

# Growing Together



Because My First Years Last Forever

Volume 1 Issue 15

**The Preschool Years:  
Four and a Half to Five**

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Dear Parents,

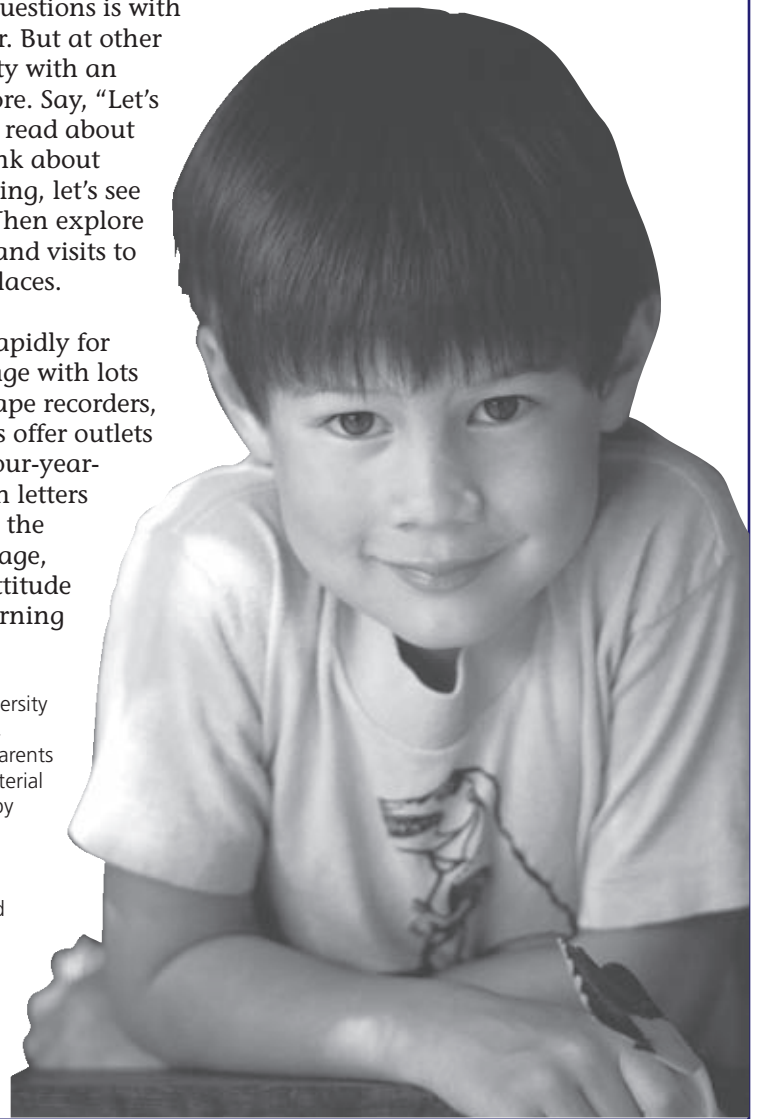
Questions! Questions! You may have noticed that lots of questions start with “why,” “how,” “what,” “when,” and “guess what.” You may hit your limit, but these questions are a good sign of development and curiosity. The questions indicate your child wants to know more and is eager to learn. If you encourage this curiosity and natural imagination now, you will help orient your child to life-long learning.

That is not to say “push the academics.” Reading, math and other academic skills will come if the basic desire to learn is solid.

One way to respond to questions is with a simple, straight answer. But at other times, encourage curiosity with an invitation to find out more. Say, “Let’s find out,” “We’ll have to read about that,” “What do you think about that?” or “That’s interesting, let’s see what we can discover.” Then explore together through books and visits to interesting people and places.

Language can develop rapidly for 4-year-olds. It’s a noisy age with lots to talk about. Puppets, tape recorders, and child-dictated stories offer outlets for their desire to talk. Four-year-olds also are interested in letters and words. Many are on the verge of reading. Encourage, but don’t push. Let an attitude of enjoyment toward learning develop.

Reprinted from: Iowa State University Extension Publication *so alive. . . three to five!* A newsletter for parents of 3- to 5-year olds, issue 5 Material for this newsletter was written by Vikki Morain, former Iowa State University Extension specialist in human development and family studies. Inquiries can be directed to Lesia Oesterreich, Family Life Specialist, Iowa State University. <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/childcare>.



