



# Ready, Set, Learn!

## Healthy Lifestyles

This past August, I gave birth to my first child, a son named Henry. As every new parent will understand, both the joys and responsibilities of parenthood at times overwhelmed me. While I basked in the love I felt as I looked at Henry's face, I also worried intensely about my ability to provide him with the best opportunities life had to offer. I soon discovered that a long stroll on the boardwalk with my son put things quickly into perspective. The fresh air and joy of some much-needed exercise gave me the kick of energy I often needed after a night of too little sleep.



As Henry and I walked, I made funny faces, sang songs and talked to him about the clouds, birds, buildings, and people I saw around us. I knew we both enjoyed this time to simply be together, but I didn't immediately realize that I was also doing something much greater for my child...I was starting him early on a path to a healthy lifestyle.

As parents and caregivers, we naturally strive to give the children in our care the very best. What more valuable gift is there than a life of health and wellness? At the center of such a life are good nutrition and regular physical activity. Encouraging our children to eat right and get moving helps them not only to live healthy lives now, but also to grow into healthy and happy adults. Regular physical activity throughout childhood may reduce the risk later in life of developing serious health problems, such as obesity, heart disease, depression, type 2 diabetes, and even some cancers. Other benefits of regular exercise include improved sleep and mood, higher self-esteem, and increased self-confidence. Research also suggests that physically active kids are more motivated, have better focus, and are more likely to succeed in school than those who lead a sedentary lifestyle.



One of the best ways parents and caregivers can promote a physically active lifestyle is by being role models who embrace this lifestyle ourselves. We can also engage children in activities that get their young bodies in motion.

We hope this newsletter provides you with plenty of creative and fun ideas for your little ones. You don't need to be a fitness expert or invest a lot of money to encourage your child to get active. All you need is the desire and the right information. It is never too early – or too late – to start your child on the path to a healthy lifestyle. It truly is one of the best gifts you can give.

~ Karen Kehoe, Ed.M.  
Virginia Beach Grow**Smart** Coordinator

### Welcome to Our New GrowSmart Coordinator!

Karen Kehoe has over ten years' experience working in elementary, secondary and special education. She holds a master's degree in language and literacy and is a licensed reading specialist. Karen is passionate about literacy education and language development, running, and spending time with her husband and son.

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### Questions or Comments?

Grow**Smart** office  
(757) 385-0144  
vbgrowsmart@vbgov.com



# QRIS

## Why are these 4 letters so important?

One vowel and three consonants - together they do not spell a word but instead define a consistent way to distinguish the level of quality in early education programs. Parents of young children should understand these four very important letters so they may make informed decisions about their children's early experiences.



The Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) is the Consumer Reports of child care; it is a tool for parents to use that measures quality when looking for a child care program. Centers receive star ratings on a scale from 1 to 5, and every star that a center earns is above and beyond the minimum standards for childcare.



Early learning providers who participate in this completely voluntary program are provided with a way to continually improve the quality of their services.

The star rating consists of 4 quality features:

- Education: qualifications and continuous training of staff
- Interactions: forming positive relationships between children, parents, and staff
- Structure: small class sizes, and low child-to-teacher ratios allowing for individual attention and small group interactions.
- Environment and Instruction: an age-appropriate curriculum which stimulates children's cognitive, social, and emotional development .

Children in high quality child care settings are more successful in school and life, so selecting an early education program is one of the most important decisions families can make. By selecting a program with a star rating, you can be confident that your child is in good hands.



To find out if your child care center is participating in QRIS:

- Visit [www.smartbeginnings.org](http://www.smartbeginnings.org) and click on Star Quality Initiative, then Find a Star Rated Center.
- Search by city or center name to find out how many stars the center earned in their most recent rating.

Building on state licensing standards, Virginia's QRIS provides a method to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education settings that families consider for their children. The QRIS defines standards for early childhood education, provides accountability measures, supports centers in improving and maintaining higher quality programs, and improves the information available to families.



This voluntary system is one indicator for families to consider as they select the best program for their child. Participation in QRIS demonstrates a center's commitment to self-assessment, continuous improvement, and high quality. Programs intentionally design environments and experiences that help each individual child reach his or her full potential in safe and nurturing surroundings.

~ Jenefer Snyder, M.S.Ed.  
Tidewater Community College



When I approach a child, he inspires in me two sentiments: tenderness for what he is, and respect for what he may become. *Louis Pasteur*

Virginia Beach GrowSmart

# Ready, Set, Teach!

## Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale

### Raising Quality in a Child's Learning Environment

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised (ECERS-R) assessment tool was developed at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill to assess the quality of a child's learning environment in a preschool or child care setting. However, parents can also use this excellent information to improve a child's learning environment at home.



