



Fun, Simple, and Powerful!



## Getting Started with the Basics

A Guide for Organizational Leaders and Coordinators



[www.rvabasics.org](http://www.rvabasics.org)



Created by the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University for use by the Basics, Inc.,  
a nonprofit organization, and local campaigns in the Basics Learning Network.  
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**None of us can do alone what all of us can do together!**

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## WELCOME TO THE BASICS

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**Now that you know what the Basics are and you are planning to share them, what are some possible next steps? What are the ways that you can play an important role?**

The Basics community is a diverse network of organizations and individuals committed to a single goal: improving children's life trajectories by making sure that all families have access to science-based strategies for making the most of the time they spend with their children from birth to age three. Whether you connect with families in a clinic, a child care center, their place of worship, or anywhere else, you have an important role to play.

The Basics Community Toolkit is an online repository of videos, activities, handouts, and other materials designed to support your organizations' routine interactions with families. It already provides materials in multiple languages, and additional languages will be added. The entire collection of resources will expand as the Basics community grows and learns together.

This guide will help get you started. It provides background on the Basics, some common vocabulary and talking points, an overview of the materials and resources in the toolkit, as well as a template for planning and documenting your work. Local Basics leaders may offer additional support and resources, so be sure to seek out opportunities to join Basics-related activities in your community. Some of the materials in the toolkit, especially the six core videos, are probably available locally in your community with a logo that includes the name of your community. When that is the case, please try to use the local versions in order to support your local Basics campaign.

Your commitment, expertise, and relationships with parents and caregivers are what bring the Basics to life. Working together, we have a great chance of ensuring that all children get the best possible start.



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## WHY THE BASICS?

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80% of brain growth  
in the first three years

From birth to age three, a child's brain undergoes rapid development, producing more than 1 million neural connections per second.<sup>1</sup> By age three, the brain has achieved 80% of its adult size.<sup>2</sup>

Skill gaps clear  
by age two

Nationally representative data show clear skill gaps by the second birthday. One recent study found that by the age of two, less advantaged children were six months behind more advantaged peers in language processing skills.<sup>3</sup>

Too many missed  
opportunities

Many parents and caregivers have never had opportunities to learn the science behind the Basics and how important they are to their children's brain development and wellbeing. A number of the greatest misunderstandings pertain to the first year of life, when doing the Basics already makes a big difference.<sup>4</sup>

Lifelong  
consequences

Brain development during the first three years builds critical foundations for cognitive skills associated with academic learning, but that's not all. It also supports development of social and emotional skills, all of which

confer lifelong benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> Center on the Developing Child. (2009). *Five numbers to remember about early childhood development* [Brief]. Available at [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)

<sup>2</sup> Dekaban, A.S., & Sadowsky, D. (1978). Changes in brain weights during the span of human life: Relation of brain weights to body heights and body weights, *Ann. Neurology*, 4, 345-356.

<sup>3</sup> Fernald, A., Marchman, V. A., & Weisleder, A. (2013). SES differences in language processing skill and vocabulary are evident at 18 months. *Developmental Science*, 16(2), 234-248.

<sup>4</sup> Zero to Three. (2016). *Tuning in: Parents of young children speak up about what they think, know and need*. Available at <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/tuning-in-parents-of-young-children-tell-us-what-they-think-know-and-need>



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## WHAT ARE THE BASICS?

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The Basics are five clusters of parenting and caregiving behaviors, distilled from research by the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University in collaboration with a national expert advisory committee. They encompass most of what experts find is important for boosting cognitive and social-emotional development of children from birth to age three. The Basics are free and don't require fancy toys or extra hours in the day—they can be incorporated into families' everyday routines.



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### Maximize Love, Manage Stress

Babies and toddlers thrive when their world feels loving, safe, and predictable. Respond with smiles, words, and touch to help them see, hear, and feel your love. You will help them develop a sense of security and self-control.



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### Talk, Sing, and Point

Babies learn language from the moment they are born. Be responsive to their sounds, and later, their words. Connect with eye contact and a loving tone of voice, while pointing to help them know what you are talking about.



