

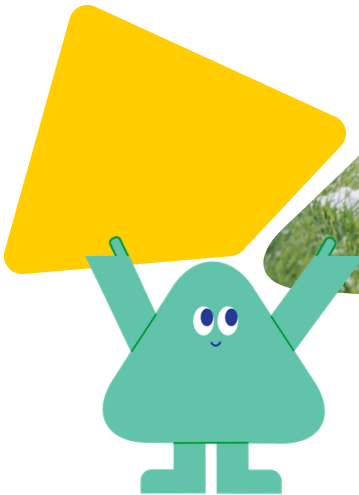
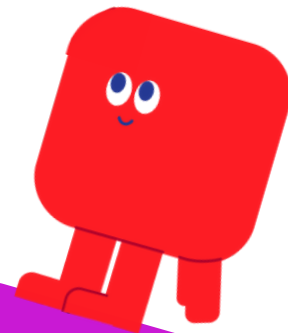
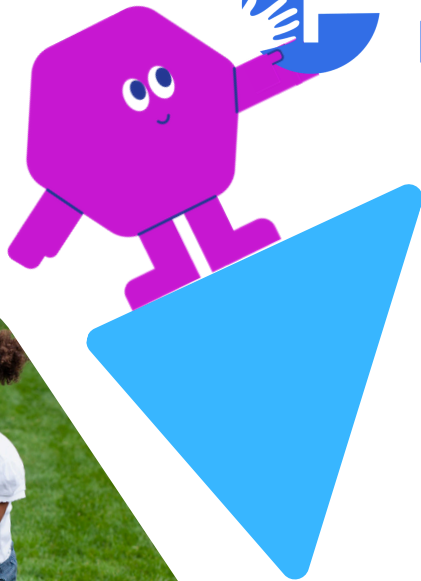


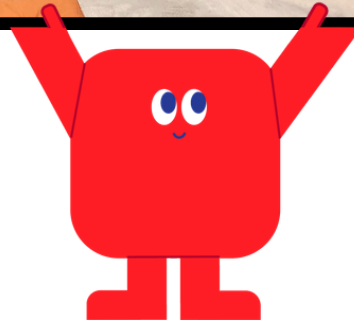
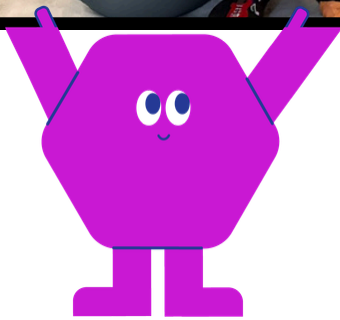
Let's Grow, Connecticut!

Spark early learning! Grow your child's heart, words, mind, and body, and access local Connecticut resources!



CONNECTICUT
Early Childhood





WELCOME TO

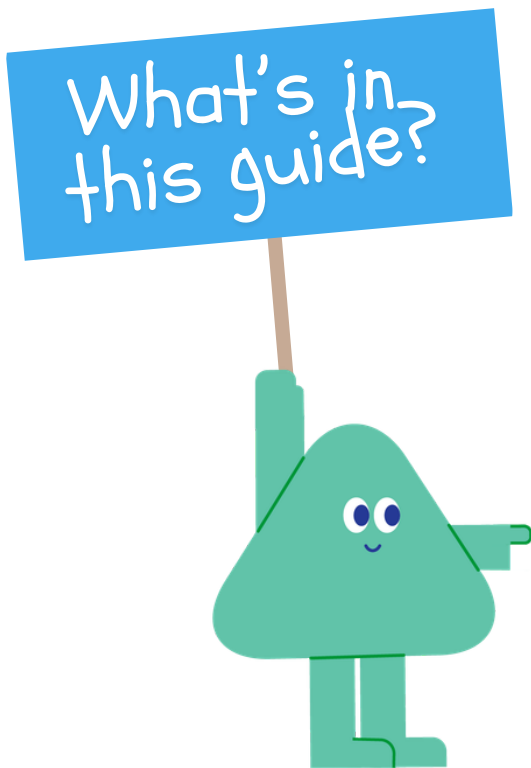


About Connecticut's Department of Early Childhood

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) is a state agency that oversees a network of programs and services that help young children and families thrive. Through partnerships with families, schools, and community-based organizations, OEC helps connect children to quality care, developmental support, and educational opportunities from birth into elementary school.

