

sparkler

brought to you by



Spark early learning with spring fun!

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

**For CT Families With
Children 5 and Under**

Learn More: playsparkler.org/ct



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 ages 5 and under (1) Use Sparkler to learn about and support child development and (2) Play a special lineup of spring 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. Any Connecticut family can use the Code CT to access support from 211 Child Development care coordinators.

Our Program's Access Code

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.

Learn More: playsparkler.org/CT

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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 Spring activities.



FEATURED ACTIVITY: APPRECIATE THE EARTH

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's take a nature walk to celebrate the Earth.
2. I'll talk to you about all of the natural things that we see, hear, and feel.
3. Do you see the leaves on the trees? Do you hear the birds chirping? Can you feel the wind on your face?

WHY?

Experiencing the world along with children helps them feel comfortable exploring and encourages their natural curiosity.



National Earth Week
April 18-April 24



Try "Appreciate the Earth" for children 0-18 months to practice CURIOSITY and COMPREHENSION.

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PLAY ACTIVITIES



FEATURED ACTIVITY: STOP AND SMELL

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's take a walk and explore nature with our noses!
2. Let's smell flowers, pine trees, herbs, and other plants.
3. Let's think of words to describe what we smell. Do the smells remind you of anything or anyone?



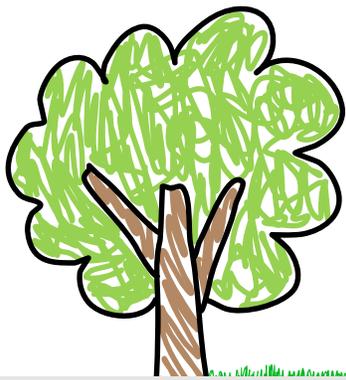
WHY?

Exploring your child's sense of smell helps him/her develop body awareness – which is one important way that children perceive the world!



Try "Stop and Smell" for children 0 months-5 years to build **EXPRESSION** and practice **PERCEPTION**.

PLAY ACTIVITIES



FEATURED ACTIVITY: SPRING FUN

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's read "Spring" in "Frog and Toad are Friends" by Arnold Lobel and count how many ways Frog tries to convince Toad to get out of bed.
2. What do YOU love about spring — the flowers ... having picnics ... playing ball outside? Let's list five reasons we love the spring.
3. Let's write a list or draw each one. Can we think of any more?



WHY?

Counting and making numbered lists helps children learn early math skills.



Try "Spring Fun" for children 4-5 years.

Practice COUNTING AND NUMBERS and build REPRESENTATION.

sparkler PLAY ACTIVITIES

♥ Heart



FEATURED ACTIVITY: PLANTS IN THE GARDEN

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's pretend that you're a gardener!
2. Let's pretend to plant seeds and water them.
3. Look! The seeds are growing into plants. How does it feel to see our seeds grow?

WHY?

Pretend play is a great way for children to understand how others feel.



Try "Plants in the Garden" for children 12 to 36 months to build EMPATHY and IMAGINATION.

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PLAY ACTIVITIES



Mind

FEATURED ACTIVITY: SPRING

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's read "Spring" in "Frog and Toad are Friends" by Arnold Lobel.
2. In the story, Frog is excited to explore the spring season with Toad. What season are WE in?
3. Let's go outside and look for signs of the season! How many seasonal changes can we notice?

WHY?

Keeping one idea in mind – like searching for specific items – helps your child develop focus.



Try "Spring" for children 18m-5 years to practice EXPRESSION and FOCUS.

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PLAY ACTIVITIES

 Body



FEATURED ACTIVITY: PLANT SHAPES

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's go and collect some natural objects: sticks, blades of grass, flowers, acorns, or leaves.
2. Let's use our plant pieces to make a shape on the ground.
3. What shape did we make?

WHY?

Making and naming shapes helps children learn that symbols mean something; this helps your child prepare to read and write!



Try "Plant Shapes" for children
12months -5 years to build
SMALL MUSCLES and
SOUNDS & LETTERS!