## Math and Numbers

Math is everywhere, and children's experiences with numbers begin early in life. Most young children become interested in numbers and beginning mathematics when their experiences have a purpose and are aligned with their abilities. Young children have difficulty understanding abstract concepts (for example, that written numbers represent a quantity). Therefore, in the beginning, children need experiences with concrete objects they can manipulate (hands-on activities where they can touch and maneuver items).

helps you complete family chores. You can also compare quantities by separating toys into piles and determine which set or pile has more, fewer, or the same. When children are counting, tell them the last counting word tells how many.

Math worksheets and workbooks are not the best way for children to learn math concepts because children need opportunities to manipulate three-dimensional objects or concrete objects. Use your child's toys and daily life experiences to teach math. You can count cars as you drive down the street, look for numbers on the menu while in a restaurant, and even use math at the grocery store when picking up quantities of each item.

If you are searching for items or toys to buy for the holidays that help children learn math concepts, consider some of the following:

- Clocks
- Playing cards
- Dominos
- Puzzles
- Play cash registers with play money
- Play telephones
- Magnetic numbers
- Balance scales with things to weigh
- Rulers and tape measures with things to measure
- Beads and bead patterns (with lacing strings)

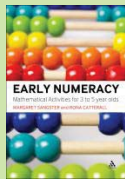
Numbers are everywhere, and math is happening all around us. Be sure to take a few moments each day and create a math experience with your child.

~ Jenefer Snyder, M.S.Ed.  
Tidewater Community College

### Early Numeracy: Mathematical Activities for 3 to 5 Year Olds

by Margaret Sangster

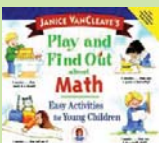
This selection of math-based activities and games provides a fun way for teachers and parents to develop math skills in preschool children.



### Play and Find Out About Math: Easy Activities for Young Children

by Janice VanCleave

Simple math activities are demonstrated, incorporating many different concepts and depicting children at play.



For example, having ten blocks on the table and touching each one as you count is called *one to one correspondence*. When your child sets the table and places one napkin for each family member, this is also one to one correspondence. Using a set of small plastic animals, children can practice a variety of sorting techniques (animals with and without fur, animals that live in the water, animals that fly or swim, etc.). Invite your child to sort the animals and then ask how and why he sorted in that manner. This invites thinking as well as communicating.

Sorting socks is another great math activity that also

# Music and Movement

Helping young children develop basic movement skills will not only help to increase their school readiness and success later in life, it will also help them build a foundation for a healthy and active lifestyle as they grow.

## Babies (Birth to 18 months)



### Kick It

Let your baby find out what her legs can do while she learns about cause and effect:

- Lay baby on her back.
- Place a stuffed animal by her feet.
- Encourage her to kick it!
- If baby doesn't kick the object on her own, hold it just close enough to let her feel it with the bottom of her feet.
- Make sure she gets to kick with both right and left feet.
- Talk to her. Encourage her. Describe what she is doing.

### Pat-a-Cake

Playing this game provides physical touch and offers baby a chance to cross the vertical midline of the body, a movement that is critical to the development of reading and writing skills.

Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man (tap baby's arms)  
Bake me a cake as fast as you can (gently shake baby's arms)  
Roll it (roll arms or legs)  
And pat it (pat baby all over)  
And mark it with a "B" (draw a "B" on baby's tummy with your finger)  
And put it in the oven (cuddle baby)  
For (baby's name) and me!

### Creepy/Crawly

Crawling and creeping not only helps your baby get around but also uses the right and left sides of the body at the same time. This also helps later with reading and writing.

- Lay baby on the tummy on carpet or smooth, clean surface.
- Place a favorite toy in front of baby, just out of reach.
- Encourage baby to get it.
- Let baby reach and retrieve the toy but then make a game of moving it out of reach again.
- Repeat as long as baby stays interested.

## Toddlers (18 to 36 months)

### Heads, Bellies, Toes

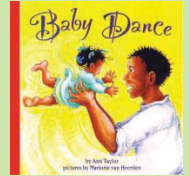
This game helps with identifying body parts, increasing flexibility, and understanding the concepts of up/down and high/low.

- Stand facing your child.
- Beginning slowly, call out the names of body parts, asking your child to touch each part as he hears its name.
- Once your child is successful at this, reverse and mix-up the order of body parts.
- Also, change the tempo at which you call out the body parts - slow, then fast.

### **Baby Dance**

by Ann Taylor

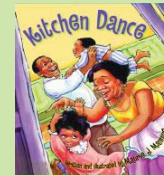
A father dances his baby girl all around as mama sleeps nearby.



### **Kitchen Dance**

by Maurie Manning

Humdrum turns hullabaloo in the kitchen as a Hispanic couple sweeps their children up into a dance full of fun and frolic. Bilingual.



# Music and Movement

## continued from Page 4

- When your child is ready, play “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes.” Later, you can once again change the order of body parts and the pace at which you call them out.

