

sparkler



♥ Heart

💬 Words

💡 Mind

🧑 Body

Spark early learning with winter fun!

Grow your child's heart, words, mind, and body with Sparkler.

**For Families With
Children 5 and Under**

Learn More: [playsparkler.org](https://www.playsparkler.org)



Help Your Child Get a Strong Start!

Children learn through play! Sparkler is a mobile app that helps parents with young children (0-5) check on their children's early development and spark early learning through play. It's available in English, Spanish, Chinese, French, and Arabic for iOS and Android, smartphones and tablets.

We ALL have questions.

From the day new parents bring their baby home from the hospital, they have questions: Are they meeting milestones? Should we be worried? What can we do to help our child learn to climb stairs... draw circles... solve problems... read books?



Know

Use Sparkler to complete the mobile Ages & Stages Questionnaires® to understand your child's development.



Play

Get inspired to learn together through play. Use Sparkler's library of 2000+ off-screen activities to grow children's hearts, words, minds, and bodies!



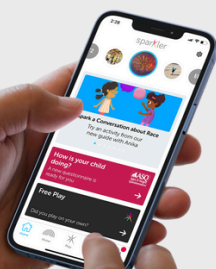
Grow

Follow your child's progress. See all that you accomplish together — and earn "Sparkles" as you play.



Connect

Get handy nudges, plus answers to your questions about child development and parenting.



This booklet helps families with children 5 and under (1) Use Sparkler to learn about and support child development and (2) Play a special lineup of winter activities together.

Get Started With Sparkler!

1

Download the app to your smartphone or tablet.

Go to the App Store or Google Play Store and download the app. You can search for the app or find it by scanning the QR code below.



2

Open the App. Tap "Create a new account."

Tap on "Email address" or another method to create your new account.

3

Enter your program's access code.

This will connect you with your school or program.

4

Now it's time to set up the parent or caregiver's Sparkler account.

Enter your email address and create a password you'll remember. On the following screen, enter your name and contact information.

5

Set up your child's profile.

The most important thing to share on this screen is your child's correct birth date (and weeks prematurity if your child is under 2 years old). The birth date allows Sparkler to assign the correct play content and developmental screening.

6

You'll see the names of the organizations that are "Sponsoring Partners."

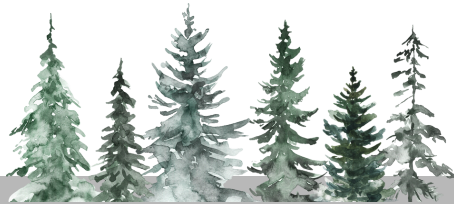
These are the organizations that are supporting you with Sparkler. They'll be able to see your screening results and play/engagement in order to offer your family support and resources.

PLAY ACTIVITIES

Play to support your child's growth and development.

Playing together is one of the best ways to help your child learn and practice new skills. Sparkler has a growing library of fun, interactive play activities that you can do TOGETHER, to help grow your child's HEART, MIND, BODY, and WORDS. Below, you will find a few activities to get you started. Parents/caregivers can discover activities in the app or scan the QR codes to link directly to Sparkler's winter activities.

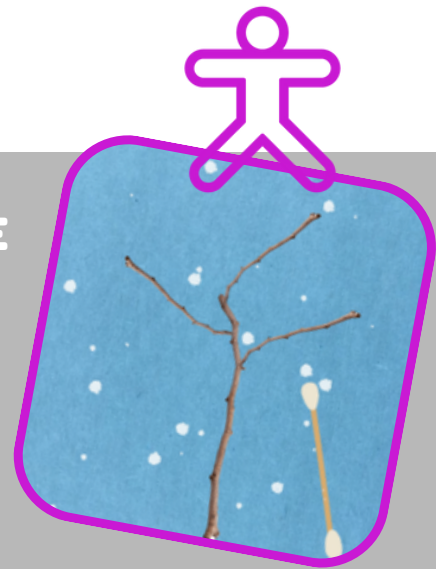
 Body



FEATURED ACTIVITY: SNOWY SCENE

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's make our own winter scene!
2. Let's glue our twigs onto the paper to make a tree.
3. Now, let's use the Q-tips and white paint to add some snow. We can make dots in the sky to look like snow. Should we add dots on the tree to look like snow is on the tree? Let's add snow to the ground, too!



