

A Families' Guide to Best of All

Therapeutic-Based
Activities for Preschoolers

**best of all (noun) \best of all\
is continual, measurable, celebrated and it never ends.**

It is a daily challenge to do a little better than you did the day before and it's always celebrated.

Possible manifestations: standing just one second longer, reading just one more word, learning just one new number, taking just one more step, never a competition, never completed.

GiGi's
Playhouse™

Down Syndrome Achievement Centers
educate. inspire. believe.



You can unleash your child's potential and we'll help!

Coming to programs at GiGi's Playhouse is your first step – congratulations! The second step is to play an active role in your child's development at GiGi's Playhouse and at home. We'll show you how!

Our goal at GiGi's Playhouse is to celebrate every display of a learner's Best of All! We do this through play-based and experiential learning, from birth through adulthood. For our preschool learners, the learning takes place alongside family members through fun and engaging activities.

GiGi's Playhouse is a place to practice skills and develop behaviors. We understand that it takes time and practice to understand our bodies and our development – and that this is sometimes hard for parents. But we must start building lifelong skills now!

This book is a tool for you! Continue learning at home, with the variety of play-based activities included in this book. Share this book with grandparents, babysitters and anyone who works with your child!

With your dedication and GiGi's Playhouse programs, your child will

- **Increase fine motor skills**, with a focus on coordination, self-care skills and visual motor skills;
- **Increase gross motor skills**, with a focus on general strengthening, balance and navigating obstacles;
- **Increase language development**, with a focus exposure to language, oral motor development and following direction;
- **Increase social skills**, with a focus on eye contact, imaginary play and simple interactions with peers;
- **Receive academic support in our tutoring programs**, with a focus on the introduction of math and/or literacy concepts; and
- Achieve his or her Best of All!



Build Best of All during programs at GiGi's Playhouse.

It is so important for family members to participate in programs while at the Playhouse. Your child is watching you and all adults - model the behavior that you want to see in your child!

Here's what you can do -

- Encourage independence! Assist or coach your child through the activity, but do not complete the activity for him or her. He or she can do it – allow your child to struggle a bit, as this is learning in action!
- Set high expectations for your child. Push him or her to do just a little more each session, such as participate in circle time a bit longer or focus on an activity a bit longer each time you attend.
- Attend programs regularly. Consistency is so important for your child to grow and develop. Exposure to social interactions is key!
- Redirect your child back to the activity if distracted. This will help build his or her ability to attend.
- Model appropriate behavior, such as sit on the carpet during circle time, sing along with the group and practice the sign language.
- Use hand-over-hand techniques when needed.
- Expose your child to language as often as possible. Once the program is over, spend the car ride home talking about the activities, friends and asking question.
- Frame your statements to say what you want your child to do. For example, say “please walk” rather than “don’t run”. Your child may only hear the word “run”!
- Observe your child during meal time to ensure that he or she is using this time for skill development in the areas of feeding, social skills and self-help skills. Encourage your child to wash hands, use utensils, wipe his or her mouth and throw away trash.
- Use time during programs to connect and converse with other families. These families will become your rocks!
- Pay special attention to the activities during the program and continue them at home – use the sign language, read a book about the theme and practice number recognition.
- If appropriate, implement strategies from ongoing private therapists to optimize techniques when your child is performing a targeted skill.
- Encourage your child to achieve his or her Best of All by celebrating accomplishments!

Tips & Tools for Best of All at Home

We've provided a number of take home activities that are easy, take little time and are purposeful. Build these activities into your everyday life and make them fun. The growth that you'll see will be amazing!

Build Fine Motor Skills at Home

Dressing, grasping, writing and eating are foundational skills that develop during the preschool age. The great part of growing fine motor skills is that they can be practiced through play – as a family member, it's your role to set up a learning environment and encourage play, which can be as simple as it sounds!

Fine motor skills increase your child's ability to interact with his or her environment by using his or her hands to manipulate and move objects in a controlled manner. During this age, your child is working towards gains in stability, bilateral coordination, sensation, dexterity, self-help skills, visual motor skills and exploring leisure activities. Again, this all is done through exploration and play! Have fun with the following activities at home.

