

RAISING HEALTHY CHILDREN IN CAMBRIDGE



CAMBRIDGE HEALTHY CHILDREN TASK FORCE

RAISING HEALTHY CHILDREN IN CAMBRIDGE

begins with you

Before a baby is born, parents may have an image of the kind of parents they will be. As your child grows, you need opportunities to set realistic expectations for yourself and your child. New parents and **babies** are forming attachments to each other and it is this time of physical and emotional closeness that sets the stage for future development. As the relationship grows in the **toddler** years, parents may discover their own parenting style—somewhere between laid back and firm. Regardless of your style, routine and structure are important to your child. Parents play the primary role of helping their children understand the world around them during the **preschool** and **school-age** years. Parents continue to provide guidance and support as children become **young teens**, while respecting their emerging independence and keeping the channels of communication open. **Older teens**, though they may not seem like it, benefit from an active, caring relationship with parents.

The role of parenting can make you feel great joy and humility. Giving yourself permission to focus on your own needs will allow you to bring your best energy and thinking to the exciting, rewarding and challenging role of parenting.

More from the Massachusetts Department
of Early Education and Care:

bit.ly/familieslearn

Contents

LETTER FROM THE HEALTHY CHILDREN TASK FORCE	3
TIPS FOR YOU	5
BABIES, BIRTH TO 18 MONTHS	14
PRESCHOOLERS, 3 TO 5 YEARS	20
CHILDREN, 6 TO 9 YEARS	26
TWEENS AND YOUNG TEENS, 9-14 YEARS	32
OLDER TEENS, 15-19	36



LETTER FROM THE HEALTHY CHILDREN TASK FORCE

Dear Reader,

We want to start by thanking you for picking up this handbook, Raising Healthy Children in Cambridge. If you are reading this, you are likely connected in a caring way to a child – be it as a caregiver, parent, or provider of services. In the spirit of “it takes a village,” we want to express our appreciation for the positive role you play in nurturing healthy children in our Cambridge community.

Drawing strength from a wide variety of cultures, Cambridge thrives as a diverse city. Together we seek to celebrate and welcome an inclusive array of traditions and ideas. As we recognize that there are many differing views on how to raise children, we also find compassionate connections in our similarities. Looking across our city, we are grateful to observe the substantial efforts and time of dedicated people and our city's resources that are devoted to cultivating an environment where all our children have an equitable opportunity to succeed.

The Healthy Children Task Force (HCTF) is a community coalition that was organized in 1990 to promote the health of children in Cambridge. The HCTF is a group of parents and professionals who work with children and families in Cambridge. We meet monthly to try and improve the health and well-

being of Cambridge families. The members of this task force worked hard on this handbook, bringing together our own expertise along with national guidelines and research.



This handbook was created to serve as a basic resource for you to support the children in your life. Each section of the book includes information, organized by age range, of anticipated growth and development. We have provided resources and web site links to connect you to all that Cambridge offers parents and kids, such as Find It Cambridge. Please take this handbook home with you to keep as a quick reference. We hope it sparks conversation between you and those alongside you on the journey of nurturing children—be it fellow parents, family, friends, care providers, educators, or health professionals.

In a world that seems to move at an ever-increasing, chaotic pace, it is vital that we join together in support of healthy children. We encourage you to read on, ask questions, seek community, and continue to be involved in our Cambridge village.

In partnership,

The Cambridge Healthy Children’s Task Force

Marc C. McGovern, MSW, Co-chair

Avra Goldman, MD, Co-chair

Mayor

Family Physician

City of Cambridge

Boston Medical Center

tips for you

Raising children, while joyful, can be difficult, constant work. While there is no shortage of opinions on how to raise a healthy and well-adjusted child, there is no one right way to do it. One of the single most important things anyone can do to be a better parent or caregiver is to take good care of yourself.

- **Spend time doing activities that you enjoy and that make you feel good.**
- **Find a few tasks or activities that you can easily “let go” to make life less busy.**
- **Talk with other parents about parenting for joint problem solving, laughter, and insight.**
- **When you take out library books with your children, take out a book for you, too.**

- **Make time to get outdoors—finding a safe place to take a twenty-minute walk can change your outlook on the day.**
- **If life events feel overwhelming, contact a friend, family member or professional for support. We all have these moments.**
- **Listen to books on tape or CD while you commute to work or travel to run errands.**
- **Take advantage of free events in our community—lectures, musical events, or conferences.**
- **Allow yourself to dream—write down your goals and priorities.**

If your child is 6 months old, act early by talking to your child's doctor if your child:

- **Doesn't try to get things that are in reach**
- **Shows no affection for caregivers**
- **Doesn't respond to sounds around him**
- **Has difficulty getting things to mouth**
- **Doesn't make vowel sounds ("ah," "eh," "oh")**
- **Doesn't roll over in either direction**
- **Doesn't laugh or make squealing sounds**
- **Seems very stiff, with tight muscles**
- **Seems very floppy, like a rag doll**

ACT EARLY

If your child is 1 year old, act early by talking to your child's doctor if your child:

- **Doesn't crawl**
- **Can't stand when supported**
- **Doesn't search for things that she sees you hide**
- **Doesn't say single words like "mama" or "dada"**
- **Doesn't learn gestures like waving or shaking head**
- **Doesn't point to things**
- **Loses skills he once had**

Babies, Birth–18 Months

Your Baby's Development

From birth, babies hear voices and see faces. All babies cry. Babies can cry or fuss up to four hours a day. Babies cry much less when they are held. You cannot “spoil” a baby by holding him or her too much. Talk to your baby as much as possible. Studies show that infants who hear more words in their first year of life do better in school and are more successful in life. Try to talk to your baby and child to help them learn about the world, explain things as you see them together.