*This newsletter is provided to parents by Help Me Grow of Cuyahoga County*

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# What It's Like to Be...

## THE PRESCHOOL YEARS FOUR AND A HALF TO FIVE

(individual development varies)

### Developing Body

- Weighs 31-57 pounds
- Stands 39-48 inches in height
- May begin to lose baby teeth
- Learns to skip
- Is able to dress self with little assistance
- Throws ball overhead
- Catches bounced balls
- Uses a fork and knife well
- Cuts on a line with scissors
- Hand dominance is established

### Developing Mind

- Knows basic colors like red, yellow, blue, green, and orange
- Understands that stories have a beginning, middle, and end
- Understands that books are read from left to right, top to bottom
- Draws pictures that represent animals, people, and objects

### Developing Communication

- Enjoys telling his or her own stories
- Enjoys riddles and jokes
- Identifies some letters of the alphabet and few numbers

### Developing Self

- Can take turns and share but doesn't always want to
- Often excludes other children in play—best friends only
- Likes to try new things and take risks
- Likes to make own decisions
- Notices when another child is angry or sad—more sensitive to feelings of others
- Likes to feel grown up; boasts about self to younger less capable children

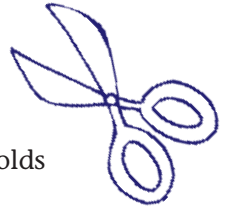
## How You Help Me Learn...

### Encourage preschoolers' language development.

Play follow the leader with skipping, galloping, and hopping.

#### You may also:

- Help your child learn to use a pair of scissors by asking him or her to help you cut out coupons.
- Have jumping contest. Five-year-olds can jump over low objects.



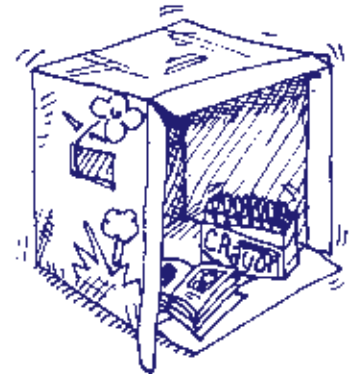
### Build on five-year-olds' curiosity and drive to understand their world.

Ask "what-if" questions. What if there were five little pigs instead of three? What if Goldilocks stayed home?

Children will use great creativity to share their thoughts on how these stories might have taken place.

### Stimulate ...

Provide a comfortable place alone. A large cardboard box makes a wonderful hideaway for older children who need a break from their younger playmates.



If you place books or paper and pencils in the box, it will encourage these young ones to read and write for fun.

Cheryl Barber, Family & Consumer Sciences Educator, Fulton County  
Kathy L. Reschke, State Specialist, Early Childhood  
Mary F. Longo, Family & Consumer Sciences Educator, Marion County  
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Reference: Berk, L. (2000). *Child development* (5th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

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Keith L. Smith, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension.

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# Play TAG with Your Kids:

## Tips to Ensure Positive Competitive Experiences

Remember playing tag as a kid? Kids running all over dodging whomever was “it.” Some remember tag fondly, while others remember it poorly. Either you were fast and enjoyed the chase, or you were ridiculed for being slow and always being “it.” These differing memories of tag parallel in many ways the debate among child development experts about how competition affects children. Some experts believe competition can be structured in a way that is good for children while others think it is inherently bad.

For children, competition is any activity where skills, qualities, or other like characteristics are openly compared to those of others. This definition is broad and covers activities from sports, to music, to grades in school, to building robots, and any other type of contest. As a parent, you may want to get your child involved in such activities, but you may also wonder if it is really good for them. What can you do as a parent to be more assured that competitive activities will have a positive impact on your child? Try playing TAG!

### Target Individual Needs

Plan to pay special attention to your child’s individual needs before, during, and after competition. Be involved in selecting and monitoring your child’s competitive activities to make sure they meet the unique needs of your child. For example, if your child can benefit from adult role models who provide highly structured activities, make sure the competitive activity you promote involves such adults. On the other hand, if your child is in need of time to socialize with other children, make sure the competitive activity is group oriented and has built in “free time” for socializing. You are the “expert” in terms of your child’s individual needs. Target these needs as you get them involved in competitive activity.