WHY?

Playing "Snowy Scene" will help children strengthen the muscles in their hands and fingers!



Try "Snowy Scene" for children 0-18 months. Practice PERCEPTION and build SMALL MUSCLES.



Try "Snowy Scene" for children 18 months-5 years. Build SMALL MUSCLES and practice PERCEPTION.



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PLAY ACTIVITIES



Words




FEATURED ACTIVITY: SNOW STORY

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's make up a story about a snowman. Try to fill in the blanks.
2. Once upon a time, there was a snowman named _____.
3. He liked to _____ in the snow. He liked to eat _____. The end!

WHY?


Making up stories helps your child learn new words, build their imagination, and think in new ways.



Try "Snow Story" for children
3-5 year to practice
EXPRESSION and STORIES.



Try "Snow Story" for children
0-36 months to practice
EXPRESSION and STORIES.



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PLAY ACTIVITIES

 Body



FEATURED ACTIVITY: SNOWMAN FREEZE DANCE

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's pretend we're snowflakes or snowmen in the winter snow! When the music plays, we dance around like snowflakes. But when the music stops, we have to freeze –just like the Snowman! Let's put on winter clothes if we have them so we look like a snowman!
2. I'll play the music. Let's twirl, jump, and glide like snowflakes How else can you move like a snowflake floating in the air?
3. I'll stop the music and say "Freeze!" We'll freeze like the Snowman. Can we freeze like when the Snowman was waiting for the boy to come back? When the music starts, we're snowflakes again!

WHY?

Activities that encourage your child to regulate their energy level, like freeze dancing, support their developing muscles and coordination!



Try "Snowman Freeze Dance"
to build **BIG MUSCLES** and
IMAGINATION!



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PLAY ACTIVITIES



Heart



FEATURED ACTIVITY: SHAVING CREAM SNOW

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's make shaving cream snow!
2. On a baking sheet, box top, or other flat surface, let's spread out some shaving cream.
3. Let's touch the shaving cream with our fingers. It's white like snow! Let's use our fingers to make lines and dots!



WHY?

Making lines and dots in an unfamiliar material like shaving cream encourages your child to develop persistence!



Try "Shaving Cream Snow" for children 18 months to 5 years.



Build PERSISTENCE and SMALL MUSCLES





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PLAY ACTIVITIES

 Body



FEATURED ACTIVITY: SNOW DOUGH

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. It's winter! Let's make our own snowy dough.
2. Let's mix 2.5 cups of baking soda with ½ cup of white hair conditioner in a large bowl.
3. Let's poke, squish, and squeeze the dough. Let's roll it into balls and make a snowman! We can add items from outside to make our snowman like sticks, pebbles, or anything else you'd like! How do our hands feel after playing with this dough?

WHY?

Making and playing with snow dough helps your child build strong muscles and develop sensory skills!



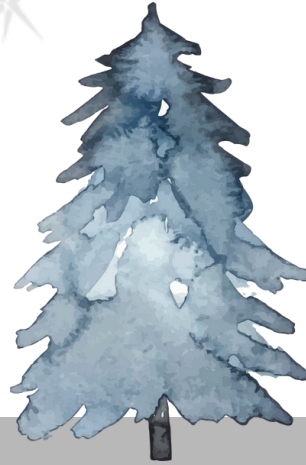
Try "Snow Dough" for children
18 months-5 years. Grow
SMALL MUSCLES and
PERCEPTION



Try "Snow Dough" for
children 0-18 months.
Build PERCEPTION and
SMALL MUSCLES.



PLAY ACTIVITIES



FEATURED ACTIVITY: WINTER ANIMAL DENS

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's talk about animals and where they live in the winter, whether they are hibernating or just staying safe and warm.
2. Let's pick an animal and build a home for it out of blocks, magnetic tiles, play-doh, cardboard, or other building materials we love.
3. What does the animal's home look like? What special features does the winter den have?

WHY?

Creating a home for animals out of open-ended materials requires creativity and flexible thinking, which will help your child learn and grow throughout life!



Try "Winter Animal Dens" for children 18 months - age 5. Practice FLEXIBLE THINKING and build SMALL MUSCLES.



Try "Find Winter Animals" for children 0-18 months. Practice FLEXIBLE THINKING and build SMALL MUSCLES.