Skills such as taking a first step, smiling for the first time, and waving “bye-bye” are called developmental milestones. Developmental milestones are things most children can do by a certain age. Children reach milestones in how they play, learn, speak, behave, and move (like crawling, walking, or jumping). In the first year, babies learn to focus their vision, reach out, explore, and learn about the things that are around them.

Cognitive, or brain development means the learning process of memory, language, thinking, and reasoning. Learning language is more than making sounds (“babble”), or saying “ma-ma” and “da-da”. Listening, understanding, and knowing the names of people and things are all a part of language development.

Below are just two of the cognitive and physical milestones your pediatrician will be looking for at 6 months:

- Shows curiosity about things and tries to get things that are out of reach
- Rolls over in both directions (front to back, back to front)



This short list is only a small part of what health care providers look for at your baby’s regular 6-month checkup. There is a separate list of milestones for each age—2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 9 months, and 18 months. You can ask your doctor about it.

What About Nutrition?

Breast milk meets all your baby’s needs for about the first 6 months of life. Between 6 and 12 months of age, your baby will learn about new tastes and textures with healthy solid food, but breast milk should still be an important source of nutrition. Feed your baby slowly and patiently, encourage your baby to try new tastes but without force, and watch closely to see if he’s still hungry.

Keep your baby active. She might not be able to run and play like the “big kids” just yet, but there’s lots she can do to keep her little arms and legs moving throughout the day. Getting down on the floor to move helps your baby become strong, learn, and explore.

Try not to keep your baby in swings, strollers, bouncer seats, and exercise saucers for long periods.

HOW MUCH JUICE?

	< 1 YEAR	
	1 YEAR +	 4 oz or less, or none

It's always better to serve water instead of juice.

Sleep and Other Issues (Birth to 18 months)



HEALTHY SLEEP for babies 4–12 months:
12–16 HOURS including naps

Sleep is especially important for children because it is vital for mental and physical development.

It is hard to set up a sleep routine that is good for newborns and infants as well as parents. For the first few weeks, a new baby will set his or her own sleep schedule, and that’s okay. Some newborns may sleep during the day and be more awake at night.

Sleep Tips for Newborns (to 3 months after birth)

- The best advice for new parents and caregivers, from birth until the baby is several weeks old, may be to sleep when the baby sleeps. Try to ask friends or family for help with chores and errands, so that everyone can get the sleep they need.
- Naps are important for infants and their parents. Newborns may take between two and four naps a day.
- Pay attention to when and how the baby shows her need to sleep. Some babies cry or rub their eyes when they get sleepy.
- New parents and caregivers will recognize sleep patterns as they get to know their little ones over time. It is best to put babies to bed when they are sleepy, but not yet asleep. Within the first 2 to 3 months, babies begin to have a regular sleep-wake cycle.

Sleep Tips for Babies 6 months to 18 months

- Set up a sleep routine as soon as your baby starts to have a regular sleep pattern. Set a naptime and bedtime and try to keep it the same every day.
- Also, it's great to read to your baby or toddler before naptime or bedtime. Even little babies like to look at picture books and hear you talk about the pictures.



HEALTHY SLEEP for babies 13–18 months:
11–14 HOURS including naps

Reading to your child is a great way to relax with your baby before bedtime or naptime.

During the first 18 months, babies also are developing bonds of love and trust with their parents and others as part of social and emotional development. The way parents cuddle, hold, and play with their baby will set the basis for future social interactions.

Here are just two of the social/emotional and communication/language milestones at age 6 months:

- Knows familiar faces and begins to know if someone is a stranger
- Strings vowels together when babbling (“ah,” “eh,” “oh”)

These are only examples. Your pediatrician will be checking your baby’s development at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 9 months, and 18 months. Ask him or her any questions you might have about milestones at these ages.

Stress

Babies can feel stress. When kids are little and feelings are big, it can feel overwhelming. Big feelings can happen inside babies, like when they feel pain or fear. Or big feelings can happen in the people around them, like when people are crying or yelling. This affects babies too.

Stressed out babies may cry a lot, want to be held more, or get stomach aches. Since they cannot talk, it can be hard to know how a baby is feeling. Infant stress also affects brain development.

What About Screens?

For children younger than 18 months of age, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends no exposure at all to media.

BABIES NEED TO FEEL SAFE

- S** Speak in soft tones to your baby, and around your baby.
- A** Attend to baby’s needs (feeding, diapering) as soon as possible.
- F** Feel as calm in baby’s presence as possible. Make space to feel adult-sized sadness, anger, and fear away from baby, if possible.
- E** Express baby’s feelings with words, if you can. Saying, “Oh, my baby is sad,” or “Did that scare you?” can help little ones learn the words for their feelings.

The Cambridge-Somerville WIC Program is where you can get:

- Healthy foods for pregnant women, infants and children
- Breastfeeding support and counseling
- Referrals to health care and social services

Where is WIC?

Cambridge WIC:

119 Windsor Street

Cambridge, MA 02139

Open: Mon. 11 am–7:30 pm; Tues 10 am–6:30 pm; Thurs 8:30 am–5 pm; 1st Saturdays 8 am–4 pm
617-665-3750

North Cambridge WIC:

266 Rindge Avenue

Cambridge, MA 02140

Open: Wed. 8:30 am–5 pm (closed last Wed. of the month); Fri. 8 am–4:30 pm

RESOURCE

♥WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR FOUR-MONTH-OLD♥

- Hold and talk to your baby; smile and be cheerful while you do.
- **Set steady routines for sleeping and feeding.**
- Pay close attention to what your baby likes and doesn't like; you will know how best to meet his needs and what you can do to make your baby happy.
- **Copy your baby's sounds.**
- Act excited and smile when your baby makes sounds.
- **Have quiet play times when you read or sing to your baby.**
- Put toys near your baby so that she can reach for them or kick her feet.
- **Hold your baby upright with feet on the floor and sing or talk to your baby as she "stands" with support.**

♥WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR ONE-YEAR-OLD♥

- Do not yell, spank, or give long explanations. A time out for 30 seconds to 1 minute might help redirect your child
- **Give your child lots of hugs, kisses, and praise for good behavior.**
- Talk to your child about what you're doing. For example, "mommy is washing your hands with a washcloth."
- **Read with your child every day. Have your child turn the pages.**
- Build on what your child says or tries to say, or what he points to. If he points to a truck and says "t" or "truck," say, "yes, that's a big, blue truck."
- **Play with blocks, shape sorters, and other toys that encourage your child to use her hands.**
- Sing songs with actions, like "The Itsy Bitsy Spider."