The most critical aspect of targeting your child’s needs is making sure that your child is developmentally ready for the activity. Your child’s enthusiasm for the activity will be directly related to their “readiness” for competition. If you observe that the other kids seem to be better adapted to the activity, maybe your child is not developmentally ready. Michael Nelson (1991) provides these recommendations for determining what activities your child is developmentally ready for:

- Children 3 to 5 years old should avoid competition as it can interfere with their learning of fundamental skills. Walking, running, swimming, tumbling, throwing, and catching are recommended activities. The key is to emphasize fun play.
- Kids aged 6 to 9 still should have minimal emphasis on competition. Sports like swimming, running, or gymnastics can be attempted to learn the fundamental skills and work toward the transition to full competition.
- At ages 10 to 12, children can compete in activities for which they have mastered the basic skills. At this age most children have the cognitive, social, and emotional maturity to handle modest competitive pressure.

Deciding when to stop a competitive activity is just as important as deciding when to start. If your child is not ready or is no longer interested in an activity, help them find a new one that will be fun. When it becomes clear that they are no longer interested in competing in an activity, help them make a change. Remember,

this can be difficult if you, as an adult, are still enjoying their participation in the activity. Your overzealous enjoyment of the activity can put stress on your child to perform to your expectations and take the fun out of the activity. Targeting your child’s needs, and not your own, is essential.

### Ask and Observe

In a game of tag, the person who is “it” switches off. One minute you are chasing, the next you are being chased. Trading places while communicating with children is equally important. Sometimes your child will be the sender of information and tell you everything you need to know about an activity. Other times you will need to be the sender of probing questions to find out what is going on. Asking meaningful questions will better help you understand the value of the activity to your child.

The most tempting questions that follow competition are related to the outcome. “Did you win?” “How did you do?” “What was the score?” Interestingly, these questions have little to do with the reasons children give for participating in competitive activities. According to a study by Barber, Sukhi, and White (1999), kids most often give the following reasons for liking to compete:

- Fun
- Learning and improving skills
- Exercise
- Team spirit
- Excitement, action, and challenge

Consequently, questions related to these reasons for competing may make more sense. “Was it fun?” “Did you learn anything?” “Wasn’t that exciting?” “Are you making new friends?” These questions will give you a better idea of your child’s enjoyment of the activity. This information should be used to judge the value of the activity, rather than relying simply on winning and losing.

While questioning and listening are crucial for spotting problems early, watching your child’s nonverbal behavior can be equally important. If they say they are having a great time, but constantly look like they are dreading every minute, something is wrong. Children may not always tell you how they really feel. This is especially true if you seem to be overly enthusiastic about their participation. Pay attention to their nonverbal behavior, while encouraging an open line of communication. When in doubt ask another simple question, “what could be better?” As a parent you can use this information to help others change the activity, or simply find another competitive arena that better matches your child’s interests. It is not unusual for children to go through several activities before the right one is found.

### Give Positive Feedback

It is easy to get consumed by the outcome of competitive events. Unfortunately, there is quite an addiction to seeing your child perform better than others. Limiting your positive feedback to those instances where children win is demotivating. Instead of focusing on winning or losing, focus on your child’s enjoyment, skill development, and reactions to the activity. For example, you can say, “You looked like you were having lots of fun out there” or “Your skills have really improved” or “I really liked the way you tried something new.”

*continues on page 121*

***Even professionals are not always in agreement on specific child-rearing and feeding recommendations. Contact your doctor with any specific questions.***

***All children develop at a different rate. If you have any questions about your child’s development, contact your doctor or local school district.***

# Just for Parents

## Getting Ready for “Big” School

It seems like only moments ago that you were changing diapers and singing lullabies – and now, somehow, your “baby” is five!! Most people would agree that there are very few things in a five-year-old’s life that are more exciting than going to kindergarten. It’s a big moment for a child.... and just as big a moment for moms and dads!.

As a parent, there’s nothing you want more than for your child to succeed in kindergarten – to get along with others, to learn all there is to learn, to be the kind of student that every teacher would want. But how do you get your child ready for that???