Tips and activities to promote fine motor skills:

- Build play into your regular routine. When you are in the kitchen, set up a cooking station for your child on the floor by giving him or her a few pots, tongs and spatulas! Have your child help you fold laundry—washcloths and dish towels are the perfect size for little hands, and matching socks by color, pattern is learning at its best.
- Utilize bath time! Use craft foam or bath crayons to create murals on the wall, squeeze out sponges, eye droppers or turkey basters and play with measuring cups.
- Play with anything that will snap, stack or fit together – Duplos, pop-apart beads, puzzles, building blocks, measuring cups and even Tupperware.
- Allow your child to get messy – playdough, sand, shaving cream and finger paint all encourage texture exploration and creativity. Add tools such as rolling pins, paint brushes, cotton swabs and more to further develop gripping and grasping.
- Sing action songs throughout the day. These are quick to sing, packed with action and can be done in the car or while waiting in line at the grocery store. Examples include Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes, Itsy Bitsy Spider and Simon Says.

- Start a band! Explore sounds and textures while playing with drums, cymbals, guitars or some simple pots and pans.
- Playing dress up is a great way to foster independence and build fine motor skills. Introduce scarves, hats, capes, pullover shirts, zippers and large buttons. Give your child a bag to store them.
- Build routines, keep them consistent and talk about them as they are being executed! For example: we get dressed after breakfast each day and brush teeth right after bath. Providing a visual schedule can help your child stay focused and on track.
- Incorporate sign language into your daily life and be consistent with it! Even if your child is verbal, sign language is still a great tool to help him or her communicate.

Visual motor skills refer to the development of hand-eye coordination, which will lead to writing, catching and cutting.

Tips and activities to promote visual motor skills:

- Set time aside each day for your child to play with lines and simple strokes – crayons, markers, finger paint or games of tic-tac-toe and dot-to-dot are perfect. Draw pictures with railroad tracks or picket fences. These simple strokes will start to develop into longer and more complex lines. Carry simple art supplies, such as a small pad of paper, crayons and stickers, in a child-sized backpack for your child to use whenever he or she has a free moment.
- Practice holding scissors, opening and closing them and then introduce paper for child to snip.
- Use cut pieces of paper and a glue stick to make a collage or simple picture.
- Match and sort everything – introduce colors, sizes and shapes. Match shoes, colored socks and silverware. Ask questions about sizes, such as “which is bigger?” or “which is smaller?”
- Play with toys that encourage placement and shapes, such as large-piece puzzles, pop up toys, stacking blocks and rings. Be sure to include the verbal interactions and use terms such as next to, under, over, behind, etc. while playing.
- Keep a small ball or a bean bag with you at all times, as this can be used for so many things, such as squeezing, rolling or throwing.

Build Gross Motor Skills at Home

Watch out world - your child will be ready to move and groove anytime, if he or she isn't already! Gross motor skills increase your child's ability to move around independently and safely across a variety of environments. During the preschool ages, children are working towards walking, running, jumping, balancing and navigating a variety of environments including your home, preschool, the park and in the community. Moving around allows your child to explore the world on his or her own terms. Your child will learn SO much by this exploration, so encourage curiosity!

Walking is such an exciting skill to achieve, both for children and parents! Developing the strength, balance and coordination for independent walking takes lots of practice and repetition. Keep walking fun, positive and motivating! Celebrate each small gain, whether it is taking one more step independently or choosing to attempt walking rather than crawling.

