



If It Fits

An idea-packed resource for evidence-based fun!

Curtain going up ... at home!

Take a cue from Broadway and “set the stage” for developing SOCIAL EASE

Much like a theatrical director who surrounds his cast with the scenery and “props” they need to bring a play to life, parents of very young children have the opportunity to create a home environment, a physical setting, where their children will learn and flourish. Research shows that the kinds of “settings” parents create in their homes influence the social and emotional “performance” of the young “actors” in their lives.

To help your child experience *social ease*—to develop the openness, friendliness, and sense of confidence commonly called *sociability*:

- ◆ Provide a home environment that contains a variety of interesting toys and learning materials. The playthings should give

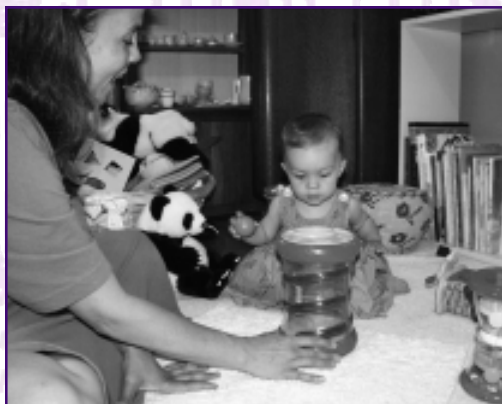
your young child a variety of different experiences and activities that can he or she can enjoy regularly.

- ◆ Interact with your child frequently. Pay attention and respond promptly and appropriately to your little one’s efforts to communicate with you.
- ◆ Encourage your young child to explore and interact with the people and objects he or she encounters as part of everyday activities.

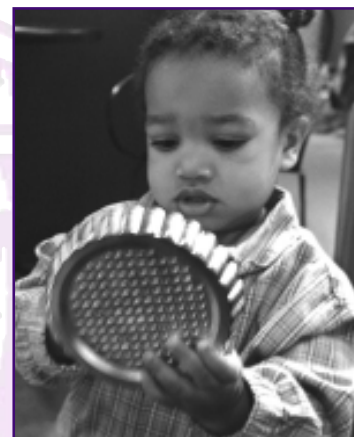
The back of this sheet contains a number of ideas and suggestions you might enjoy using to help “ring up the curtain” on a surefire hit in *your* home. So hop up on your director’s chair and take a look around from your young child’s point of view. With a few changes and additions, you’ll be on your way!



The most intriguing items in a young child’s environment shouldn’t be “off limits.” When exciting things—like this piano—are accessible to explore and experience at home, the growing child develops greater confidence.



Low, open-sided shelves and baskets provide inexpensive, enticing, and easy-to-reach storage for the toddler’s play corner of this family’s living room.



Unbreakable, smooth-edged cooking utensils and food containers make fascinating, real-world playthings for young children. Keep these child-safe items in your lowest kitchen cupboard and drawers to set the stage for hours of fun and discovery.

Bright Ideas

Set aside short periods of time, several times each day, simply to pay attention to your young child. Practice noticing and commenting warmly on what she's doing. Try to respond quickly and appropriately to her signals, vocalizations, and movements that are attempts to communicate with you.

When your young child goes along as you run errands, you'll find lots of opportunities for him to interact with other people—an important way to build social ease. Carry him in a shoulder pack or push him in a stroller or shopping cart, and he'll have lots of encounters with people doing and saying interesting things—a checkout clerk ringing items across a price-code scanner, a neighbor walking her dogs, and many others.

Let him see you greet people yourself, and encourage him to smile, say "hello," shake hands, etc.

Make child-friendly zones in each of the main activity/living areas of your home:

- In the **LAUNDRY ROOM**, set a hamper of warm clothes, fresh out of the dryer or off the line, onto the floor where he can touch, sort, and "help" you fold things. While laundry products must be stored carefully out of reach, keep child-safe items like a container of wooden clothespins on a low shelf where he can play with them while you work.
- On days when you spend plenty of time in the **KITCHEN**, she'll have fun being there, too. Store plastic containers and lids in an easy-to-reach cabinet or drawer. Keep a sturdy chair or step-stool handy to position him for bubbly kitchen-sink play, stirring cake batter, or other kitchen "chores."
- Set up a corner of the **LIVING ROOM** as a special play area for your young child. Partition it off with cushions or a beanbag chair, or set the space apart visually with a colorful area rug. Stock a section of a bookcase with chubby board books and picture books especially for her. Stash favorite toys in a decorative basket or chest. Make sure that items on low surfaces like coffee tables are safe for a "cruising" child. Let the objects and toys your child can reach be ones that make interesting responses when handled. Simple musical instruments or objects with a variety of pleasing textures are good examples.
- In the **BATHROOM**, take care to lock medicines and chemical products out of harm's way, and perhaps install a toilet-seat lock to prevent a curious toddler from tumbling in. Then make the area child-friendly with a safe potty seat, a stack of soft washcloths to roll, fold, or use for dress up, and a plastic basket filled with plastic utensils and other toys for bath-time fun.

Early childhood practices recommended in this issue of *If It Fits* are based on research described in a practice-based synthesis by C. M. Trivette (2004). Influence of home environment on the social-emotional development of young children. *Bridges*, 2(7). Read or download the complete synthesis and/or a user-friendly, illustrated, two-page research summary, *Bottomlines*, 2(7), by visiting our web site, www.researchtopractice.info.

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