I have good news for you – you already *have!* It may surprise you to know that, when asked what they want new students to know when they start school, most kindergarten teachers don’t say things like counting or knowing their letters or tying their shoes. *They* expect to teach children those things. What they really want is for children entering school to be able to get along well with other children, follow directions, listen and pay attention, and ask for help when they need it. And you’ve been helping your child with those skills for a long time!

So don’t go buy flash cards or expensive computer games. As you’ve read in earlier newsletters, there are lots of ways to support your child’s learning and development that take advantage of “teachable moments” – real-time situations when you can focus for a few minutes on learning something new. So keep your eyes open for teachable moments; keep talking to your child about what she sees, feels and thinks; keep reading books together; keep modeling the skills and attitudes you want *her* to have. In other words, keep doing what you’ve been doing!

Now for some specific suggestions for making kindergarten a success for everyone:

### Before school starts:

- Most schools have an orientation: an opportunity for parents and children to visit the classroom and meet the teacher before school starts. GO!! It’s the first step toward establishing a good relationship with the teacher and making school involvement a priority. It also gives you concrete things to remind your child about as you look forward to that first day: “Remember those toy dinosaurs that you played with when you visited school? What other things do you think you’ll see when you go back?”

- Schedule immunizations early – the pediatrician’s office gets very busy right before school starts!
- Do a few “dry runs” of the first day – the route to school, drop-off and pick-up, etc. Again, the more things about the first day that are already familiar to your child, the less anxious she’ll be.
- Chances are your child will be looking forward to the first day....*unless* he picks up anxious vibes from *you!* As a parent, you may feel sad that he’s growing up, anxious about things you can’t control, or fearful that he’ll be afraid or confused. One of the most helpful ways to cope with your own feelings (and **not** pass them on to your child) is to talk honestly with other experienced parents.

### The first day:

- If your child will be riding a school bus for the first time, make an extra effort to meet the bus driver and introduce him or her to your child. Five year olds are VERY literal and may be quite confused and afraid about getting into a “car” with a “stranger” to go to school. Meeting the bus driver formally will help your child put him or her into the category of “safe adult.”
- Talk to your child about school – but be specific! Ask about which toys he played with, who he played with, what he had for snack or lunch. “How was school?” almost never gets a satisfying answer! And remember to be positive – it will help him look forward to the next day if he’s feeling a bit anxious about returning.
- If you think your child might have a hard time leaving you, ask the teacher if it’s okay if she brings a small family picture or a favorite comfort item to leave in her cubby.
- Take a picture – it’s a once-in-a-lifetime day!

### Once school starts:

- Be sure that your child has a good night’s sleep and a good breakfast before heading off to school each morning. Set bedtime and breakfast routines right away and stick to them. Children who are hungry or tired have a very hard time learning and getting along with others.

- Follow the rules – for example, if the teacher has a rule that no food or toys from home are brought to school, support the rule, even if it means a tantrum. Just like at home, adults need to be united when it comes to rules. If you think it's an unfair or unrealistic rule, talk to the teacher.
- Teachers' and parents' perspectives will differ, so try to understand and respect one another.
- Be involved whenever and wherever you are able. Volunteer in the classroom, on field trips, or for special events. Contribute resources or information (do you have an old keyboard from work that you can donate for pretend play?). Fill out and return forms. Communicate early and often.
- Be your child's advocate: if you sense that your child is having problems in school, don't ignore it. Talk with the teacher, the principal, your pediatrician, or another parent. Many problems first come to light in a school setting: hearing, sight or speech problems; attention problems; social skills that need extra support. Or there may be a problem with a school bully or some other frightening situation. Be reasonable but persistent – no one can be an advocate for your child like you can.

It's hard to believe your child is five already! When you have a chance, look back through all the old pictures and talk together about all that's changed. What an amazing adventure!