Tips and activities to encourage walking skills:

- Allow plenty of practice to walk with support. Walk while pushing objects. Use a push toy to walk to the mailbox, push the chairs in after dinner or push the laundry basket to the bedroom.
- When you walk holding your child's hands, position his or her arms so that they are in front of your child at approximately chest level. This will help engage the abdominal muscles for balance. Holding hands above the head causes the back to arch, which results in poor use of the core and balance. When your child can walk holding two hands, progress to walking with one hand held.
- When your child is ready to take independent steps, begin by placing them only 1-2 steps away from you or the couch. When they are brave enough to try those first few steps all by themselves, CELEBRATE!
- Practice taking just 1-2 steps until your child is very confident! Move a small activity table just two steps away. Sit on the floor and have your child take two steps to you for a giant bear hug. Slowly increase the distance. Always make it positive and fun!
- Create play stations around the room to encourage spontaneous walking – place toys on the couch, coffee table or ottoman. Make sure they are all a few feet away from each other so that your child can take a few steps between each station.
- Help your child think of themselves as a walker instead of a crawler. Use walking as part of your daily routine. Walk into story time, at the grocery store, to their chair for breakfast or to throw away trash Your child can walk independently or with assistance by holding your hand.

Running is a natural extension of fast walking. As your child moves faster, he or she will achieve the “flight” phase of running, in which both feet are off of the surface at the same time. This is the hallmark of running and is what differentiates it from fast walking. Once your child is running, put on your own sneakers and get on the move together!

Tips and activities to encourage running skills:

- Use simple verbal cues that your child can associate with running, such as “Ready, Set, Go”, “Run fast”, or “Go, Go, Go”. Be sure to include the “Stop!” phase of running, too.
- Play games to encourage moving faster. Run races, play chase, play tag, kick a ball and run after it. Run just slightly in front of your child and encourage them to “get you”!
- Run downhill. Running downhill will naturally increase your child’s speed. Some children will feel nervous with this activity as they have to control their speed without losing their balance. Start with a very small hill/ramp and progress to a larger hill as your child feels confident.
- Incorporate running into your daily routine. Run to the corner on your way to school, run to the mailbox, run while playing fetch with the family dog, etc. Find ways to move throughout your day by running.
- To build up your child’s endurance to run longer distances, set a “finish line”, such as a tree across the field or the swings at the park. You can tailor the distance to your child’s level, and over time, increase the distance to encourage him or her to go just a little farther.

Jumping requires your child to master both bending and straightening his or her legs with enough force and power to produce “lift-off” and adequate balance and control to land on his or her feet. Many children will begin by bouncing and jumping on a trampoline or bouncy surface, such as a mattress before jumping on the floor.

Tips and activities to encourage jumping skills:

- Bounce on a small mini-trampoline with a handle or on a mattress with support. At first, touch behind his or her knee to encourage the knee to bend. Another option is to apply downward pressure at his or her hips, which will produce power to his or her feet.
- Model jumping in slow motion using the verbal cues of “bend and jump”. As you bend your knees to prepare to jump, say “bend”. As you explode upward to jump, say “jump”. These words paired with the actions will help your child understand the components of jumping.
- When your child is first learning to jump, he or she can practice without support and while holding your hand. Holding your hand will help them feel secure if they are a bit nervous and will give a little extra support for balance.

- Make jumping fun – be a kangaroo, a bunny or a frog! Sing action songs that incorporate jumping such as 5 Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed or If You Are Happy and You Know It (jump up and down). Play games such as Jump the River or Follow the Leader.
- Incorporate jumping into your daily routine. Jump over the crack in the sidewalk when you walk into preschool, have your entire family jump to the dinner table or jump off the curb when you come out of the store.
- When your child is able to jump on flat surfaces, you can progress to jumping forward, jumping off of steps or raised surfaces, jumping over objects and eventually jumping up onto raised surfaces.

Balancing helps children move easily and comfortably in everyday situations. For example, a child needs balance to pick up one foot and kick a ball to play soccer or to walk up the stairs. Developing balance will help strengthen your child’s feet, hips and core. Balance skills will begin by using a wider base of support. As balance improves, practice with a narrower base of support or standing on one foot.