If your child is 18 months old, act early by talking to your child's doctor if your child:

ACT EARLY

- **Doesn't point to show things to others**
- **Can't walk**
- **Doesn't know what familiar things are for**
- **Doesn't copy others**
- **Doesn't gain new words**
- **Doesn't have at least 6 words**
- **Doesn't notice or mind when a caregiver leaves or returns**
- **Loses skills he once had**

If your child is 2 years old, act early by talking to your child's doctor if your child:

- **Doesn't use 2-word phrases (for example, "drink milk")**
- **Doesn't know what to do with common things, like a brush, phone, fork, spoon**
- **Doesn't copy actions and words**
- **Doesn't follow simple instructions**
- **Doesn't walk steadily**
- **Loses skills she once had**

Toddlers, 18–36 Months

Your Toddler's Development

At 18 months, most children can:

- Walk alone
- Walk up steps
- Pull toys while walking
- Help undress herself
- Drink from a cup
- Eat with a spoon

At 2 years, most children can:

- Stand on tiptoe
- Kick a ball
- Begin to run



Toddlers need to be physically active to be healthy. At least one hour of physical activity every day will contribute to healthy development.

What about Nutrition?

At this age, children begin to develop food preferences and they can be very picky. Here are some tips to gently encourage good eating habits:

-

Daily Amounts for Toddlers

FRUITS  1

one serving is:
1/2 piece fresh fruit or
1/4 cup cooked, frozen,
or canned

Provide 2–3 servings
per day

VEGETABLES  1

one serving is:
1/4 cup cooked

Provide 2–3 servings
per day

GRAINS  1

one serving is:
1/4 cup cooked or
1/3 cup dry cereal or
2–3 crackers or
1/2 slice bread

Provide 6–11 servings
per day

HEALTHY PROTEINS  2

one serving is:
1 ounce meat, fish,
chicken, or tofu or
1/4 c. cooked beans
or 1/2 egg

Provide 2 servings
per day

- Introduce new foods by serving just a tablespoon or two.
- Offer healthy foods of different colors, like tomatoes, sweet peppers, carrots, and green beans and ask your child the names of each color.
- Serve your child what you are eating.
- Engage your child in very simple tasks involved with food preparation or have them watch you while talking about what you are doing.

Measuring by Hand

For cooked fruit, veg, or rice,
1/4 cup is the same as one handful  1

For meat, fish, chicken, or tofu,
1 ounce (oz.) is the size of 3 dice  3

HOW MUCH JUICE?

 **18-36 MONTHS**  4 oz or less, or none

It's always better to serve water instead of juice.

Sleep and Other Issues (18–36 months)

HEALTHY SLEEP

for toddlers who are under 2 years old:

11–14 HOURS including naps

By 18 months of age, most toddlers are napping once a day, for 1–3 hours.

Safety is key for healthy brain development and good mental health. Kids feel safe (and not stressed out) when their grownups feel safe. Try to keep kids away from big, unsafe, grownup situations, including arguing and fighting within the family or community violence in the neighborhood. If kids are exposed to scary situations, let teachers or any people who are taking care of your child know, so that they may provide her comfort or support.

Toddlers are trying to do things for themselves but still need to be reassured by the adults in their lives. They are experiencing the world and trying to make sense of it all at the same time. Because they are just learning all sorts of new tasks, they often get frustrated. Temper tantrums are common at this age. Parents can help a toddler having a tantrum and shorten it by staying nearby and wait for the child to calm down, neither punishing nor giving in to demands.

What About Screens?

Pediatricians recommend that kids 18 months to 5 years old should never spend more than one hour per day in front of a screen. Screens include computers, gaming devices, phones, tablets, movies, and television. Your child can benefit from this limited screen time only if you are present and able to discuss what is happening on the screen. Only high-quality children’s media should be viewed. Before two years of age, children should not be viewing/using digital media by themselves.





My Notes

The Center for Families provides enjoyable activities and groups where

- you and your child can be together with other parents and children for fun activities
- you can meet other parents to learn and share parenting experiences
- everyone is welcome!

Where is the Center for Families?

Main Office: 70 Rindge Avenue c/o **Peabody School**
Cambridge MA 02140
Bus Routes 77&83
Phone: 617-349-6385
Parent/Family Member & Child Drop-in Playgroups are offered at these locations:

Moses Youth Center (formally Area IV Youth Center), 243 Harvard St., Bus Routes 69,83 & 91

Gately Youth Center Gym, 70 Rindge Ave. (back of Peabody School) Bus Routes 77 & 83

RESOURCE

♥What You Can Do for your 18-month-old♥

- Turn a walk into learning time. Talk about what you see, like the colors of cards, or count the number of dogs. Let your child share her ideas with you and expand on what she says.
- **Play with blocks, balls, puzzles, books and toys that teach cause and effect and problem solving.**
- Take your child to the park to run and climb on equipment or walk on nature trails. Watch your child closely.
- **Provide safe areas for your child to walk and move around in.**
- Provide balls for her to kick, roll, and throw.
- **Blow bubbles and let your child pop them.**

♥What You Can Do for your 2-year-old♥

- Encourage your child to help with simple chores at home, like sweeping and making dinner. Praise your child for being a good helper.
- **Be patient with your little explorer: Toddlers need to repeat activities many times until they can predict what will happen in a given situation.**
- Try to make your child's sleeping environment the same every night and throughout the night (temperature, level of noise and light in the room, blankets).
- **Provide a safe, loving environment. It's important to be consistent and predictable.**
- Encourage your child to play with blocks. Take turns building towers and knocking them down.