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PLAY ACTIVITIES

 Mind

FEATURED ACTIVITY: WE ARE DRUMMERS

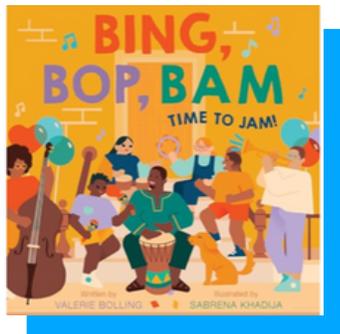
INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's listen to author Valerie Bolling read her story, "Bing, Bop, Bam: Time to Jam."
2. Drums are everywhere! Let's pat the floor to make a drumming sound. Let's pat the table to make a drumming sound.
3. Now let's turn this cup into a drum by stretching a balloon or fabric over the top and attaching it with a rubber band.
4. Let's try it: pat-pat-pat. We made a drum! Now let's sing a song as we play the drum!



WHY?

Turning other surfaces into drums helps your child make connections. Children can make music anywhere!



Try "We Are Drummers" for children 0-5 years to practice CONNECTION-MAKING and build IMAGINATION

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PLAY ACTIVITIES

♥ Heart

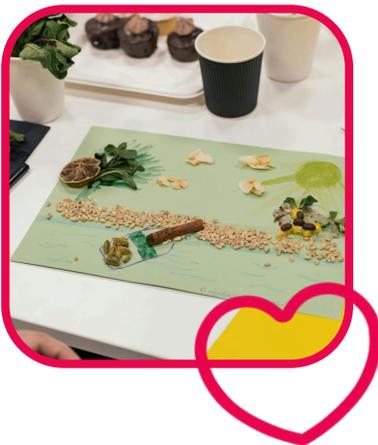
FEATURED ACTIVITY: NATURE COLLAGE

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's use things we find outside to make pictures of ourselves!
2. Let's collect things like leaves, sticks, pebbles, and flowers. What part of your face does a pebble look like? Does my mouth look like a stick?
3. Let's take what we found and glue it to paper to create collages of our faces!

WHY?

Noticing and observing details of our own face and others' faces helps us build our knowledge of who we are and helps us notice the ways all people are different and similar.



Try "Nature Collage" for children 3 to 5 years to build **IDENTITY** and **SMALL MUSCLE**.

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PLAY ACTIVITIES

Words



FEATURED ACTIVITY: PAINT A PICTURE OF NATURE

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's go out and look for nature all around us. We can look at trees and grass, look for animals, or even look at flowers in the store. Let's talk about the colors and shapes that we see. We can take a picture to remember.
2. Back at home, let's paint a picture inspired by what we saw! I'll only offer you paints that are the color of the things that we saw, but you can paint anything that you want!
3. Let's talk about your art! Are the shapes and colors the same as the shapes and colors that we saw in nature?



WHY?

Experimenting with art materials is a great way to engage your child's natural curiosity about the world and the way things work.



Try "Paint Nature" for children
12m-3 years to practice
REPRESENTATION and
SMALL-MUSCLE.



Try "Paint Nature" for children
3-5 years to practice
CONNECTION-MAKING and
REPRESENTATION.

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PLAY ACTIVITIES



Body



FEATURED ACTIVITY: FROM SEED TO FLOWER!

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's pretend to be a seed growing into a sunflower!
2. Can you curl into a tiny sunflower seed planted in the soil? Now, imagine that sun shines and rain falls. What happens? How do you move and grow?
3. You're getting bigger! Can you sprout leaves and a sunflower? Can you stand on one foot like a stem? How will you move in the wind? Turn your flower to face the sun!

WHY?

When children follow verbal directions to move their bodies, they practice balance and gain physical control.



Try "From Seed to Flower" for children 12-24 months to build PERCEPTION and SELF-REGULATION.



Try "From Seed to Flower" for children 24 months-3 years to grow PERCEPTION and SELF-REGULATION!

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PLAY ACTIVITIES



FEATURED ACTIVITY: TWEETY SNACK

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's bring a cereal snack with us on a walk or to the park. Let's look for some hungry birds. Are you hungry, too?
2. Let's share your cereal with the birds. You can toss a handful and watch the birds eat. You can eat some, too!
3. How do you feel after your snack? How do you think the birds feel? Did our snack make them happy?

WHY?

Taking care of other living things – plants, animals, and people – helps your child build empathy.

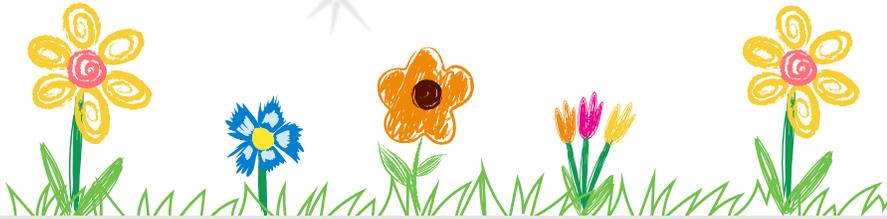


Try "Tweety Snack" for children
0 to 36 months. Build
EMPATHY and SMALL
MUSCLE.