Tips and activities to encourage balance skills:

- Work on balancing on one foot by kicking balls, stepping over objects of different heights and stomping on fun surfaces. Stomping on bubble wrap is a great activity that most kids love and it requires force and balance to stomp hard enough to pop the bubbles.
- Play activities that require picking up one foot. Fun songs include Hokey Pokey and Sticky Bubble Gum. Catch bubbles on a bubble wand and hold it up for your child to pop it with his or her feet. Put stickers on his or her shoes and lift one foot to get the sticker.
- At the park or in a parking lot, hold your child’s hand while she walks on concrete parking markers or on the curb. Play games to see who can stand on the curb in a tandem pattern (one foot in front of the other) the longest. Stand on the imaginary bridge (balance beam) to go fishing with a magnetic fishing game or “walk the plank” like a pirate.
- To create a balance beam at home, simply purchase a board at your local hardware store. The exact width is not crucial (although not narrower than 4 inches). You want one board that is wider (7-10 inches) and one board that is narrower (a 2x4 works great!). Not only can you use these boards as balance beams, you can also practice stepping over them, create inclines or declines and so much more. Be creative!
- Use the GiGi’s balancing line to balance a little longer each day! Stand on one foot, touch your toes and raise your hands above your head. Once you are ready, use multiple balance lines to create a beam to walk on!

Navigating Obstacles: As soon as your child begins walking, he or she will begin to encounter obstacles, including a transition from carpet to hardwood flooring, a curb in front of the grocery store, a swinging bridge at the local park or the stairs in your home. Navigating obstacles will further strengthen the feet, legs and core, as well as improve balance and coordination.

Tips and activities to encourage navigating obstacles:

- Expose your child to a variety of surface textures - tile, wood, carpet, grass, sidewalks, woodchips, sand, mats and dirt.
- When your child approaches an obstacle, he or she will likely want to climb or crawl over it. Initially, this is OK! Climbing or crawling on an obstacle allows your child to use all of his senses to learn about the obstacle. After having a chance to test the obstacle by climbing or crawling, encourage him to walk.
- Be positive and encouraging! Every child who is learning to walk and navigate obstacles will stumble and fall. Most of the time, your child will be fine, but simply startled by their fall. They will look to you for reassurance. A simple statement, such as “Uh, oh, you fell. Let’s get back up.” said in a positive tone with a smile will help your child learn that falling is okay.
- Make obstacle courses at home on a rainy day or in your yard. Use couch cushions, pool noodles and jump ropes to step over, step up and step down.
- Some children will need help noticing obstacles in their environment. If you notice that your child frequently trips over obstacles, begin to point out the obstacle as you approach it. For example, “I see a step. Let’s step up.”
- When navigating obstacles, your child will need to gauge whether to change his or her speed. Most of the time, your child will need to slow down, or even stop prior to navigating the obstacle. Again, you can model this skill using simple language, such as “stop at the edge and step down.” Some children need help slowing or stopping their movement. Hold your child’s hand or stand in front of him or her as they navigate the obstacle. This will set a limit on their speed.

Build Social Skills at Home

Many relationships are in your child’s future! The foundation of building social skills starts at a young age through eye contact, imaginary play and simple interactions with peers. Many children start playing with peers in a parallel state, which means that they are playing “with” another child by simply sitting next to him and this will evolve to more interactive play.

Eye contact: Eye contact is an important foundation for communication, development and attending skills. Eye contact sends information to your communicative partner

and demonstrates listening. It also promotes learning when the child is looking and listening to the parent, teacher or friend.

Tips and activities to promote eye contact:

- Encourage your child to look at the person speaking by simply coaching him or her to do so.
- Sign language can be incorporated by signing “look” during an activity when your child becomes distracted.
- React! When your child makes eye contact with you, respond with an exaggerated facial expression. This will encourage your child to maintain eye contact for a short period of time.
- Make silly faces in a mirror or through games, such as Simon Says.
- Make animal or character masks that have large cutouts to look through.
- Always look your child in the eye when speaking to them or when they are speaking to you. You might need to bend or squat down to their level in order to facilitate this action.
- When your child asks for something, make sure they look directly at you when asking and you look directly at them when giving it to them.
- Celebrate your child when he or she makes direct eye contact.