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### Count, Group, and Compare

Every child's brain is wired for math. Make talking about numbers, shapes, patterns, and comparisons a focus of your time together and watch your child learn to love math.



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### Explore Through Movement and Play

Babies are like scientists who love making discoveries. Watch to see what interests your child, then encourage their curiosity and help them learn when they play and explore.



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### Read and Discuss Stories

Reading turns kids into confident thinkers. Make books a regular part of your relationship from the very beginning. With infants, point at the pictures and speak with excitement. With toddlers, just make it fun.

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## WHAT IS SOCIOECOLOGICAL SATURATION?

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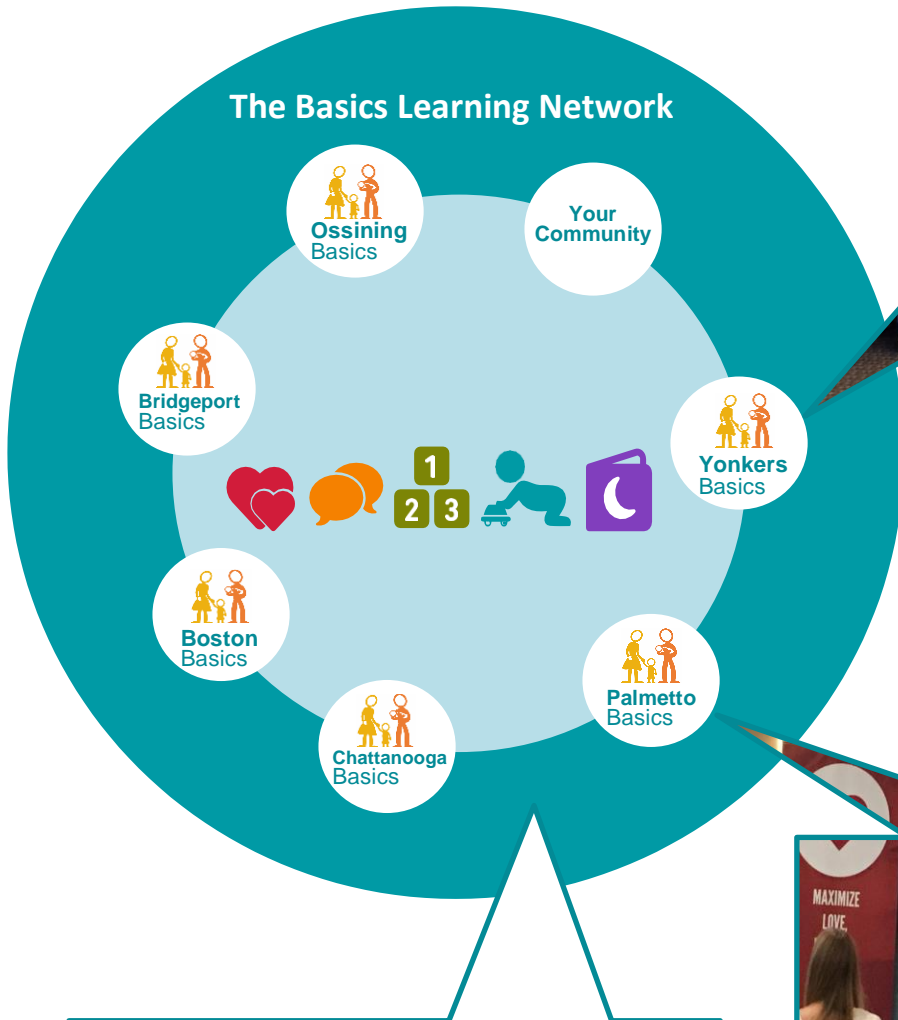
People live in social ecologies made up of the people, settings, and norms that shape their everyday interactions, and consequently, their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. The Basics movement aims to saturate the social ecology around each family and to engage the whole community, so that everyone knows the Basics and every parent or caregiver receives encouragement and support for using them. Every type of setting and organization in the image below is a place for sharing the Basics.