The OEC supports families through:

- **Birth to Three** – Early intervention services for infants and toddlers
- **Early Care & Education** – Affordable child care and preschool programs
- **Family Support Services** – Home visiting, parenting resources, and developmental support
- **Help Me Grow** – A network of programs across Connecticut that helps children and families find the supports they need (accessed through 211 Child Development at the United Way of Connecticut)
- **Sparkler App** – Free Ages & Stages Questionnaires® to help parents learn about their child's development, play-based activities to support learning, tips for grown-ups, and connections to support
- **Care 4 Kids** – Financial assistance for eligible families needing child care support



Topic	Page
Spark Early Learning: How you can play, learn, and access resources with Sparkler	p. 4
Developmental Milestones: Learn about child development from prenatal through age 5	p. 6
Parenting and Child Development: Overview of tips for grown-ups in Sparkler	p. 9
Play: Overview of play to build early skills in young children	p. 10
Local Resources: Guide to local Connecticut resources for young families	p. 15



Help Your Child Get a Strong Start!

Children learn through play! Sparkler is a mobile app that helps parents with young children (prenatal-5) check on their children's early development and use that information to spark early learning through play. It's currently available in English, Spanish, Chinese, French, and Arabic for iOS and Android, smartphones and tablets. The CT Office of Early Childhood provides Sparkler statewide to families with children 5 and under and to programs serving young children to increase access to developmental screening, monitoring, play, and support.

From the day new parents discover that they are expecting a baby, they have questions: Are they growing and learning as they should be? What can we do today to help my child learn to climb stairs... draw circles... solve problems... read books? Should I be worried?



Know

Use the app to complete the mobile Ages & Stages Questionnaires® to understand your child's development starting at 2 months.



Play

Get inspired to learn together through play with our 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!



Connect

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



Understand and support your child's early learning and development with Sparkler – starting prenatally and through age 5.

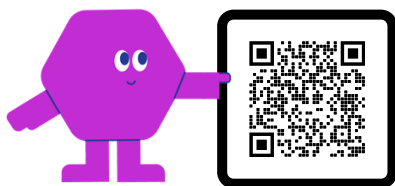
Get Started With

sparkler

1

Download the app.

Scan the QR code below to download the mobile app onto your smartphone or tablet. Once you've installed the app, scan the QR code again to link up with the CT code — which will connect you with the 211 Child Development at the United Way of Connecticut. If you're affiliated with a school, family resource center, or other program, ask them for their unique code to link with them. If you scan YOUR PROGRAM'S UNIQUE CODE, you'll skip right to step 4.



Access Code
Código de acceso
访问代码
CT

2

Open the App. Tap “Create a new account.”

Tap on “Email address” or another method to create your new account. (Skip this step if you scan your program’s unique QR code to link with your program.)

3

Enter your program's access code.

Typing in the access code will connect you with your school or program. (Skip this step if you scanned your program’s unique QR code.)

4

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

Enter your email address and create a password that 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 screenings.

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 other Sparkler engagement in order to offer your family support and resources. You can always add/subtract/edit which organizations you're linked with later.

all about...

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

WATCH THEM GROW

As children grow, they tend to develop skills in the same order and at around the same age as other children. Each new skill is a step — a milestone — in their development.

KEEP TRACK

Knowing what new skills you should expect your child to develop and when helps you know if their development is on track.

USE THE ASQ IN SPARKLER

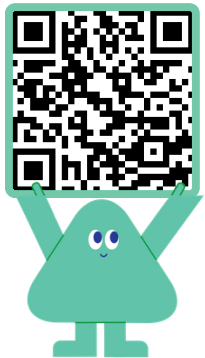
You can use Sparkler to check your child's growth and development (2 months - 60 months) with the Ages & Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ), a series of questionnaires that provides a snapshot of how your child is developing. Scan the QR code to learn more about the ASQ in Sparkler.

LEARN THE SIGNS. ACT EARLY

Learn the Signs, Act Early is a program from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that helps adults learn about and monitor their child's early development. Scan the QR code to learn more about "Learn the Signs" in Sparkler's app.

YOU CAN HELP!

Children learn and practice new skills by playing! Use what you learn from completing the ASQ and developmental milestones to choose play activities that support your child's development. Sparkler has more than 2,000 play activities to choose from — designed by early childhood educators — to help families grow their children's hearts, words, minds, and bodies through age 5.



DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

Sparkler organizes developmental skills into four main categories, or domains:



Here are some of the milestones most children reach in each domain as they grow up. Scan the QR codes to view more milestones for your child's age (this information is from the CDC's Learn the Signs, Act Early program).