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PLAY ACTIVITIES

 Body



FEATURED ACTIVITY: SPRING SIGNS

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's go outside on a spring scavenger hunt.
2. What signs of spring do you think we'll see outside — Birds chirping? Bees and Butterflies buzzing around? Buds on branches? Green grass? Puddles? Flowers growing? Let's make a list.
3. How many of the items on our list can we find? Can we discover any other signs of spring?

WHY?

Discovering and observing changes in nature inspires children's curiosity. When they observe things, they can begin to ask "What?" and "Why?"



Try "Spring Signs" for children 12-24 months to build BIG MUSCLE and CURIOSITY!



Try "Spring Signs" for children 24 months to 3 years to build BIG MUSCLE and CURIOSITY!

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

SCAN TO READ THE FULL TEXT!



Here is an example:

LEARN ABOUT FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Fine Motor development is about the strength and coordination of the small muscles in our wrists, hands, and fingers. As children grow, their small muscles get stronger and more coordinated, allowing them to grab and shake rattles, wave bye-bye, feed and dress themselves, etc. Eventually, small muscles allow people to draw, write, sew, play the piano, tickle a baby, and more...

When children exercise their “small muscles,” they also learn independence and develop the ability to play with other children.

As children grow, their muscle coordination will progress in stages.

They will start by being able to bring their hands together in front of their tummy, then start to reach for and grab what they want. As they use their hands and fingers more, they will learn to pick up objects with a finger and thumb and how to transfer objects from one hand to another. Between 1 and 2 years old, children become better at stacking blocks, scribbling, and feeding themselves with a spoon. Your child might start to hold crayons like an adult around 3, but many children do not develop this mature tripod grasp until they are 6 or older!

To help your child develop strong fine motor skills, play games and do activities using hands and fingers. Let them pick things up and drop them again. Squeeze, poke, shake, pound, pour, and tear. Stack blocks and push connecting blocks together. Do art projects with scissors, crayons, and paint. String beads or dry pasta. Encourage your child to help dress himself or herself by zipping, snapping, and pulling on. See if your child can use one finger, two fingers, or their whole hand to accomplish different tasks.



FINE MOTOR GOAL

I WILL GIVE MY CHILD A CHANCE TO PLAY WITH HIS OR HER HANDS EVERY DAY. MY CHILD WILL DEVELOP STRONGER FINE MOTOR SKILLS JUST BY USING HIS OR HER FINGERS AND HANDS DURING PLAY!

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.



0-2 months

Calms down when spoken to or picked up.

Looks at your face.

Seems happy to see trusted grown-ups.

Makes sounds other than crying.

Reacts to loud sounds.

Watches people and toys for several seconds.

Holds head up when on tummy.

Moves both arms and both legs.

Opens hands briefly.

2-4 months

Chuckles (not yet a full laugh) when you try to make them laugh.

Looks at you, moves, or makes sounds to get or keep your attention.

Makes sounds back when you talk.

Turns head towards the sound of your voice.

Looks at hands with interest.

Holds head steady without support when being held.

Brings hands to mouth.

Pushes up onto elbows/forearms when on tummy.

4-6 months

Knows familiar people.

Likes to look at self in mirror.

Laughs

Takes turns making sounds with you.

Puts things in their mouth to explore them.

Reaches to grab a toy they want.

Closes lips to show they don't want more food.

Rolls from tummy to back.

Pushes up with straight arms when on tummy.

Leans on hands to support themselves when sitting.



6-12 months

May be shy or fearful around strangers.

Smiles or laughs when you play "peek-a-boo."

Waves "bye-bye"

Calls a parent "mama" or "dada" or another special name.

Understands "no" (pauses 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.

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

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.

 Heart

 Words

 Mind

 Body

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 in Connecticut 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 Mobile App

Available on the **App Store**

GET IT ON **Google Play**

Access Code:
CT

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 with 211 Child Development care coordinators. If you need a referral, answers, or support, use the app to access a network of support available through HMG Connecticut.



4

Access Support

Access info and activities to spark ongoing healthy childhood development (birth through 5) through Sparkler and 211 Child Development. Use the app to play and learn and get tips for parents in English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, and French.



Questions?

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