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PLAY ACTIVITIES

 Body




FEATURED ACTIVITY: SNOW BALL TOSS

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's play snowball toss!
2. I'll roll two socks together to make a snowball, and then place a basket or other large container in a safe place.
3. Let's try to make "baskets" by tossing our snowballs into the container. We can take turns, and move farther and farther away from the basket to make it more difficult.

WHY?


Activities that encourage your child to regulate their energy level, like tossing to hit a target, supports them developing muscles, coordination, and self-regulation.



Try "Snowball Toss" for children 18 months to 5 years. Build **BIG MUSCLES** and **SELF REGULATION**



Try "Snowball Fun" for children 0-18 months. Build **BIG MUSCLE** and **SELF-REGULATION**



PARENT TIPS

Learn and grow with your little one.

Sparkler has a growing library of tips — just for parents. The mini lessons, created by early childhood educators, help parents to:

- Learn facts and research about early childhood development
- Find out how they can support their child's development
- Set goals to support their children's early learning

Here is an example:

TIPS FOR READING A WORDLESS BOOK

1. START WITH THE COVER

- Ask questions: Look at the cover of the book with your child and talk about what they see. Ask questions like: “What do you think this book is about?” “What do you notice in the picture?” This helps set the stage for the story and encourages observation skills.
- Discuss the title (if available): If there’s a title, read it aloud and ask your child what he or she thinks it means and how the title relates to the cover art.

2. EXPLORE THE PICTURES

- As you read, look closely at the illustrations: Take time to look at the details in each illustration. Encourage your child to notice different things in the pictures, such as characters, objects, and place.
- Ask guiding questions: “What do you see here?” “What do you think is happening?” “How do you think the character feels?” This sparks your child’s imagination and allows him or her to think about the story from their perspective.

3. CREATE YOUR OWN STORY

- As you read, tell your own version of the story: As you move from page to page, make up a story based on what you see. You can describe what might be happening, what the characters might be thinking or feeling, or what could happen next.
- Invite your child to add to the story or suggest ideas.
- Encourage participation: Let your child take over some storytelling. You might ask, “What happens next?” or “How do you think this part of the story ends?”

4. FOCUS ON EMOTIONS AND ACTIONS

- Discuss the characters’ feelings: Look at the characters’ expressions and body language. Ask your child, “How do you think this character feels? Why?” This helps children develop empathy and other social emotional skills.
- Identify actions: Encourage your child to describe the actions of the characters. For example, “What is the character doing here?” “How do you think they are feeling while doing this?” This can strengthen vocabulary and comprehension skills.

CONTINUED...

SCAN TO READ THE
FULL TEXT!





PARENT TIPS

Learn and grow with your little one.

TIPS FOR READING A WORDLESS BOOK (continued)

5. USE DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

- Build vocabulary: As you describe the scenes, use a variety of words. For example, instead of saying, “The dog is running,” try saying, “The dog is sprinting! Its tail wagging excitedly as it runs through the tall grass.”
- Using new words introduces vocabulary and helps children develop language skills.
- Point out details: Pay attention to the small details in the illustrations (like the weather, background items, or subtle facial expressions). This gives the child more opportunities to practice language and build a rich understanding of the images.

6. MAKE CONNECTIONS

- Relate the story to real life: Encourage your child to relate what they see in the pictures to their own experiences. For example, if the story shows a snowy day, you can ask, “Have you ever played in the snow? What do you remember about it?” This makes the story more personal and engaging.
- Create a connection to other books: If you’ve read other books with similar themes or settings, ask your child if they can find anything in this book that reminds them of those stories.

7. ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- Open-ended questions encourage deeper thinking and help children develop problem-solving skills. Examples include:
 - “What do you think will happen next?”
 - “Why do you think the character is doing that?”
 - “How does this picture make you feel?”
 - “What would you do if you were in this situation?”

8. ENCOURAGE REPETITION

- Revisit the story: Wordless books are great for rereading.
- Add new details to the story! Notice new things! Help your child to understand new parts of the story and further improve language skills.
- Tell the story in different ways: Each time you read the book, introduce new vocabulary, emotions, or perspectives, keeping the book new and exciting every time.



SCAN TO READ THE
FULL TEXT!