Imaginary Play: Children learn through experiences! Imaginary play encourages creativity, problem solving and gives a child practice for real-life experiences. Imaginary play also aids in learning many vital social and emotional skills.

Tips and activities to encourage imaginary play:

- Model the behavior or play you want your child to practice- cuddle with a doll, wrap it in a blanket, change its diaper and give the doll a bath.
- Allow your child to help you with chores! Give your child a small broom to help sweep the floor, ask him or her to dry the dishes, and allow him or her to feed the dog.
- Use play food and utensils to make a meal and don’t forget to clean up using a small bin to “wash” the dishes.
- Build forts and hideaways using large boxes and sheets. Include costumes, props and decorations for a full imaginary experience. Ask your child to share details about the scene and storyline.
- Use puppets and stuffed animals to re-create stories from your child’s favorite books.
- Introduce stories in which your child creates characters, setting or theme. For example, “Let’s tell our own story today. Who should it be about?”

Simple Interactions with Peers: Preschool aged children are usually engaged in parallel play (playing side by side without many interactions) and will be learning to interact with their peers through play and role modeling of parents and siblings.

Tips and activities to encourage simple interactions with peers:

- When playing with your child, practice turn taking, cooperation and choice making. Acknowledge the times your child chooses an activity and the times that you or others choose an activity. For instance, have your child choose the first activity and state “you choose the first game, but I will choose the next one.”
- If a group of children are playing, have one less item than what is needed in order to encourage sharing, such as 3 bottles of glue for 4 kids or two dress-up skirts for 3 kids.
- Play games that encourage turn-taking, such as playing on a simple obstacle course, going down a slide, or swinging on a swing, while one swings and the other pushes.
- Create a group activity, such as making a pretend meal or playing house, and encourage each child to have an active role.

Build Language Development at Home

Language increase your child’s ability to get his or her wants and needs met and successfully interact with the environment. During the preschool ages, many children with Down syndrome are working towards developing a larger receptive and expressive vocabulary, beginning to “chain” words together, ask questions and interact with others.

Exposure to Language: Language learning takes place within the everyday interactions young children have with family and, in time, peers. These interactions should be fun and geared toward the current level of the child. If the family members are using language that is too high for the current language level of the child, it is more difficult for the child to learn and benefit from the language interaction. The language should be relevant and appropriate to your child so he can use it to build upon what he currently knows. One of the biggest challenges for families is to keep their language level low, just slightly higher than their child’s current language level. If this strategy is used consistently throughout the daily interactions you have with your child, the child’s language will continue to grow. An example of this technique is:

The child says, “Daddy car.” The parent responds, “Daddy’s blue car.”

The child says, “He go get ball.” The parent responds, “He will go get the ball.”



Tips and activities to encourage language exposure:

- Encourage and respond to all forms of language, both verbal and nonverbal. Interacting should be FUN!
- Children who initiate frequently and engage with others create an ideal condition for their own language learning. You have many daily opportunities to label, describe and comment about ongoing activities in your child's day. This is language learning at its best!
- Observe: this means pay close attention to your child so you know what he or she is interested in or what he or she is trying to communicate. Many young children communicate in subtle ways. An example of this is:
 - Jamie sat on the floor with her mother as she pushed a toy horse across the floor while looking at her mother several times. As Jamie looked at her mother she was waiting for a reaction. Seize the moment to use language! This mother should respond with a horse sound or a comment such as "big, brown horse".
- Wait time is a powerful tool because it gives the child an opportunity to initiate and it also gives time to respond to questions and requests, which builds language. Studies of adult-child interactions have shown that adults give children approximately one second to respond to questions or comments. After one second, the adult repeats, rephrases the question, comments or provides the answer. This approach deprives the child of important language learning opportunities. Ask one question at a time and allow time for your child to respond! Count to 10, if needed, before prompting again.
- Listen! This increases the likelihood the child will use more language to interact with you.