If your child is 3 years old, act early by talking to your child's doctor if your child:

- Falls down a lot or has trouble with stairs
- Drools or has very unclear speech
- Can't work simple toys (such as peg boards, simple puzzles, turning handle)
- Doesn't speak in sentences
- Doesn't understand simple instructions
- Doesn't play pretend or make-believe
- Doesn't want to play with other children or with toys
- Doesn't make eye contact
- Loses skills he once had

ACT EARLY

If your child is 4 years old, act early by talking to your child's doctor if your child:

- Can't jump in place
- Has trouble scribbling
- Shows no interest in interactive games or make-believe
- Ignores other children or doesn't respond to people outside the family
- Resists dressing, sleeping, and using the toilet
- Can't retell a favorite story
- Doesn't follow 3-part commands
- Doesn't understand "same" and "different"
- Doesn't use "me" and "you" correctly
- Speaks unclearly
- Loses skills he once had

Preschoolers, 3–5 Years

Your Preschooler's Development

Kids between the ages of 3 and 5 become better runners and climbers and better at asking questions, all skills that help them learn about the world. Allowing preschoolers to explore while staying safe helps them learn and grow in healthy ways.



By age 5, most children:

- Dress and undress themselves
- Run and climb well
- Ask lots of questions
- Begin to learn letters, colors, numbers
- Form friendships, learn to share, and be aware of the feelings of others

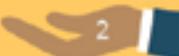
What About Nutrition?

Serve a vegetable or fruit at each meal or snack. Serve whole grain breads, pasta, rice, cereal, or crackers. Low fat protein food is best.

Daily Amounts for Preschoolers

FRUITS 
 one serving is:
 1/2 piece fresh fruit
 or 1/4 cup cooked/frozen/canned
 Provide 2–3 servings per day

VEGETABLES 
 one serving is:
 1/4 cup cooked
 or 1/2 cup salad
 Provide 2–3 servings per day

GRAINS 
 one serving is:
 1/2 cup dry cereal
 or 1/3 cup cooked or
 or 3–4 crackers
 or 1/2 slice bread
 Provide 6–11 servings per day

HEALTHY PROTEINS 
 one serving is:
 1 ounce meat, fish, chicken, or tofu
 or 1/3 c. cooked beans
 or 1 egg
 Provide 2 servings per day

Avoid serving drinks with sugar, like soda, fruit drinks or iced tea. Instead serve low fat milk and tap water.

Make cookies, sweets, or cake something special by saving them for certain days or occasions. At this age, children begin to develop food preferences and they can be very picky. They also can be unpredictable about what they may want or how much they want on a specific day. Your best strategy will be to just make healthy food choices available. Here are some tips to gently encourage good eating habits and avoid wasting food:

Measuring by Hand

For cooked fruit, veg, or rice,
 1/4 cup is the same as one handful 
 1/2 cup is the same size as two handfuls 
 For meat, fish, chicken, or tofu,
 1 ounce (oz.) is the size of 3 dice 

HOW MUCH JUICE?

 **3–5 YEARS**  4–6 oz.
 (1 juicebox)

It's always better to serve water instead of juice.

- Introduce new foods by serving just a tablespoon or two. Serve your child what you are eating.
- Engage small children in very simple tasks involved with food preparation or talk about what you are doing while they watch you. They can help you pick out vegetables at the grocery store or farmers market.

Sleep and Other Issues (3–5 years)



HEALTHY SLEEP

for children who are 3, 4, and 5 years old:

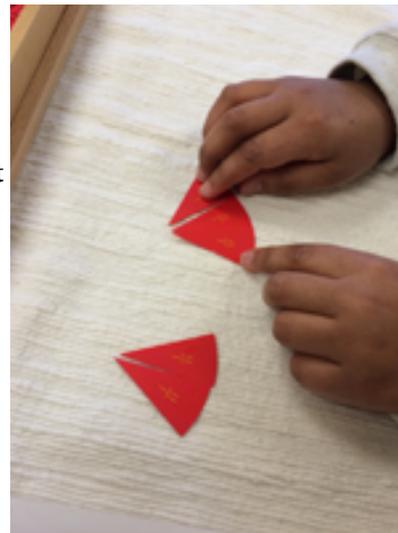
10–13 HOURS

Sleep Tips

- Maintain a regular and consistent sleep schedule.
- Keep a relaxing bedtime routine that ends in the room where the child sleeps. Reading or talking quietly together is a great routine.
- A child should sleep in the same sleeping environment every night, in a room that is cool, quiet, and dark—and without a TV or other screens.

What About Screens?

Pediatricians recommend that young children up to age 5 should never spend more than 1 hour per day in front of a screen. Screens include computers, gaming devices, phones, tablets, movies, and television. Your child can benefit from this limited screen time only if you are present and able to discuss what is happening on the screen. Talk with your child about the characters, action, or details of a movie or a game, both during and afterwards, to expand their understanding. More than one hour of screen time per day can cause problems in language development and interfere with normal social and emotional learning (self-control, for example). Instead, try to help your child play creatively, which is necessary for healthy development.