### Let's Gallop

Show your child how to gallop like a horse. If you do this activity for long periods of time, it helps build up your child's heart health.

- Show your child galloping (leading with one foot while the other plays catch-up).
- Ask her to do it, too.
- Make a game of “Follow the Leader” out of it.
- If your child isn't yet ready to gallop, have her pretend to be a horse. She'll be galloping before you know it.
- Give your child a stick horse or a small, child-size broom. This may make it more fun and help her learn to gallop.
- When your child knows how to gallop, have her try galloping with her other foot first.

For more information about music and movement, visit [www.VBparents.com](http://www.VBparents.com). Click on the Early Learning tab, then on Healthy Bodies in Motion.



### Rabbits and Roos

Invite your toddler to jump as though he were a rabbit. Then ask him to show you how a kangaroo would look jumping. Alternate between the two.

## Preschoolers (3 to 5 years)

### Heel Raises

Lifting and lowering the heels is a strength-training exercise that even young children can do. It also helps with balance.

- Stand facing your child.
- Hold hands.
- Slowly lift and lower your heels, encouraging your child to do the same thing at the same time.
- Pause each time you rise onto tiptoe, counting aloud to five.
- Instead of just raising your heels, you and your child can jump (with two feet) or hop (one foot) lightly in place.
- Try all of these activities both slowly and quickly.

### Bean Bag Balance

When it comes to balancing activities, this is an all-time favorite for children.

- Place a beanbag or a small, soft toy on your child's head.
- Invite him to walk from one point in the room to another without dropping the beanbag.
- If he has to, he can hold on to the beanbag at first.
- Ask him to balance the beanbag as he walks both slowly and quickly, in different directions (forward, backward, sideways), and in different pathways (straight, curving, and zigzagging).



~ Grace Chou

Virginia Beach Department of Public Health

# Help Develop Children's Motor Skills

It is important to provide lots of activities, materials, and toys that help develop the small and large muscles in a young child's body.

Fine motor skill development involves using the small muscles of the fingers and hands, usually in coordination with the eyes, to enable such functions as writing, drawing, grasping small objects, and fastening clothes. Gross motor skill development involves using the large muscles to enable walking, running, jumping, skipping, lifting, pushing, and other large body movements.

**To enhance fine motor development**, infants need developmentally appropriate materials and toys such as rattles to shake and grasp; soft grasping toys such as animals, rings, or dolls; simple stacking rings; clean teething toys; bead mazes; large stringing beads; and large pop beads.

Toddlers, ages 18 months to 3 years old, need containers to drop objects into; bead mazes; sets of manipulatives such as links and interlocking objects; large beads to string; lacing toys; finger paints; large watercolor markers; play dough; and puzzles with knobs and large pieces to promote this development.

Preschoolers, ages 3-5 years old, need many fine motor materials available for most of the day, including (1) small building toys: interlocking blocks, Lincoln logs; (2) art materials: crayons, scissors, markers, pencils, play dough; (3) manipulatives: beads for stringing, pegs/pegboards, sewing cards; and 4) puzzles - both regular and knobbed puzzles for different levels of ability.



**Mighty Fine Motor Fun: Fine Motor Activities for Young Children**  
by Christy Isbell  
Dozens of fun parent-and-child activities. It also includes a glossary, index, and references.

**Itsy Bitsy Spider**  
by Annie Kubler  
From the "Sign and Sing-along" series, this oversized board book features large, colorful pictures of babies rhyming with their fingers.



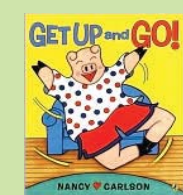
## Stretch

by Doreen Cronin & Scott Menchin  
A colorful dog character models all kinds of stretching exercises, from yoga to surfing a wave.



**To promote the development of a child's gross motor skills**, indoor/outdoor physical play is needed every day! Try using balls, rocking horses, low slides, push toys, and small tricycles to enhance these skills. Babies that crawl can "go after" a toy on the floor and can "dance" to music while being supported by a caregiver. **It is recommended that young children have a one-hour outdoor play period every day.**

During outdoor play, children need access to riding toys, balls, swings, slides, climbing apparatus, balance beams, and large grassy or mulched areas to just run and play. These activities will enhance gross motor skills as children move and explore the outdoor environment. Children will also learn about the world around them!



## Get Up and Go!

by Nancy Carlson  
Animal characters demonstrate many ways to get exercise indoors and outdoors while having fun.

Source: Harms, T., Cryer, D., & Clifford, R. (2005). *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale*. New York: Teachers College Press; Harms, T., Cryer, D., & Clifford, R. (2006). *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale*. New York: Teachers College Press.

~ Marty LaGiglia, M.S.Ed.  
Director of Square One  
[www.sqone.org](http://www.sqone.org)