Oral motor development: Muscle tone significantly impacts both the breath support and ability to develop movement needed for speech intelligibility. Low muscle tone affects the ability of the cheeks, lips, jaw, tongue and soft palate to move independently and simultaneously. These oral motor skills are very important for the production of precise speech sound development and require core strength as the foundation.

Feeding development: A child's oral motor development may also impact a child's ability to eat. It is important to help your child develop his or her range of motion in tongue movement, strong chewing ability, jaw strength and stabilization and reduce/eliminate any forward tongue posture. These oral motor issues may not only impact the child's feeding and nutritional intake, but may also impact the child's ability to produce accurate and precise speech sound development.

Tips and activities to help with oral motor and feeding development:

- Use an electric toothbrush or Z-vibe to normalize oral sensation within your child's mouth. Hyposensitive children (with low oral tone) have little to no

awareness of what is going on inside their mouth, which may result in difficulty in awareness of taste, temperatures and textures. By activating your child's senses within his or her mouth, his or her awareness will increase.

- Strengthen your child's lips by practicing sounds, such as "oooo", "eeee", "oo-ee". Say 'puh' and pop the sound with your lips. Puff out the lips while keeping your lips sealed. Purse the lips to make a kiss. Blow bubbles, whistles, kazoos or horns. Drink through a straw with lips pursed around the straw and the tongue placed behind the teeth.
- Strengthen your child's tongue with sounds and movements, such as "lalalalalal" without moving the jaw up and down. Try a tongue click or pop. Place the tongue on the roof of the mouth and hold for ten seconds.
- Use straws to suck up liquid or thickened liquid like yogurt or applesauce, while keeping the tongue retracted (pulled back) and lips pursed. Puff out cheeks and then suck the cheeks in. These movements will all strengthen your child's cheeks.
- Use a mirror and make funny faces and ask your child to do the same.

Following directions: is an important receptive language skill and should be encouraged from a very young age. By working on this skill in small steps, the child begins to strengthen his or her ability to follow directions and comprehend what is asked and expected both at home and school.

Tips and activities to encourage direction following:

- Start by giving the child a simple one-step directive, such as "give me the book" or "give me your cup".
- Slowly increase this directive to include more common objects. Move to actions such as "clap your hands" or "touch your nose". The game Simon Says is great for listening and following directions. Use hand-over-hand if your child is having difficulty with the directive. Praise the child as he or she moves to successful completion by saying "good touching your nose" or "great job putting the blocks away".
- From one-step directions, move to two-step related directions such as "get your coat and go to the door" and "pick up the doll and hand her to me".
- When two-step related directives have been met with success, move to two-step unrelated directives such as, "put your book on the table and get you coat" or "finish your cookie and then brush your teeth".
- Remember to reinforce every step the child takes in learning these skills. Many children will need assistance in learning these skills and may require the parent walking them through the directive initially. This encouragement will shape the behavior and lead to further development!

Glossary

Co-contraction: the action of completely stiffening one part of the body by contracting muscles on both sides of a joint

Dexterity: accurate and efficient hand movements for function

Digital palmer grasp: a grasp used to hold a pencil or tool, in which the handle is stabilized in the palm, while the thumb, second and third fingers extend to the end; the second stage of grasp development

Expressive language: the ability to put thoughts into words and sentences in a way that makes sense and is grammatically accurate

Fine motor skills: the small movements of the body that use the small muscles of the fingers, toes, wrists, lips and tongue

Gross motor skills: the large movements of the body including rolling, sitting, crawling, standing, walking, running, and jumping

Hyperextension: “locking” a joint by over-extending it, using the skeletal stability rather than muscle control

Hypotonia: the condition in which muscles don't have the normal amount of tone, or contraction, so they appear loose or floppy

Ligamentous laxity: Ligaments are connective tissue that help support our joints. Ligamentous laxity, which is common in people with low muscle tone, results in increased mobility and possibly decreased stability around the joints

Muscle power: the ability to contract a muscle for a quick or explosive movement

Muscle strength: the ability to contract a muscle and generate force

Palmer grasp: a grasp in which the utensil or pencil is held firmly in the palm by all the fingers and thumb; the first stage of grasp development.