MILESTONES

0-5 YEARS OLD

Children's brains and bodies are growing rapidly during the first months and years of their lives! During children's earliest years, their "brain architecture" is being built, providing the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health. During this time, positive, loving, responsive care and PLAY supports healthy brain development; children's experiences can shape their development and have lifelong effects. Parents and caregivers have the power to help children get off to a strong start.



How can parents and caregivers help?

Parents and caregivers play a vital role in promoting children's early development! Research shows that some important parenting practices that support healthy child development include:

- Following the child's lead and responding in a predictable way
- Showing warmth and sensitivity
- Having routines and household rules
- Sharing books and talking with children (even before they can respond!)
- Keeping children healthy and safe
- Using appropriate discipline without harshness

Parents can also access tools like Sparkler, which enable them to check in on their children's early growth and development with the Ages & Stages Questionnaires®, a developmental screening tool that provides a snapshot of how the child is doing. Sparkler also helps parents/caregivers monitor and promote early learning and development on an ongoing basis — making each day and moment in the early years count!



What is Learn the Signs Act Early?

"Learn the Signs. Act Early" is a program from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that helps parents and childcare providers learn about healthy early development, monitor children's development, and take action when there is a concern. Learn more in Sparkler's app, where you can find summaries of the milestones.



What is the ASQ?

The Ages and Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ) are series of questions that parents answer to help families, teachers, and pediatricians find out how children's skills (communications, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving, personal social) are developing. Access the ASQ and learn more about screening in Sparkler's app.



	Heart	Words	Mind	Body
0-2 months	<p>Calms down when spoken to or picked up.</p> <p>Looks at your face.</p> <p>Seems happy to see trusted grown-ups.</p>	<p>Makes sounds other than crying.</p> <p>Reacts to loud sounds.</p>	<p>Watches people and toys for several seconds.</p>	<p>Holds head up when on tummy.</p> <p>Moves both arms and both legs.</p> <p>Opens hands briefly.</p>
2-4 months	<p>Chuckles (not yet a full laugh) when you try to make them laugh.</p> <p>Looks at you, moves, or makes sounds to get or keep your attention.</p>	<p>Makes sounds back when you talk.</p> <p>Turns head towards the sound of your voice.</p>	<p>Looks at hands with interest.</p>	<p>Holds head steady without support when being held.</p> <p>Brings hands to mouth.</p> <p>Pushes up onto elbows/forearms when on tummy.</p>
4-6 months	<p>Knows familiar people.</p> <p>Likes to look at self in mirror.</p> <p>Laughs</p>	<p>Takes turns making sounds with you.</p>	<p>Puts things in their mouth to explore them.</p> <p>Reaches to grab a toy they want.</p> <p>Closes lips to show they don't want more food.</p>	<p>Rolls from tummy to back.</p> <p>Pushes up with straight arms when on tummy.</p> <p>Leans on hands to support themselves when sitting.</p>
6-12 months	<p>May be shy or fearful around strangers.</p> <p>Smiles or laughs when you play "peek-a-boo."</p>	<p>Waves "bye-bye"</p> <p>Calls a parent "mama" or "dada" or another special name.</p> <p>Understands "no" (pauses or stops when you say it)</p>	<p>Puts something in a container, like a block in a cup.</p> <p>Looks for things they see you hide, like a toy under a blanket.</p>	<p>Pulls up to stand.</p> <p>Walks, holding on to furniture.</p> <p>Picks things up between thumb and pointer finger, like small bits of food.</p>

**12 months**

Plays games such as “peek-a-boo” and “pat-a-cake”

Waves “bye-bye”
Calls a parent “mama” or “dada” or another special name

Understands “no” (pauses briefly or stops when you say it)

Puts something in a container, like a block in a cup

Looks for things they see you hide, like a toy under a blanket

Pulls up to stand
Walks, holding on to furniture

Drinks from a cup without a lid, as you hold it

Picks things up between thumb and pointer finger, like small bits of food.

18 months

Moves away from you, but looks to make sure you are close by

Points to show you something interesting

Helps you dress them by pushing arms through sleeves or lifting up feet

Tries to say three or more words besides “mama” or “dada”

Follows one-step directions without any gestures, like giving you the toy when you say “Give it to me”

Plays with toys in a simple way, like pushing a toy car

Walks without holding onto anyone or anything

Scribbles

Climbs on and off a couch or chair without help.