2 months	Smiles at you	Makes sounds other than crying	Watches you move	Holds head up when on tummy	
4 months	Smiles to get your attention	Makes sounds like "oooo" and "aahh"	Looks at their hands	Pushes up onto elbows when on tummy	
6 months	Knows familiar people	Takes turns making sounds	Reaches to grab a toy	Rolls from tummy to back	
9 months	Reacts when you leave	Makes sounds like "mamama" and "bababa"	Looks for objects when dropped	Sits without support	
1 year	Plays simple games with you	Says "mama" or "dada" or other special name	Looks for things they see you hide	Walks, holding onto furniture	
15 months	Copies other children while playing	Tries to say one or two words besides "mama" or "dada"	Follows directions given with both a gesture and words	Takes a few steps on his own	

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

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Here are some of the milestones most children reach in each domain as they grow up. Scan the QR codes to view more milestones for your child's age (this information is from the CDC's Learn the Signs, Act Early program).



18 months	Moves away from you, but makes sure you are close by	Follows one-step directions without any gestures	Copies you doing chores	Walks without holding on	
2 years	Notices when others are hurt or upset	Says two-word phrases	Points to things in a book when you ask	Kicks a ball	
30 months	Plays near other children, sometimes with them	Says about 50 words	Uses things to pretend	Jumps with two feet	
3 years	Calms down within 10 mins after you leave	Talks with you in conversation	Draws a circle when you show how	Strings large beads or macaroni	
4 years	Changes behavior based on location	Says sentences with four or more words	Names a few colors of items	Catches a large ball most of the time	
5 years	Follows rules or takes turns when playing games	Retells a story with at least two events	Counts to 10	Hops on one foot	



TIPS FOR GROWN-UPS

Examples from Sparkler's Library

Sparkler's tips for grown-ups (in the KNOW section of the app) help families learn about child development and simple ways that they can help their children. Here are a few examples:

For New Parents



Newborn Sleep



Preparing Siblings
for the New Baby



What to Look for
in Infant Child
Care

Child Development



Learning Math
Through Play



Big Feelings



Separation

Parenting Skills



Bedtime



Managing
Stress



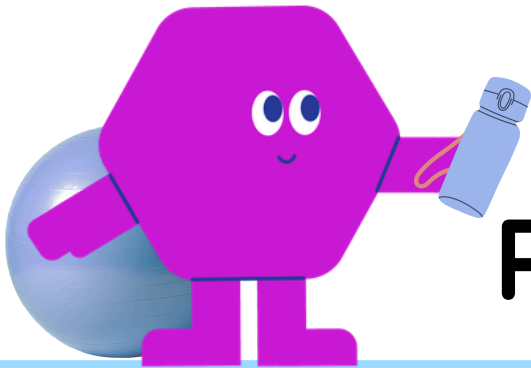
Potty Time!



sparkler

PLAY ACTIVITIES

Playing 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 starting in trimester 1 of pregnancy and going through age 5. On the next few pages, find a few activities to get you started. Scan the QR codes to find more activities in your app!



Prenatal

FEATURED ACTIVITY: SHINE A LIGHT

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. At around 22 weeks, your baby can start to perceive light and dark! Try shining a flashlight on your belly to see if your baby moves.
2. Shine the light on one side and wait a few moments for a response. If you don't feel anything, try the other side or lower or higher on your belly.
3. Your baby might respond by moving, or he/she might be sleeping right now. Try again later! Note: This is not a test of your baby's well'being, so if your baby doesn't respond to the light, it's not a sign of anything wrong! This is just for fun.



WHY?

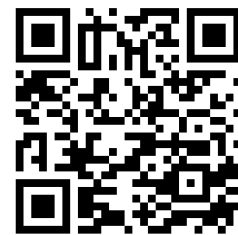
Your baby is starting to perceive the world in more ways now — including touch, vision, and hearing!



Yoga Series: Trimester
3 Yoga



Fill Your Water



Baby Talk



♡ Heart Play to Grow Heart Skills



Scan to play it in the Sparkler app!



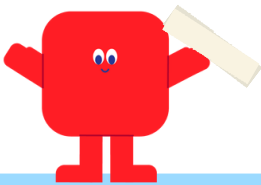
FEATURED ACTIVITY: FEED YOUR WORRY MONSTER

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's choose a paper bag or box and turn it into a Worry Monster! We can use craft supplies to give it eyes, arms, and colors.
2. Now let's give our monster a funny name! Then, on little pieces of paper, we can each write or draw something we feel nervous or worried about, and then feed it into our monster's mouth.
3. We can put your Worry Monster near your bed or in your calming corner. Anytime you're feeling nervous, draw or write about it and feed it to your monster to let that feeling go.