WHAT IS

Media-free time is a regular time when everyone in the household has their phones put away or turned off and are not answering. Televisions, computers, tablets, video games, and even phones are not being used.

MEDIA-FREE TIME?



If your child is 5 years old, act early by talking to your child's doctor if your child:

- Doesn't show a wide range of emotions
- Shows extreme behavior (unusually fearful, aggressive, shy or sad)
- Is easily distracted, has trouble focusing on one activity for more than 5 minutes
- Doesn't respond to people, or responds only superficially
- Unusually withdrawn and not active
- Can't tell what's real and what's make-believe

ACT EARLY

- Doesn't play a variety of games and activities
- Can't give first and last name
- Doesn't use plurals or past tense properly
- Doesn't talk about daily activities or experiences
- Doesn't draw pictures
- Can't brush teeth, wash and dry hands, or get undressed without help
- Loses skills he once had


 RESOURCE

The Cambridge Public Library is where you can boost your child's literacy and learning by:

- checking out books to share
- bringing him to story times
- signing her up for programs that help kids keep learning by reading during the summer
- asking librarians for books on specific topics

Where is the Cambridge Public Library?

Main Branch 449 Broadway	Mon-Thurs 9 am–9 pm Fri-Sat 9 am–5 pm Sun 1–5 pm
Children's Room 449 Broadway	Mon-Thurs 9 am–7 pm Fri-Sat 9 am–5 pm Sun 1–5pm

Neighborhood branch and teen room information:
www.cambridgema.gov/cpl/

♥WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR PRESCHOOLER♥

- Your child needs to learn by exploring new things but needs to feel safe. Let her try new things but help make sure she does not try dangerous things.
- **Your child needs to feel safe in the world. Comfort and explain things to him when they might be frightening.**
- When your child gets angry, as all children do, let her show her anger as long as she does not hurt herself or others. Show her that you can help keep the world safe for her.
- **Try to have at least one family meal all together each day. Use that time to talk about each person's day.**
- Go with her to the library and the park and spend time together reading and playing.
- **Go with him to the supermarket and have him choose a food from the fruit and vegetable aisle.**
- Sing songs together.
- **Walk, dance, ride bikes, or play sports together.**
- Draw or do crafts together.
- **Act out stories or songs together with your child.**

HOW TO RECOGNIZE STRESS IN KIDS

Kids show that they are under stress differently than adults do. Their stress may show up as



extreme sadness
depression
fear
bedwetting
self-harm

- changes in behavior



irritability
tantrums
fighting
playing in unsafe ways
(such as with fire or matches)

- changes in mood

- physical changes



changes in eating or sleeping habits



suddenly, poor grades

- problems with learning

What can you do if you see these signs? Help your child feel safe to talk about big feelings. Respect his right to feel what they feel. Often, just sharing feelings with a trusted adult makes kids feel less scared, because they feel less alone. If your child is showing signs of stress, ask the teacher or pediatrician for tips on how to help them de-stress.

Children, 6–9 Years

Your Child's Development

“Middle childhood” brings many changes in a child’s life. By this time, kids can dress themselves, catch a ball more easily using only their hands, and tie their shoes. Having independence from family becomes more important now. Events such as starting school bring children this age into regular contact with the larger world. Friendships become more and more important. Physical, social, and mental skills develop quickly at this time. This is a critical time for children to develop confidence in all areas of life, such as through friends, schoolwork, and sports.



Thinking and Language

Problem-solving and thinking skills develop a lot at this age. Your child may also begin to pay more attention to decision-making and to organizing ideas, time, and things. Starting at age 6, kids begin to:

- Start to understand ideas like power and influence
- Question the way things are
- Think about how current actions affect the future; may worry about things like climate change and war
- Memorize information more easily
- At 6 years old, follow a series of three commands in a row

Free, active play is fun and helps children develop their imaginations and social skills as well as their muscles and bones. Children imitate the activities of their parents. If you are physically active, your kid will learn to enjoy movement as well.

What About Nutrition?

Many guidelines remain the same as when your child was younger. For example, still serve a vegetable or fruit at each meal or snack. Serve whole grains and low-fat protein foods. Still offer skim or 1% milk, avoiding juice and drinks that include sugar.

Sleep and Other Issues (6–9 years)



Not getting enough sleep is common in this age group, due to homework, evening activities, and/or later bedtimes.

Your child will continue to benefit from a routine before going to bed that is the same every night. Calm and enjoyable activities are best right before bedtime. Continue to read to, and with, your child.

Sleep Tips

- **Set limits.** Be sure to set clear limits, such as how much time your child will read independently or together with you before lights must be turned off.
- **Turn off televisions, computers, and radios.** Television viewing, computer-game playing, internet use, and other stimulating activities at bedtime often cause sleep problems. When a child has a screen or digital devices in their bedroom, and as well as when they have too much screen time, the amount and quality of sleep is reduced.
- **Don't let your child eat or drink food or drinks containing caffeine at any time of day.** Caffeine can be found in sodas, coffee- and mocha-flavored products, iced tea, and many other foods and drinks.

Behavior

Frequent physical complaints (such as sore throats, tummy aches, or arm or leg pain) may simply be due to a child's increased body awareness. Sometimes they can be a sign that a child

SIGNS OF SLEEP DEFICIT (Not Getting Enough Sleep)

Being moody, irritable, cranky, and/or easily frustrated

Behavior problems, including hyperactivity

Problems with attention, memory, making decisions, and reaction time, all of which are important for learning

Weight gain (Studies show that children who do not get enough sleep are more likely to be overweight.)

is feeling stressed. Although there is often no physical evidence for such complaints, the complaints should be investigated to rule out possible health conditions. This will also assure the child that the parent is concerned about their well-being. You also might notice your child at this age:

- Can be sensitive to other people’s opinions and reactions
- Becomes interested in having discussions, debates, and arguments
- Develops a sense of pride in accomplishments and an awareness of challenge

Peer acceptance becomes more important during this age. Kids may take part in certain behaviors to be part of “the group.”

