know what you want your child to learn.**
 - It should have some use in his everyday activities.
 - He should be ready to learn it. He has the skills that are needed in order to learn the new skill.
 - This is something you could expect him to do in the next few weeks, not next month or next year.
- 2. Have a plan for teaching the very small steps that make up the new skill.**
- 3. Have an idea of what steps you are going to teach first, second, third, etc.**
- 4. Use materials, toys, and routine situations to help you teach new skills.**
- 5. Use similar prompts and directions each time you work with this skill until it is learned. After the skill is learned, try to reduce the**

prompts and directions until Baby can do it without the prompting.

- 6. Reward your baby often.** Baby will learn quickly when he knows that there is a positive reward after all of this work. His progress and pleasure will be a reward for you.



If your efforts are not helping, think about what you have been doing. The best of plans may need to be changed.

- Ask a therapist for guidance. Tell the therapist about your experiences in teaching a skill. Discuss whether this is a realistic skill for your baby to learn now. Would there be other skills that would be better to work on now?
- Do the steps of this skill need to be broken down into even smaller steps?
- Can Baby do all of the skills that are needed in order to do this new skill?
- Is Baby interested in learning?
- Does Baby see a reward for learning this new skill?
- Can you see progress? The steps may be so small that you do not see it. Keeping a chart may help. Count how many times your child does it. Note when he did it without prompting. Note when he showed pleasure in doing it.

If you are discouraged, leave this skill for awhile.

Work on some other skill. Come back to this one later. Baby may just not be ready for this one now. There are many more skills to be learned.

Every few days, come back to the skill that was the challenge. See if Baby shows more interest or progress.

Adapted from material in **Toys and Playthings: A Practical Guide for Parents and Teachers**, by John and Elizabeth Newson. NY: Panteon Books.

This issue was initially prepared by Debbie Amsden for Cooperative Extension, University of Delaware. For more information, contact Pat Nelson, 105 Edward R. Wilson House, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19717-1303.

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Updated with the assistance of Brooksie Pruden, Extension Assistant, and La'Shawn Waters, student in the Department of Individual and Family Studies, University of Delaware. Cooperative Extension Education in Agriculture and Home Economics, University of Delaware, Delaware State University and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. Janice A. Seitz, Director. Distributed in furtherance of Acts of Congress of March 8 and June 30, 1914. It is the policy of the Delaware Cooperative Extension System that no person shall be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of race, color, sex, disability, age or national origin.