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# THE BASICS LEARNING NETWORK

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*Yonkers Basics Advisory Board meeting*



*Palmetto Basics Kickoff (South Carolina)*

**The Basics Learning Network** brings together cities, towns, and counties in the U.S. and abroad where civic-sector leaders have adopted the five Basics as a framework for infant and toddler caregiving. As the work develops across the Network, the Basics Community Toolkit and other collaborative resources and activities provide ongoing opportunities to accumulate and share emerging lessons to maximize the collective impact of our work.



**The  
Basics**

[www.rvabasics.org](http://www.rvabasics.org)

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE BASICS COMMUNITY TOOLKIT

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**The Basics Community Toolkit** is a repository of tools and resources for sharing the Basics. Inspire and support parents, caregivers, and other allies with six types of tools, each introduced below. Use and combine them in ways that fit your context and typical workflow, so that sharing the Basics can become a routine component your organization’s support for families. The collection is a living resource that will grow as the Basics Learning Network accumulates knowledge about the most effective strategies for disseminating the Basics and supporting their widespread adoption.

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## Videos

Communicate and model effective practices with short, powerful videos.

**Six Core Videos.** Use these foundational videos to show families who are applying the five Basics in their everyday lives. These include an overview video and one for each of the five Basics. Deploy them across a variety of settings. Most communities in the Basics Learning Network have these same videos with a logo that reflects participation in the network (e.g., Yonkers Basics or Chattanooga Basics). If this is true for your community, please try to use the local versions to help support your local campaign.

**Poems.** Use these animated videos to communicate key Basics messages. For example, propose to parents that “The Basics Caregiver’s Promise” is a pledge they should live by. Likewise, “The Basics Community Contract” defines the type of commitment to seek from the whole community.

**Voices of the Community.** Hear community leaders, practitioners, and parents and caregivers share their thoughts and experiences with the Basics. Depending on the particular video, use them with colleagues in professional roles or with parents and caregivers.



## Implementation Guides

Get ideas from several types of resources with guidance on sharing the Basics. Find simple discussion protocols, hands-on activities to actively engage caregivers and children, and tips for integrating the Basics into ongoing services for families. Discover how these resources can help during doctor’s visits, in parent workshops, playgroups, and other settings.



## Handouts

Distribute handouts to raise awareness about the Basics and offer concrete

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caregiving tips. Look for opportunities to share them whenever and wherever you can. Handouts can be used to spark discussion during trainings or meetings. Send them home with participants to reinforce concepts covered and serve as reminders.

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### Posters

Spread awareness by hanging colorful, engaging posters in prominent locations, such as entrances and waiting areas.

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### Presentations

Share the Basics vision, approach, and methods with these PowerPoint presentations. Use them to introduce the Basics to your organization or community and keep them involved as active allies.

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### Research and Evaluation

Learn about the research, including the science behind the five Basics.

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## STEPS FOR ADOPTING THE BASICS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

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Make sharing and reinforcing the Basics core to your organization's routines and institutional identity. If possible, collaborate with your local Basics leadership organization to plan and document your progress. Consider using the **Implementation Documentation Template** on pages 11 and 12 of this guide (a Microsoft Word version that you can edit is also available online in the toolkit). In the toolkit, you will also find **The Basics Organization-Level Rubric for Assessing Implementation Maturity**, a multi-faceted tool that can be used as a guide during the planning stage as well as self-assessment once your organization is further along.

### STEP 1: Recruit a Point Person and Initial Champion(s)

Identify the point person responsible for managing implementation and communicating with external Basics partners. Then recruit others whose positions or interests make them likely to be enthusiastic champions to help spearhead the effort.

### STEP 2: Review the Toolkit and Brainstorm Uses

Begin exploring the Basics Community Toolkit, including videos, implementation guides, handouts, and other print collateral. Brainstorm ways that these free tools and resources might support or enhance the ways your organization interacts with parents, caregivers, and other stakeholders for the benefit of infants and toddlers.

### STEP 3: Engage Others in Your Organization

Engage additional people in your organization. This requires introducing them to the Basics and inspiring their interest. A great way to introduce the Basics is by showing a PowerPoint presentation from the toolkit and playing one or more Basics videos at a regular staff or department meeting. Later, you may choose to provide additional guidance or training on ways that frontline staff at your organization can make sharing the Basics routine.