Stress Management

Even if parents do everything “right,” kids will sometimes struggle with stress from things happening around them. Kids who are dealing with big, scary, stressful feelings might not know how to ask for help or comfort. For kids 6 years old and older, it’s important that parents try to set firm limits on the amount of time spent using video games, phones, tablets, computers, and watching TV or movies, and also make guidelines for what is being watched, not just how much. Try to make sure your child’s screen time does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity, and other behaviors essential to health. It is important for children to have as much time with parents and caregivers that is face-to-face, and in person, as possible.

What About Screens?

When family members have regular “media-free times,” such as during meals or certain days of the week, children are more likely to develop in a healthy way. See “5 Tips for Keeping Kids Health with Media” on the next page.

5 Tips for Keeping Kids Healthy with Media

1 **Make a Family Media Plan**



Take charge and make a plan that fits your kids' ages and creates family times without screens. Here's how: [HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan](https://www.healthychildren.org/MediaUsePlan)

2 **No Screen Before 18 (months)**



Healthy development for toddlers under 18 months old means no media use, whether on a tablet, phone, TV, or computer.

The only exception is video-chatting with family members (such as on Skype or FaceTime), which can promote social connection when an adult is present on both ends of the call.

3 **1 Hour Per Day, Max**



Pediatricians recommend no more than 1 hour per day of high quality media for kids ages 2-5. Watch it with them.

4 **Give Yourself a Break**



Limit your own screen time and model doing things you enjoy that don't involve screens. Parents are the most important influence in a young child's life.

5 **Make Some Rooms Screen-Free**



Learn from each other and reinforce your family's values by keeping mealtimes tech-free. Any screen in a bedroom is a risk to healthy sleep.

Tips based on AAP recommendations. Cambridge HCTF CC-BY-NC-SA.

The Cambridge Recreation Department offers:

- weekend, after-school, and summer programs for physical activity for kids (and adult fitness/sports)
- parks and playgrounds for outdoor free play, exercise, and sports
- indoor pool and gym facilities at the War Memorial Recreation Center

Where is Cambridge Recreation?

War Memorial Recreation Center
 1640 Cambridge Street
 Cambridge MA 02139
 Phone: 617-349-6279

Athletic League and War Memorial information is here:
<http://bit.ly/cambrec>



♥WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR 6–9 YEAR OLD♥

- Show affection for your child. Let her know that you notice and value her accomplishments.
- Help your child develop a sense of responsibility—ask him to help with household tasks, such as setting the table.
- Talk with your child about school, friends, and things she looks forward to in the future.
- Talk with your child about respecting others. Encourage him to help people in need.
- Help your child set her own achievable goals—she'll learn to take pride in herself and rely less on approval or reward from others.
- Make clear rules and stick to them, such as for how long your child can watch TV or when she has to go to bed.

8 Tips

for Helping Kids 9–14 Manage Stress

1

Encourage your child's passions. Help them find and do things that make them happy. When teens get sad or down, encourage them to stay involved with friends and school.

3

Monitor and/or limit screen use. Social media and other screen use can trigger unhealthy emotions in teens. Help them make good decisions and set limits.

5

Encourage exercise. Getting exercise boosts mood and physical health.

7

Attend your child's athletic games and arts performances.

8

Insist on regular sleep. Teens whose parents set a 10:00 p.m. bedtime (and enforce it) are 25% less likely to become depressed. Even though your teen may claim to function well as a "night owl," you should know he still needs 8–9 hours of sleep a night.

2

Talk to your kid! Ask about school and other activities. Use questions that can't be answered with just one word (like "Yes" or "No"). Even if they say they don't want to talk, it helps to know you are there to listen. If your child seems to be very sad or worried a lot of the time, it may be helpful to reach out to your child's doctor.

4

Notice the good things that happen every day. People who focus on positive experiences are better able to cope with sad moods and negative emotions.

6

Model healthy living. Live your life the way you wish your teen would live hers—get enough sleep, eat healthy, be physically active, model good relationships, have a set time when you go screen-free, and show that you use strategies to cope with stress.

Tweens and Young Teens, 9–14 Years

Your Older Child's Development

This age is a time of many physical and other changes in your child. Hormones change as puberty begins. Most boys grow facial and pubic hair and their voices deepen, usually after age 12. Signs of puberty often start before age 12 in girls, when most grow pubic hair and breasts, and start their period. They might be worried about these changes and how they are looked at by others.

Children who feel good about themselves are more able to resist negative peer pressure and make better choices. This may be a time when your child might face peer pressure to use alcohol, tobacco products, and drugs, and to have sex.



Age 9–11 is an important time for children to gain a sense of responsibility along with their growing independence. Teens 12–14 make many more of their own choices about friends, sports, and schoolwork. They have their own personality and interests, although parents are still very important. During these five years, children in this age group might:

- **Begin developing a worldview, including a basic set of values**
- **Develop a stronger sense of right and wrong**
- **Want to contribute and earn money**
- **Be better able to express feelings through talking**

- Keep secrets (often being able to have secrets is more important than the secret they're keeping)
- Have more ability for complex thought
- Have a better awareness that different kinds of behavior are for different situations

What About Nutrition?

Many guidelines (consuming low-fat milk, for example), remain the same as when your child was younger, but she will increasingly make her own choices. It is still the case that modeling healthy eating habits will have a positive impact.