WHY?

This playful activity helps your child recognize, express, and manage their worries in a creative and empowering way, giving them a tool to practice calming strategies on their own.



Scan to play it in the Sparkler app!



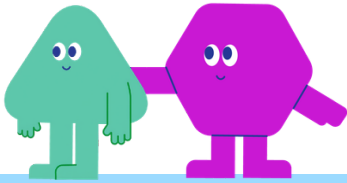
FEATURED ACTIVITY: FILLED WITH GRATITUDE

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's write or draw people, places, and things we're grateful for on small pieces of paper.
2. Now let's say a few words about each one, fold it, and put it in a jar. Let's take turns, adding more and more things we're grateful for into the jar.
3. Is the jar full? What else are we grateful for?

WHY?

Talking and writing/drawing about things we're grateful for helps us to express big ideas in new ways.



Scan to play it in the Sparkler app!



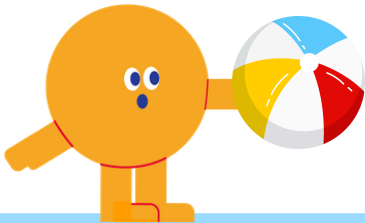
FEATURED ACTIVITY: BACK EASEL

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's pretend that WE are easels! I'm going to draw a shape on your back easel. Can you guess what it is? It was a circle!
2. Now YOU pretend I'm an easel and draw a shape on MY back. I'll guess what it is.
3. Let's try again! How many shapes can each of us guess?

WHY?

Drawing and identifying shapes helps your child learn important early geometry and measurement skills.



Scan to play it in the Sparkler app!



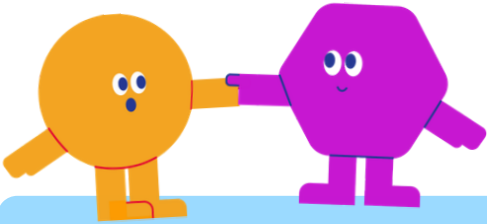
FEATURED ACTIVITY: MATH BALL

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's turn our beach ball into a Math Ball! Write the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 on each color of our beach ball.
2. I'll throw the ball and you catch it. Which numbers do your thumbs land on? Jump that many times!
3. Now throw to me. It's my turn! Let's toss back and forth and continue playing math ball.

WHY?

When your child practices counting, adding, and subtracting, they are getting better at calculating.



Scan to play it in the Sparkler app!



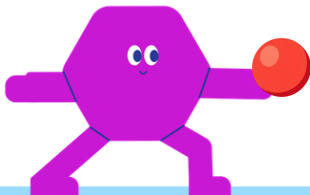
FEATURED ACTIVITY: STROLL IN SYNC

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's go on a walk with our family. Let's all hold hands as we walk to the park, the store, or around the block.
2. Let's take big, slow steps all together. Now let's take quick little steps!
3. How else can we move in sync? Let's try jumping all together!

WHY?

Coordinating movements with others helps your child to practice regulating their body and inhibiting their natural impulses.



Scan to play it in the Sparkler app!



FEATURED ACTIVITY: TUNNEL BOWLING

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's make a tunnel by cutting the bottom off of a paper cup and taping it to the ground.
2. Let's move a couple feet away from the tunnel and take turns rolling a small ball through. We will count each time the ball makes it through!
3. Let's practice: how many times in a row can we roll the ball through the tunnel without missing?

WHY?

Making the tunnel and rolling the ball help your child to build small muscles and hand-eye coordination.



Scan to play it in the Sparkler app!



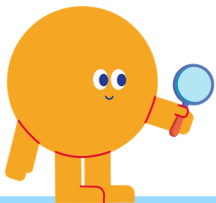
FEATURED ACTIVITY: BACK TO BACK

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Let's sit back to back with the same kind of art materials in front of us. Let's try to draw a bird in a nest that looks the same!
2. Tell me what you're drawing step-by-step, and I'll try to draw the same thing you're drawing.
3. When we're done, let's see how similar or different our drawings look! Let's do it again and I'll be the one to give you directions.

WHY?

When your child describes where they are drawing things on their paper, they have to use position words like "on top," "next to," "underneath," and "beside" as well as words to describe color, size, and shape!



Scan to play it in the Sparkler app!