Pincer grasp: the thumb and first finger come together to pick up small objects

Pronation: When related to fine motor skills, it is the normal resting position of the forearms and hands (palms down). When related to gross motor skills, it is when the foot and/or ankle roll inwards, placing weight on the inside of the foot.

Prone: laying on one's stomach

Quadruped: positioned on one's hands and knees

Receptive language: what we understand and comprehend, such as following directions and understanding a story that was read

Sensory Integration: the neurological process that organizes and integrates sensations from the body and the environment in order to make an adaptive response

Speech: the verbal ability to make the sounds that become words, the physical act of talking.
Speech consists of articulation (how speech sounds are made), voice (the use of the vocal folds and breathing to support speech) and fluency (the rhythm of speech)

Supination: When related to fine motor skills, it is the rotating of the wrist to turn the forearm and the palm up. When related to gross motor skills, it is the rolling outward of the foot and ankle.

Supine: laying on one's back

Visual motor: refers to activities in which the eyes guide hand movements

Wide base of support: positioning the body part, typically the arms or legs, spread wide apart.



Resource List

Suggested Books:

Activities for Gross Motor Skills Development Early Childhood by Jodene Smith

Early Communication Skills for Children with Down Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals by Libby Kumin

Excell: Experiences in Context for Early Language Learning by Catherine B. Raack

Fine Motor Skills for Children With Down Syndrome: A Guide for Parents And Professionals: Third Edition by Maryanne Bruni

Gross Motor Skills for Children With Down Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals: Second Edition by Patricia C. Winders

It Takes Two To Talk: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children Communicate by Ayala Manolson

Learning Language and Loving It: A Guide to Promoting Children's Social, Language and Literacy Development by Elaine Weitzman and Janice Greenberg

Sign With Your Baby: How to Communicate With Infants Before They Can Speak by Dr. Joseph Garcia

Suggested Websites:

ARK Therapeutic Services: www.arktherapeutic.com

A leading manufacturer of innovative therapy tools and special needs products.

Beyond Basic Play: <https://beyondbasicplay.wordpress.com/>

Blog by a pediatric physical therapist with tips, tricks and more to promote movement.

Beyond Play: www.beyondplay.com

A catalog and website provide products for early childhood and special needs children.

Playing with Words 365: www.playingwithwords365.com

Blog by a speech language pathologist with to promote language development.

The Inspired Treehouse: www.theinspiredtreehouse.com

Blog by pediatric occupational and physical therapists that promote development and wellness.

The Therapy Street: <http://therapystreetforkids.com/>

An extensive library of fine motor development activities.

Woodbine House: <http://www.woodbinehouse.com/Down-Syndrome.29.0.0.2.htm>

A continued list of books and resources about Down syndrome.

Gift List for 3-5 Year Olds

- Cups, pails, and shovels
- Play kitchen with play food & pots or workbench with play tools
- Bean bags and balls of all sizes
- Blocks, Duplos, or Legos
- Snap apart beads
- Bristle block
- Peg boards
- Musical instruments, especially ones requiring both hands to play
- Play dough and accessories
- Finger paint
- Sand art
- Stuffed toys that vibrate when squeezed
- Play tent
- Tactile mats
- "Touch and Feel" books, board books, pop up books and flap books
- Puppets
- Dress up clothes
- Crayons, washable markers, pens, pencils, and chalk
- Simple coloring books, blank paper, construction paper, white glue and glue sticks
- Child sized scissors
- Stickers with simple shapes
- Magna Doodle
- Mr. Potato Head
- Ker-plunk game
- Connect 4 games
- Slinky
- Frisbee
- Pretend play toys, such as farm sets, doll houses, dolls and accessories
- Cars, trucks, planes and trains
- Tricycle or Strider Bike
- 2 or 3 wheeled scooter (ride standing up)
- 4 wheeled "gym-class" scooter (ride sitting down)
- Mini-trampoline with handle
- Hippy-hop ball with handle
- Tilt board or balance board
- Balance beam
- Jump ropes
- Yoga Pretzel cards
- EZ steppers/monster stompers
- Outdoor play equipment for climbing
- Parachute
- Tunnel
- Play telephones
- Music CDs with preschool appropriate songs

About the Authors

GiGi's Playhouse thanks our Therapeutic Excellence Committee!