#### Talking Points for Introducing the Basics

- Eighty percent of brain growth happens in the first three years of life.
- Developmental skill gaps are very clear by age two.
- We have a big opportunity to give our kids a strong foundation for school and life right from the start.
- The Basics are five powerful ways to help make it easier for children do well in school and for the rest of their lives.

### STEP 4: Develop and Document Your Implementation Plan

**Goal.** Develop a Basics goal statement for your organization. For example, "Among the parents we serve who have infants or toddlers, at least 80% will know and use the Basics."

**Strategies.** Decide which methods of sharing the Basics will help you meet each goal. Consider the following key strategies:

- ✓ Display posters and materials.

- ✓ Show videos in waiting rooms and during presentations.
- ✓ Share the Basics in one-on-one conversations (e.g., medical visits, case meetings).
- ✓ Share the Basics in group sessions (e.g., workshops, playgroups, community events).
- ✓ Promote your work on social media or other communications channels.

Other questions to consider:

- How do you plan to initiate sharing the Basics in your organization?
- How do you plan to prepare and support your staff to share the Basics?
- What (if any) forms of additional training might be beneficial?
- How will you reinforce parents' and caregivers' initial exposure to the Basics?
- How can you support and perhaps even integrate efforts with other Basics champions in your community?

**Logistics.** For each way that you expect to share the Basics, identify action steps and decide who will carry them out, what training or support they will need, when they will take each step, and with what resources.

**Documentation and Monitoring.** Consider how you will document the level of implementation activity and progress toward your goals. What forms of data will you collect to track progress? What forms of relevant data do you already collect?

### STEP 5: Print or Order Basics Materials

Identify which Basics materials you will need and the quantities. Download and print them from the toolkit or contact your local Basics leaders about acquiring locally-branded materials.

### STEP 6: IMPLEMENT YOUR PLAN!

#### STEP 7: Reflect and Update Your Plan

Find a time to meet as a team, hear from colleagues about their experiences sharing the Basics, and review data on implementation activities and progress. Identify things that are working well and others that could be improved. Revise your implementation plan accordingly.

#### STEP 8: Tell Us How You're Doing

A number of communities are beginning to share and practice the Basics. We would love to know what you've tried, how it worked, and the successes and challenges you experienced. Please share with us at [info@thebasics.org](mailto:info@thebasics.org).



# IMPLEMENTATION DOCUMENTATION TEMPLATE

STEP 1: Recruit a Point Person and Initial Champion(s)		
Name	Contact	Role

STEP 2: Review the Toolkit and Brainstorm Uses					
✓ Videos	✓ Implementation Guides	✓ Handouts	✓ Presentations	✓ Posters	✓ Research and Evaluation

The Basics Community Toolkit is available at <http://boston.thebasics.org/en/community-toolkit/>

STEP 3: Engage Others in Your Organization			
Who else needs to be engaged?	How? (E.g., Watch Basics videos, discuss PowerPoint presentation)	When?	Where?

STEP 4: Develop and Document Your Implementation Plan			
What will be done?	By whom?	When?	Basics Materials and Other Resources Needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Display posters and materials</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show videos</li> </ul>			

### STEP 4: Develop and Document Your Implementation Plan

▪ Share the Basics in one-on-one conversations			
▪ Share the Basics in group sessions			
▪ Promote the Basics on social media or other communications channels			

#### Questions to Consider (and jot down brief responses to)

- ✓ How do you plan to initiate sharing the Basics in your organization?
- ✓ How do you plan to prepare and support your staff to share the Basics?
- ✓ What (if any) forms of additional training might be beneficial?
- ✓ How will you reinforce parents' and caregivers' initial exposure?
- ✓ How can you support and perhaps even integrate efforts with other Basics champions in your community?
- ✓ What forms of data will you collect to track progress? What relevant forms do you already collect?