FEATURED ACTIVITY: TWO TRUTHS

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Tell me two things about you that are true and one thing that isn't true.
2. Then I have to guess which ones are true and which one isn't!
3. Now it's my turn. See if you can guess which one isn't true!

WHY?

When your child plays this game, they practice using words to express their ideas.

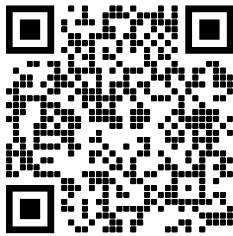
Access Connecticut Resources

Find free local resources to support your child's early learning and development.

Help Me Grow CT



Scan to Learn More
about Help Me Grow
Connecticut



Help Me Grow (HMG CT) helps caregivers ensure every young child has the strongest foundation for a successful start in life. Through a network of care coordinators, community providers and partners, HMG CT offers a safe, welcoming, judgment-free way to explore local programs and resources that support children's growth, play, and learning. HMG CT helps families access:

- **Age-appropriate activities for your child(ren)**
 - You can use Sparkler to find activities in the **play** section of the app or Care Coordinators at 211 can point you toward additional activities
- **Information & materials around recognizing developmental milestones**
 - Families can access information about the **CDC's Learn the Signs. Act Early** and other parenting tips in the Sparkler app. HMG can also share information from Healthy from Day One and more!
- **Developmental screenings to track growth and milestones**
 - Families can use Sparkler to complete Ages & Stages Questionnaires® (ASQs) to learn how their children are growing and developing.
 - Through HMG, screenings are available on paper mailed home or online.
- **Connections to local community-based resources**
 - Find supports near you like play groups, parenting groups, food support, and early learning programs.
- **Tools and guidance that empower families to advocate for their children and community.**

2-1-1 Child Development



2-1-1 Child Development is a specialized program of United Way of Connecticut that supports children's healthy growth and development starting from pregnancy. Call 1-800-505-7000 to speak with care coordinators who can connect you to community programs, developmental resources, parenting supports, health services, and early childhood programs across Connecticut. The service is **free**, confidential, and multilingual. It is available to parents, caregivers, providers, and pregnant individuals looking to learn more, have questions, or have concerns about a child's development, behavior, learning, or well-being. Child Development also serves as an access point for Connecticut programs and services, helping families get connected to the right supports early.

How can families access Help Me Grow or 211 Child Development?

- Call 211 Child Development at **1-800-505-7000** Monday-Friday from **8 AM - 6 PM**. Help is available in any language.
- Or make a referral at <https://cdi.211ct.org/cdireferralform/makereferral>
- Or connect by using the **Sparkler app**.

Free Programs Offered in the State of Connecticut

Connecticut offers many free programs and resources to support families with young children from pregnancy through age 5. Whether you are looking for developmental support, parenting guidance, health services, or early learning resources, these programs are designed to help children grow, learn, and thrive while supporting families every step of the way.



Birth to Three is a program built to help all CT families who have children under age 3 with developmental disabilities or delays (or have a condition that poses a high risk of developing one). Birth to Three can:

- Assess your child's development
- Look for signs of autism (if your child is 16 months or older)
- Create a personalized family support plan for your child
- Connect you with experts who can meet with your family



Preschool Special Education is a program provided to eligible 3, 4, and 5-year-old children with disabilities. Services are based on what the individual child needs to benefit from their education. In Connecticut, special education services are provided by local and regional school districts.



Home Visiting is a statewide program that welcomes families who are expecting a baby or have a young child up to age 5. A home visitor will tailor support and services for your unique family, in the home, community, or virtually. Connecticut offers four different types of home visiting programs that are evidence-based. Each type is designed to meet the unique needs of many families with young children. These include:

- Parents as Teachers: Teaching parents about early childhood
- Child First: Supporting children and families experiencing multiple challenges
- Nurse-Family Partnership: Connecting first-time parents with nurses
- Healthy Families America: Improving family dynamics and child development



Children & Youth with Special Health Care Needs is a program for children from birth through age 21 with chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional conditions. At your local medical home site, you can receive family caregiver support, educational support, respite planning, coordination of medical care, and help with transition services.



Sparkler is proud to partner with the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood to support families with young children across Connecticut. Through Sparkler's free mobile app, families with children prenatal through age 5 can access developmental screenings, playful learning activities, parenting support, and connections to local resources through 211 Child Development and community programs. Sparkler helps families learn, play, grow, and connect — all while supporting healthy early childhood development through everyday interactions and play.