Kathy L. Reschke, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Human Development & Family Science Extension State Specialist, Early Development and Care, The Ohio State University

Reference: Berk, L. (2000). Child development (5th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

## School Safety

Although we don't like to think about it, getting to and from school can be dangerous. Here are a few quick pointers for your child's safety:

- Help your child memorize his: full name, parents' full names, address, and parents' phone number(s). But also provide a card with this information that can be carried in a school bag – under stress, memory can be unreliable.
- Walking to school is not recommended for children this young unless an adult or responsible teen brother or sister walks with them.
- If your child will ride a school bus, introduce your child to the driver. Make sure your child knows the number/name of the bus.
- Help your child memorize the "Check First" rule: any time something unusual happens – you see a stranger, you can't find your bus – check first, with the teacher, parent, or other adult you know.

The school can share many more safety tips with you – just ask!

Kathy L. Reschke, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Human Development & Family Science Extension State Specialist, Early Development and Care, The Ohio State University



# Feeding Your Preschooler

## Helping Your 5-Year-Old Make Healthy Food Choices

Your 5-year-old is getting ready for kindergarten. Your love and support have prepared her to embark on this wonderful journey of learning, exploration and independence. Part of this growing up also means learning to make healthy choices – whether it is to engage in physical activity, eat healthy snacks and meals, or choose a healthy beverage. Your job is to provide her an environment that offers healthy choices, give her the tools that help her make healthy choices, and continue to provide your love to make her feel good about herself.

### Lunches – to pack or buy?

Starting kindergarten is sometimes an anxious time both for the parent and the child. One of the dilemmas that many kindergarten parents face is what to do about lunch? If your child attends a full-day kindergarten, then he will need to eat his lunch at school. Again, your role is to provide a healthy and safe lunch that your child would like, but it is for the child to decide how much of it he will eat.

Many schools offer hot or bag school lunches for children. Schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program have to meet nutritional guidelines laid out by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). These lunches tend to be wholesome and provide about a third of your child's daily nutritional needs. Many schools are working to improve the quality of school lunches by providing more fresh fruits and vegetables, and less fried and fatty foods. Talk to the dietary staff at your child's school if you have any concerns or if your child has any special dietary needs. Some children like to eat school lunches only on days when their favorite foods are served. Make sure you discuss the lunch menu provided by your child's school with him to help him decide when he is going to eat at school. This will help you plan for the days when you have to pack a lunch for him.

Packing a school lunch that children enjoy often becomes a challenge for many parents. Following some simple guidelines will help ensure you pack a safe and nutritious lunch that your child can enjoy.

### Nutritious Lunch

- Pack a variety of foods in small quantities. Larger quantities often overwhelm children and make the meal unappealing.

- Choose a variety of foods from MyPyramid. A general recommendation is that 3-5 food groups should be represented at each meal.
- Make sure that your child's lunch includes some fruits. Cut up pieces of an apple, half of a banana, or sections of an orange. Choose cut up fruit over fruit juice to get the most nutrition out of fruits. Vegetables like carrots, celery or broccoli with a low-fat dip give an extra crunch to a packed lunch.
- Choose whole grain products like whole-wheat bread for sandwiches or whole grain crackers.
- Use leaner meats such as sliced lean turkey instead of a high fat high salt bologna for a sandwich.
- Choose foods that are nutrient dense (higher in whole grain carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals) over foods that are calorie dense (high in refined carbohydrates like sugar and refined flour, and high in saturated fats and trans fats). Some examples of nutrient dense foods include: fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy, lean meats. Examples of calorie dense foods include: fruit drinks and sugary beverages, candy, chips, cookies etc).

### Food Safe Lunch

- Wash your hands and the food preparation area before you start packing your child's lunch.
- Start with fresh, clean foods and clean lunch boxes or paper bags.
- Use insulated lunch boxes and freezer gel packs to keep cold perishable foods safe until lunch time. Pack perishable foods like meats and dairy next to the gel packs. Frozen juice boxes can also help keep cold foods safe.
- If your child's school does not offer microwave facilities to warm food, hot foods can be transported in an insulated bottle to keep them hot. Before adding food to the insulated bottle, fill it up with boiling water, let it stand for a few minutes and discard water. Fill the bottle with hot soup or stew and close tightly. Make sure your child has help opening the bottle at school to avoid spilling hot food.
- Do not reuse bags that have previously held food.