Sleep and Other Issues (9–14 years)



The infographic is contained within a light green rectangular box with a thin border. It features a yellow crescent moon icon in the top left corner. The text is arranged in two sections. The first section is for kids aged 9-12, with the text 'HEALTHY SLEEP' in large purple letters, 'for kids who are 9, 10, 11, and 12 years old:' in smaller purple letters, and '9-12 HOURS' in large purple letters. The second section is for teens aged 13-14, with the text 'HEALTHY SLEEP' in large purple letters, 'for teens who are 13 and 14 years old:' in smaller purple letters, and '8-10 HOURS' in large purple letters.

 **HEALTHY SLEEP** for kids who are 9, 10, 11, and 12 years old: **9-12 HOURS**

HEALTHY SLEEP for teens who are 13 and 14 years old: **8-10 HOURS**

Sleep Tips

- Be sure to set clear limits, such as what time lights must be turned off.
- Turn off televisions, computers, and radios. Television viewing, computer-game playing, internet use, and other stimulating activities at bedtime often cause sleep problems. Phones can be especially tempting to children this age and can interfere with sleeping. It is best to keep them in a different room during the night.
- It's best not to let your child eat or drink food or drinks containing caffeine at any time of day. Caffeine can be found in sodas, coffee- and mocha-flavored products.

What About Screens?

At this age many kids want to communicate with their friends, and their friends' friends, through online "chatting" and social media using screens. But these kinds of communication can be a problem because this is an age when healthy ways of relating to others and impulse control are not yet developed. When communication happens through emails, texts, and social media apps, kids are at risk for misunderstandings and bullying. You can suggest healthy forms of communicating with friends, such as regular phone calls or face-to-face communication. Age 13 is the minimum age to legally set up an account on certain brands of social media that collect data from users, as a protection for children's privacy.

The Middle School Network (MSN) is where you can find good experiences for your child in Grade 6, 7, or 8 when school is not in session. These camps, clubs, teams, and classes can help them

- be motivated to learn and take on challenges
- find their talents
- engage safely with peers
- strengthen their school work

Where is the Middle School Network?

www.agendaforchildrenost.org/middle-school-network.html

Annie Leavitt

annie@agendaforchildrenost.org



RESOURCE

♥WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR 9–12-YEAR OLD♥

- Be involved with your child's school. Go to school events; meet your child's teachers.
- Encourage your child to join school and community groups, such as a sports team, or to be a volunteer for a charity.
- Help your child develop his own sense of right and wrong. Talk with him about risky things friends might pressure him to do, like smoking or dangerous physical dares.
- Talk with your child about the normal physical and emotional changes of puberty.
- Encourage your child to read every day. Talk with him about his homework.
- Provide plenty of fruits and vegetables; limit foods high in solid fats, added sugars, or salt.

♥WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR 12–14-YEAR OLD♥

- Encourage your teen to be physically active. She might join a team sport or take up an individual sport. Helping with household tasks may also keep your teen active.
- Meal time is very important for families. Eating together helps teens make better choices about the foods they eat, promotes healthy weight, and gives your family members time to talk with each other.
- When there is a conflict, be clear about goals and expectations (like getting good grades, keeping things clean, and showing respect), but allow your teen input on how to reach those goals (like when and how to study or clean).
- Know where your teen is and whether an adult is present.



PHOTO: RACHEL ECK

My Notes



A series of ten horizontal dashed blue lines, providing a space for writing notes.

Older Teens, 15–19 Years

Your Teen's Development

This is a time of changes in how teenagers think, feel, and interact with others, and how their bodies grow. Most girls will be physically mature by now, and most will have completed puberty. Boys might still be maturing physically during this time. Though it can develop earlier, this may be the age when a teen is becoming more clear who they are in terms of gender (how a person thinks of their identity, whether as male, female, or “nonbinary”) and their sexual orientation (attraction, whether heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or another orientation).

Teens might have concerns about body size, shape, or weight. Eating disorders also can be common, especially among girls. During this time, teens are developing their unique personality and opinions. Relationships with friends are still important, yet your teen will have other interests as he develops a more clear sense of who he is. This is also an important time to prepare for more independence and responsibility; many teenagers start working, and many will be leaving home soon after high school.



Thinking

The brain undergoes a “rewiring” process that is not complete until we are 24 years old. Because their brains are still changing, teenagers (and even older youth) have the

opportunity to develop good habits and skills that can persist into late adulthood. However, this period can also be a time when lifelong bad habits or behaviors can take root.

Teens :

- form close friendships and start to develop romantic thoughts.
- may question old values without losing their identity.
- are able to understand more difficult concepts, whether in math, right-and-wrong, or identity.

Behavior

During adolescence, it is normal for young people to begin to separate from their parents and make their own identity. The teenage years are a time of experimenting with new things and taking risks. All teenagers try new things and most teenagers do stay safe. It is very important during these years to keep talking openly and honestly with your teenage child about the risks of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, and sex so that your child can ask for help if it is needed.

Sleep and Other Issues (15–19 years)

A graphic with a light green background and a thin green border. On the left is a yellow crescent moon icon. To its right, the words "HEALTHY SLEEP" are written in large, bold, purple capital letters. Below this, in smaller purple text, it says "for teens who are 15, 16, 17, and 18 years old:". At the bottom, "8–10 HOURS" is written in large, bold, purple capital letters.

 **HEALTHY SLEEP**
for teens who are 15, 16, 17, and 18 years old:
8–10 HOURS

Sleep is food for the brain. During sleep, important body functions and brain activity occur. Skipping sleep can be harmful—even deadly, particularly if you are behind the wheel. Sleepiness can make it hard to get along with your family and friends and hurt your performance in school or in sports. Teens need eight to ten hours of sleep each night to function best. Teens’ sleep patterns are different than children’s—it is natural to sleep later in the morning, and stay awake later in the evening, even until 11:00 p.m. or 12:00 a.m., if you are a teen.