Lyndsey Menning is a physical therapist working in the Northwest Suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. She completed her undergraduate degree in kinesiology and exercise physiology at the University of Wisconsin and her Masters degree in physical therapy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has spent the last 13 years working in Early Intervention and private practice. She specializes in treating the birth to age eight population, serving children with a wide range of developmental delays and disabilities, including many children with Down syndrome. She enjoys bringing her clinical expertise into the home setting to make it accessible and practical for families in the early years of their child's development.

Chris Newlon has served on the Board of Managers for GiGi's Playhouse McHenry County for the past 6 years in a variety of roles. She is also a public speaker and outreach specialist for the National Association for Down Syndrome, with a focus in schools and hospitals. Chris worked in Adolescent Psychiatry and with people with Eating Disorders as a licensed OT in Ohio and Illinois. She is the mother of five children, ages 12 to 28, the youngest of whom has Down syndrome.

Lora White is a pediatric speech and language pathologist in private practice in the Northwest Suburbs of Illinois. She has spent the last 35 years working with children with developmental disabilities and their families. Lora has extensive training in oral motor/ feeding issues and the communication development of children. Her practice consists of many children with Down syndrome.

Kenzi Huelskoetter has her Type 03 Teaching License and has spent all of her career in educational and recreational program management.

Daniell Bargstadt is the National Programs Manager at GiGi's Playhouse. She conducts research and development to grow our programs, enhances program materials, and provides training, support and guidance to program staff and volunteers. Daniell has been with GiGi's for over 12 years, as a founder, a board President, a local program coordinator, and now a member of the national staff. On the personal side, she's the mother of 5 children, the youngest of which is Olivia, a teenager with Down syndrome shown at left. You can reach Daniell at dbargstadt@gigisplayhouse.org, or by submitting a Zen Desk ticket in the category of Programs. Daniell is honored to have worked so closely with our team of experts to complete this project!

List of References

A special thanks to the authors below who shared their research and books with the world. We've used their learnings to help us create this book for GiGi's Playhouse.

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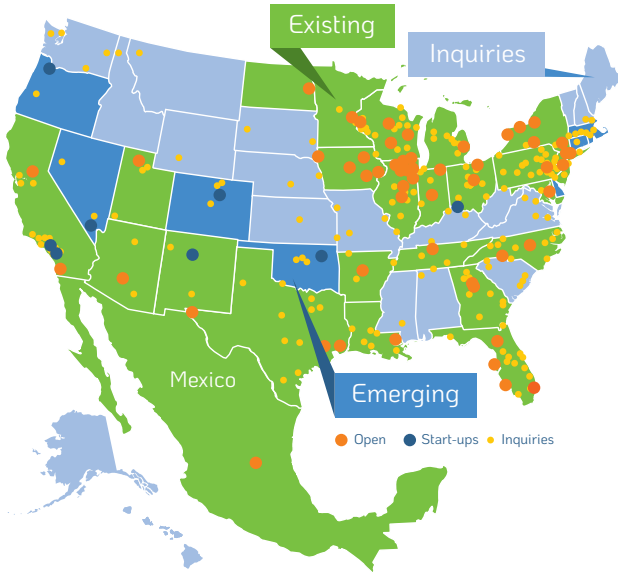
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Disclaimer: Please note that the activities and exercises within this book should not replace therapeutic intervention. It is best to consult your pediatrician, therapist or speech and language pathologist who is trained to individualize to the needs of your child. Their guidance will be important for successful development.



GiGi's Playhouse™

Down Syndrome Achievement Centers
educate. inspire. believe.

Locations across North America, including Mexico, and still growing!
Check our website for a location near you!
gigisplayhouse.org