Scan for B23
referral form



Scan for the
centralized
referral form
at 211 Child
Development!



Scan to learn
more



2-1-1 Child Care

211 Child Care is a free, confidential, statewide resource that helps Connecticut families find child care programs that meet their individual needs. Families can search for child care in their community or connect with a Child Care Referral Specialist for personalized assistance. 211 Child Care provides information and referrals for a variety of early childhood and school-age programs, including:

- Licensed child care centers
- Family child care homes
- Nursery and preschool programs
- Before- and after-school care
- Summer programs and camps
- Head Start and School Readiness programs
- Public Pre-K and license-exempt programs
- Other child care and early childhood resources

Child Care Referral Specialists can help families understand their child care options, identify what to look for when choosing a quality program, and connect with additional resources such as Care 4 Kids, developmental supports, and other family services. Families can also use the online Child Care Search Tool to search by location, child's age, type of care, or specific provider.

Cost: Free

Who can use it: Connecticut families seeking child care or early childhood resources

Phone: Dial 2-1-1 or 1-800-505-1000

Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM

211

Child Care

Scan for more information:



Care 4 Kids

The Care 4 Kids program helps low to moderate income families in Connecticut pay for childcare costs. This program is sponsored by the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood. The goal of the Care 4 Kids (C4K) program is to make child care affordable for low to moderate income families in Connecticut. The program is a partnership between the State of Connecticut, the families in the program, and the providers who take care of the children.

Families must:

- Live in Connecticut;
- Be working or attending a temporary family cash assistance (Jobs First) approved education/training activity; GED/high school equivalency, or enrolled in undergraduate studies (associate's or bachelor's degree); and
- Meet the program's income requirements.

Children must:

- Live in Connecticut; and
- Be under age 13, or if the child has special needs, be under age 19.

care4kids
MAKING CHILD CARE AFFORDABLE

Scan for more information:



Diaper Bank

The Diaper Bank of Connecticut helps families and individuals access essential basic-needs products through its Diaper Distribution Network (DDN), a network of community organizations throughout Connecticut. The Diaper Bank supplies products to partner agencies, which then distribute them directly to people in their communities. Families can use the online **DDN Member Directory** to find a participating organization in their area. The directory can be searched by county and by the type of product needed.

Available resources include:

- Infant and toddler diapers
- Period products
- Youth incontinence products
- Adult incontinence products

Families should contact the community partner listed in the directory directly to learn about availability, eligibility requirements, distribution schedules, and how to receive supplies, since requirements may vary by organization.

Cost: Assistance is provided through participating community organizations

Who can use it: CT families and individuals who need help accessing diapers and other basic hygiene supplies

The Diaper Bank Phone: [203-934-7009](tel:203-934-7009)



Scan for more information:



CT Family Resource Centers

Connecticut Family Resource Centers (FRCs) are community-based programs located within public schools and managed in partnership with the Connecticut State Department of Education. FRCs provide integrated, comprehensive support across early childhood development and family wellness, with services that typically include Parents as Teachers (PAT) home visits, child development resources, playgroups, and school-age childcare. Their model is designed to meet families where they are, offering accessible, school-based support that strengthens school readiness and family stability.

Learn more online: www.ctfrc.org/find-your-frc-location-map

Find your local FRC





Additional Resources



Developmental Support

Ages and
Stages
Questionnaires



CDC Learn The
Signs
Act early



Pregnancy
Support



Mental Health Support

Safe
Helpline
(888) 774-2900



American Academy
of Pediatrics: Early
Childhood Brain
Development



Connecticut
Association for Infant
Mental Health



Health & Dental Support

Health Resources
at 211



Mental Health
at 211



CT Dental Health
Partnership



Food & Nutrition Support

Food Resources
from 211



Connecticut
WIC Program



Home Delivery
of Meals



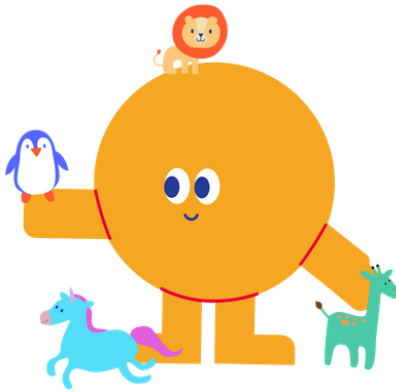
Housing & Utility Support

Housing
Resources at 211



Utility Support
at 211





sparkler



Child Development

 **Help Me Grow**
Connecticut

 **CONNECTICUT**
Early Childhood