Teens need reminding that sleep is still an important factor in health, and that screens in bedrooms, even phones, can interfere with good sleep.

Sleep Tips

- **Dim the lights at night and get lots of daylight in the morning .**
- **Have a routine bedtime of 10:00 p.m.**
- **Sleep in a cool environment.**
- **Turn off every device at night—music, the Internet, phone, and television. Even the light from an alarm clock could have a negative effect on your sleep if it is too close.**
- **Try not to have a very different sleep pattern on the weekend, because this can affect your biological clock and hurt the quality of your sleep.**

Stress Management

Being a teenager can be terribly stressful. School, friendships, and dating are common sources of stress for teens. Sometimes stress is mild and manageable. Other times, stress can get overwhelming. Social bullying, conflict with parents, and community or media violence are just some of the stresses that can be hard for teens to manage without help. Problems with mood or worrying become more common at this age. Signs that a teenager may be feeling over-stressed or struggling with his emotions include:

- **Hard time coping with daily activities and problems**
- **Changes in sleeping or eating without other causes**
- **Big or sudden mood swings**
- **Seeming very sad or angry or worried most of the time, or for many days at a time**
- **Withdrawing from family and/or friends (spending more time alone)**
- **Changes in using alcohol or drugs (starting to use, or using a lot more)**
- **Excessive time online**

- **Getting in trouble with authorities (for example, stealing)**
- **Unusual thoughts, feelings, or beliefs that seem out of touch with reality**
- **Threatening to harm self or other people**

What About Screens?

Teens will increasingly make their own choices about screen time. As a parent, you can support the process of making good choices about screens and Internet safety in these ways:

- **Most important of all is to be sure your teen feels he or she can confide in you without judgment when they have a question or concern, or when they or others are in danger. “Keeping the lines of communication open” means being willing to listen well, and caringly, even when that’s difficult.**
- **Many teens need to be reminded that nothing they post online, and no text message, is private. Privacy settings do not make what they say or post online fully private. Images, thoughts, and behaviors teens share online will instantly become a part of their permanent “digital footprint” that future schools, employers, and others can see.**



WHAT IS A

Your digital footprint is a trail of data you create while using the Internet. It includes a record of the websites you visit, emails you send, and information you submit to online services. Teens may not realize or believe their online activity could be viewed by employers and others.

DIGITAL FOOTPRINT?

The Cambridge Teen Health Center provides

- annual physical exams, immunizations, sports physicals, and sick visits by specialists in adolescent medicine
- health education and mental health services
- free legal consultations for youth (under 21) around immigration



RESOURCE

Where is the Teen Health Center?

CHA Cambridge Teen Health Center

CRLS, 459 Broadway

Hours Monday through Thursday: 8 am–4 pm

Friday: 8 am–3 pm

Phone: 617-665-1548

♥WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR OLDER TEEN♥

- Show interest in your teen's school and extracurricular interests and activities.
- **Respect your teen's need for privacy.**
- Encourage your teen to volunteer and become involved in civic activities in her community.
- **Compliment your teen and celebrate his efforts and accomplishments.**
- Show affection for your teen. Spend time together doing things you enjoy.
- **Respect your teen's opinion.** Listen to her without playing down her concerns.
- Encourage your teen to get enough sleep and physical activity (at least one hour a day), and to eat healthy, balanced meals.
- **If your teen engages in interactive internet media such as games, chat rooms, and instant messaging, encourage her to make good decisions about what she posts.**

The End.

You've come to the end of this handbook.

The authors of this handbook include parents of adults, teens, and young children. We know that our lists of resources, helpful phone numbers, and brief summaries of what to expect and what to look for as your child grows up can't be more than a small form of support for Cambridge parents.

Making connections with other people is fundamental for parents. Whether it is a network of trusted friends, an extended family, a faith community, a neighborhood group, or your doctor's office, staying connected is good for parents and children. Plan who you can call in an emergency. Think about friends or family members whose children are older so you can have experienced parents to ask about their own experiences. Building connections with parents of children the same age as your child, whether at school or in the neighborhood or at work, or at events and programs described on the Find It Cambridge web site (see below), can also give you a place to discuss childhood milestones and parenting issues.

We wish you and your family well.

—the Cambridge Healthy Children Task Force

Find It Cambridge is an online resource that helps you easily find the activities, services, and resources you are looking for in Cambridge. Our city has an amazing array of opportunities, and Find It Cambridge serves as the one web site for those who live, work and play here to go to learn about these opportunities and events.

Visit finditcambridge.org to see what it's all about.

There are many features on Find It Cambridge that make it easy for you to find what you are looking for. You can filter by age, category, location, and/or cost; sign up to get reminders about upcoming events; and much more.

You can also get help finding the resources you need by talking with a Find It Here Expert at three places: the Cambridge Public Schools Student Registration Center, the Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee (CEOC), and the Center for Families (CFF).



finditcambridge.org

Cover Art by Greggy Bazile. Greggy Bazile is an experienced young artist skilled in public art and graphic design. He goes to the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School and hopes to be an interdisciplinary artist and designer.

Resources in the City of Cambridge

Findit Cambridge finditcambridge.org

Department of Human Service Programs cambridgema.gov/dhsp

Student Registration Center

Cambridge Public Library cambridgema.gov/cpl

Cambridge Public Health Department cambridgepublichealth.org

Additional resources are listed in the purple boxes in each chapter of this handbook.

Resources on the Web

American Academy of Pediatrics: healthychildren.org

Sleep Foundation sleep.org

Families Learn and Grow Together bit.ly/familieslearn

My Resources

My child's doctor: _____

My child's dentist: _____

My child's school or daycare: _____

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
HEALTHY CHILDREN TASK FORCE