### STEP 5: Print or Order Basics Materials

Basics Materials Needed	Quantity	Basics Materials Needed	Quantity

*Download and print from the Basics Community Toolkit website or contact your local Basics leaders about ordering materials.*

### STEP 6: IMPLEMENT YOUR PLAN!

#### STEP 7: Reflect and Update Your Plan

- Find a time to meet as a team.

### STEP 7: Reflect and Update Your Plan

- Share what people in the organization have experienced implementing the Basics.
- Review data on implementation activities and progress.
- Identify things that are working well and things that you could improve.
- Update your implementation plan in response to this discussion.

### STEP 8: Tell Us How You're Doing

- Please share your progress and feedback at [info@thebasics.org](mailto:info@thebasics.org)!

### Notes

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# THE BASICS COMMUNITY CONTRACT

BY RONALD FERGUSON

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We should sign a Basics Contract  
Wherein when it comes to babies  
We would share an obligation  
With no “ifs” or “buts” or “maybes.”

### Maximize Love, Manage Stress

We could guarantee that parents  
Would be rescued from their stress  
By supportive friends and neighbors  
Helping put their cares to rest.

This includes the types of friendship where  
When weary from no sleep  
Every parent finds a trusted soul  
Their precious child to keep.

### Talk, Sing, and Point

We would help each parent come to know  
The benefits of talking  
And the ways that pointing helps the child  
Decipher all their squawking.

### Count, Group, and Compare

We would post on walls and billboards  
Things that little kids could count  
Near some sculptures made for grouping  
To compare and climb and mount.

### Explore through Movement and Play

We would donate games and puzzles  
And some toys to use outside  
We’d make sure that every toddler  
Has a tricycle to ride.

### Read and Discuss Stories

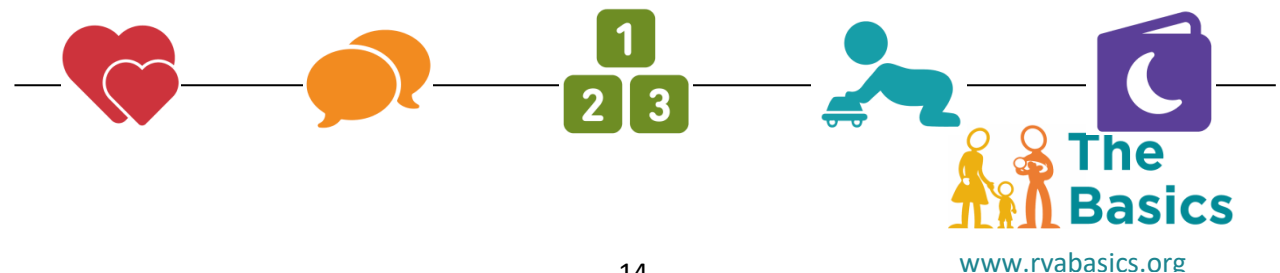
And each child would be enthralled  
By all the wonders found through reading  
For we’d offer to each family  
Any books they might be needing.

Hereby Resolved

If we all embrace this vision  
(That means friends and neighbors too)  
Parents then will find the bandwidth  
To do what they need to do.

Yes they’ll need to do the Basics  
And by doing your small part  
You will help more parents seed their kids  
To learn and grow up smart.

If we all resolve to do these things  
We’ve learned will be required  
Then each child our efforts benefit  
Will be a life inspired.





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# THE BASICS CAREGIVER'S PROMISE

BY RONALD FERGUSON

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With my **heart** I will love you

And shield you from stress.

With my **mouth** I will speak what I feel.

With soft words and sweet songs every time I behold you

I'll show you that my love is real.

With my **fingers** I'll point at the objects I name

And I'll count them in groups to compare.

With my **feet** I will take you outdoors to explore

While we play and enjoy the fresh air.

With my **eyes** I will read as I show you the world

Through bright pictures and stories in books.

These are ways to make sure that your brain is prepared

For successes wherever you look.

This my promise I make from the day of your birth

That these *Basics* I'll faithfully do.

For my job is to help you grow happy and smart

Starting now when your life is brand new.

You will learn that your life is an artwork.

And that you are the artist in charge.

But before you decide what to do with your life

Listen now

To the beat

Of my heart





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