24 months

Notices when others are hurt or upset, like pausing or looking sad when someone is crying

Points to things in a book when you ask, like “Where is the bear?”

Says at least two words together, like “More milk”

Tries to use switches, knobs, or buttons on a toy

Plays with more than one toy at the same time, like putting toy food on a toy plate

Kicks a ball

Runs

Walks (not climbs) up a few stairs with or without help

Eats with a spoon.



24 months

Notices when others are hurt or upset, like pausing or looking sad when someone is crying

Points to things in a book when you ask, like “Where is the bear?”

Says at least two words together, like “More milk”

Tries to use switches, knobs, or buttons on a toy

Plays with more than one toy at the same time, like putting toy food on a toy plate

Kicks a ball

Runs

Walks (not climbs) up a few stairs with or without help

Eats with a spoon.

30 months

Plays next to other children and sometimes plays with them

Shows you what she can do by saying, “Look at me!”

Follows simple routines when told, like helping to pick up toys when you say, “It’s clean-up time.”

Says about 50 words

Says two or more words together, with one action word, like “Doggie run”

Names things in a book when you point and ask, “What is this?”

Says words like “I,” “me,” or “we”

Uses things to pretend, like feeding a block to a doll as if it were food

Shows simple problem-solving skills, like standing on a small stool to reach something

Follows two-step instructions like “Put the toy down and close the door.”

Uses hands to twist things, like turning doorknobs or unscrewing lids

Takes some clothes off by himself, like loose pants or an open jacket

Jumps off the ground with both feet

Turns book pages, one at a time, when you read together

3 years

Calms down within 10 minutes after you leave, like at a childcare drop off

Notices other children and joins them to play

Talks with you in conversation using at least two back-and-forth exchanges

Asks “who,” “what,” “where,” or “why” questions

Talks well enough for others to understand, most of the time

Draws a circle, when you show them how

Avoids touching hot objects, like a stove, with a warning

Strings items together, like large beads or macaroni

Puts on some clothes independently, like loose pants or a jacket

Uses a fork



Heart



Words



Mind



Body

4 years

Pretends to be something else during play, like a teacher, superhero, or animal

Asks to go and play with other children

Comforts others who are hurt or sad

Avoids danger, like not jumping from tall heights

Likes to be a "helper"

Uses sentences with four or more words

Says words from a song or story

Talks about at least one thing that happened during the day

Answers simple questions like, "What is a coat for?"

Names a few colors of items

Tells what comes next in a familiar story

Draws a person with three or more body parts

Catches a ball most of the time

Serves themselves food or pours water with adult supervision

Unbuttons some buttons

Holds crayon or pencil between fingers and thumb (not a fist)

5 years

Follows rules or takes turns when playing games with other children

Sings, dances, or acts for you

Does simple chores at home, like matching socks or clearing the table after eating

Tells a story that they heard or made up with at least two events.

Answers simple questions about a book or story after you read it

Keeps a conversation going with more than three back-and-forth exchanges

Uses or recognizes simple rhymes (bat-cat, ball-tall)

Counts to 10

Names some numbers between 1 and 5 when you point to them

Uses words about time, like "yesterday," "tomorrow," "morning," or "night"

Pays attention for 5 to 10 minutes during activities.

Writes some letters in their name

Names some letters when you point to them

Buttons some buttons

Hops on one foot



Supporting Your Child Age 5 and Under

1

Monitor

Play to learn with your child using Sparkler's mobile app and monitor their early development from birth through age 5. Get 2,000+ playtime activity prompts and info on early learning milestones from the CDC.

Sparkler



Use Your Program's Access Code

2

Screen

Use Sparkler to complete the Ages & Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ-3 and ASQ:SE-2) as your child grows up to keep checking in on their development over time and access info on how you can support their healthy early development.



3

Connect

Connect via Sparkler with your local program or provider — which could be a school, family resource center, home visitor, healthcare provider, etc.

If you need a referral, answers, or support, use the app to access a network of support available to families in your area.

4

Access Support

Access info and activities to spark ongoing healthy childhood development (birth through 5) through Sparkler and your local program/provider. Use the app to play and learn and get tips for parents in English, Spanish, Chinese, French, and Arabic.



Questions?

- Ask your program/provider!
- Learn more online at playsparkler.org
- Email us at support@playsparkler.org