## Enjoyable Lunch

- Let your child decide what she wants to take for lunch from the healthy choices you offer. You and your child might want to make a weekly schedule of what she wants to take for lunch and then shop for those items together.
- Have her help pack her lunch the night before or if your schedule permits in the morning. Shopping and packing lunches are great opportunities to educate your child about healthy choices. Make healthy eating fun by involving her in planning, purchasing and preparing foods.
- Some children get bored with one type of food quickly and want a variety, while others may want the same food offered almost every day. As long as the child is eating healthy choices from 3-5 food groups at lunch, and is eating a variety of healthy foods at other meals, there is nothing to be concerned about.
- Treats do not have to be only sugary or fatty snacks; they can be stickers or little notes from you to your child. And if your child wants an occasional candy or bag of chips packed in his lunch box, let him enjoy a small portion of these foods.



Punam Ohri-Vachaspati, Ph.D., R.D., L.D.  
Assistant Professor, Extension Educator  
Ohio State University Extension, Cuyahoga County

Reference: Gains, S. Packing school lunches with pizzazz, food safety, and nutrition. Retrieved from Colorado State University Cooperation Extension website at <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/columncc/cc040824.html> on February 9, 2006.

Photo Provided by USDA, Photographer Ken Hammond.

*Continued from page 117*

There is no such thing as providing too much positive support. In fact, positive reactions from parents are related to greater enjoyment and positive self esteem for children.

## Let the Fun Begin

In this game of TAG the parent is "it," trying to help their child learn and have fun. *Target individual needs.* You are the expert concerning your child's unique needs. *Ask and observe* as a way of monitoring the activity. Good communication can prevent undue stress for your child. Most of all *give positive feedback.* By targeting your child's needs and learning how they perceive the activity, you will be better equipped to support them in the ways they need as individuals. So get busy playing TAG, and your child will get busy enjoying life through competition.

Laura Maloney, Student, Department of Human Development and Family Science, and David W. Andrews, Ph.D., Dean, College of Human Ecology, The Ohio State University

For more information, visit the Human Development and Family Life web site at: <http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife/>

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<http://ohioline.osu.edu/bb-fact/index.html>

This web site has a series fact sheets that provide information about Kindergarten and First grade topics that include:

- Get Off To a Good Start
- Nurturing Your Child's Self-Esteem
- Helping Your Child Succeed In School
- Holiday Stress Busters for Big and Little People
- Discipline and Your Child
- Nutrition and Fitness
- Reading Skills and Journal-Keeping
- Caution--Is Your Home Safe?
- Summer Activities for Fun and Learning
- Dealing With Morning Madness
- Understanding Sibling Rivalry
- Good Study Habits and Homework

**This is the last issue of *Growing Together*. We hope the series has been helpful to you in your very important job as parents.**

**If you have any specific questions on preschooler feeding and would like to speak to a registered dietitian, call Cuyahoga County Board of Health, Nutrition Program, 216-201-2000, Ext. 1526.**



Ohio State University Extension  
 Cuyahoga County  
 9127 Miles Avenue  
 Cleveland, OH 44105-6136

Call any one of these Invest in Children partners below for support or information on how to make sure your child is healthy, well cared for and ready for school.

**Prenatal Hotline • 216-778-BABY**

Prenatal information and support for expectant mothers

**MomsFirst • 216-664-4194**

Prenatal care and support for expectant mothers in the City of Cleveland

**Help Me Grow • 216-736-4300**

Services and support for children prenatal to age three

**Healthy Start • 216-987-7346**

Health Insurance (Medicaid) for children prenatal to age nineteen

**Starting Point • 216-575-0061**

Child care services and information on care for children with special needs

**Family Help Line • 216-229-8800**

Free, anonymous support, information, referrals and crisis intervention

**Tot-Line • 216-431-8200**

Information on child development

**First Call For Help • 2-1-1 or 216-436-2000**

Free, confidential information and support for referrals to other local health or social services

*This newsletter is provided to parents by Help Me Grow of Cuyahoga County.*

*Help Me Grow is a statewide child development program and a partner of Invest in Children. As Cuyahoga County's early childhood initiative, Invest in Children works to increase the development, funding, visibility and impact of early childhood services in the county, so our children start kindergarten healthy, well cared for and ready for school.*



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*If you have specific questions about your child's health or development, or concerns about your own health and well-being, please contact your physician.*