



<http://www.dkimages.com/discover/Home/People-and-Society/Babies/Babies-008.html>

## The Importance of Play

Play is a very important tool for a child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth. Some people have likened play to children as work and study are to adults. Like adults learn through study, children learn everything through play. It is how they learn about the world and about themselves.

According to Your Total Health, children learn in spurts. In playtime when they learn a new activity or concept, they practice it over and over until they master it. When learning a new skill, children sometimes appear to forget the skills they mastered previously, but once they have mastered the new skill, they will integrate the new skills with the old ones.

Sometimes parents struggle to find time and energy to play with their children. But play is very important to a child's healthy development. The following are some guidelines from Catherine Marchant, a play therapist at Wheelock College, for the types of play parents can engage with their children, while at the same time teaching them fundamental concepts:

### Social Play

Interaction with parents and others is important. When your baby smiles at you, praise him and smile back. Your baby will also enjoy exchanging looks and laughter with you. Older infants enjoy games like peek-a-boo and pat-a cake.

- **Peek-a-Boo**

Playing peek-a-boo with toys helps teach infants about

*object permanence*, the understanding that an object has not disappeared permanently just because it isn't visible now. Your baby will eventually learn that permanence applies to people also, and you can reinforce this lesson by hiding yourself around corners or behind furniture.

- **Pat-a-Cake**

Clapping hands to the pat-a-cake rhyme gives your baby practice in *coordinating actions with words*. Other ditties to rehearse include "Itsy-bitsy Spider" and "Where is Thumbkin?"

### Cause-and-Effect Play

An awareness of cause-and-effect relationships begins at about seven months. You can foster this awareness during your daily activities by explaining, for instance, how turning a faucet lets the water flow. At around 9 months a toddler will enjoy his own experiments with causal relationships. Letting him repeatedly turn on the water or lights will thrill him more than most store-bought games.

### Object Play

Touching, banging, mouthing, throwing, pushing, and experimenting with things in any way is something that 4-10 month olds enjoy. As they reach the toddler years, parents can determine which of the following "Recipes for Play Activities" are appropriate for their children.

- **Finger Paint**

Materials—2 C. water, 1 C. corn starch, and food coloring  
Directions—mix water and cornstarch. Add several drops of food coloring. Mix until thickened. Children love to touch and feel the texture.

Purpose—sensory experience

- **Soap Bubbles**

Materials—water, liquid soap, and glycerin  
Directions—use 2 C. of water for every ¼ C. of soap. Stir together water and soap and add several tablespoons of glycerin and stir.

Purpose—verbally directed reaching, language, positions in space

- **Peanut Butter Play Dough**

Materials—1 C. creamy peanut butter, ¼ C. honey, 1 C. instant nonfat dry milk\*

Directions—Mix together until smooth. \*For milk allergies, you may substitute flour for the instant nonfat dry milk. Note that some children may have peanut allergies.

Purpose—sensory experience

- **Traditional Play Dough**

Materials—1 C. flour, 1 C. warm water, 2 teaspoons cream of tartar, 1 teaspoon oil, ¼ C. salt, food coloring.

Directions—Mix all ingredients, adding food coloring last. Stir over medium heat until smooth. Remove from pan and knead until blended smooth. Place in plastic bag or airtight container when cooled. Will last for long time.

Purpose—sensory experience

### Functional and Representational Play

Pretending to use familiar objects in an appropriate way (e.g. pushing a toy lawn mower over the grass, or calling Grandma with a hairbrush) is fun for 12-21 month infants as they begin to use their imaginations more and more.

### Early Symbolic Play

At about age two, begin "creating something out of nothing" (e.g. a shoebox becomes a car, complete with motor noises and everything). At 30-36 months, your child may begin to role play people like doctors, teachers, or mommy and daddy.

### TV-Free Ideas for Your Toddler

Many parents try their hardest but find it difficult to keep their child from the TV, especially when parents are too exhausted to play or it's early in the morning and their child is ready to start the day but mom and dad are still trying to catch some zzzzs. Instead of placing your child in front of the tube, here are some suggestions taken from [www.parentsplace.com](http://www.parentsplace.com). They suggest that, although these activities still require parental energy, they result in more engaged parent-child interaction.

1. **Work on age-appropriate puzzles.** If you can, you may want to purchase new puzzles for this week.
2. **Make a puzzle.** Help your child make a puzzle by cutting an old photo, greeting card, or calendar picture into large pieces. Let him or her put the pieces back together on a sheet of paper.
3. **Read aloud.** Get new books out of the library. Read familiar favorites. Help your child make an indoor fort using a sheet, blanket, or towel. "Build" it over chairs. Let your child read books with a flashlight inside the fort.
4. **Read a map.** Take a look at any map, and, depending on the type of map, point out major roads, highways, exits, mountains, bridges, bodies of water.
5. **Organize photo albums.** Put photos into albums. This depends on your child's age. (If your child is too young you may end up with scattered, chewed on photos -- so be careful.)
6. **Write letters.** Compose letters to friends and family, detailing your week's past activities. Little children can be encouraged to write or use stickers to help spell out words.
7. **Dance to Music.** Let your child draw a flag on a piece of paper. Attach a stick to one end, turn on the radio to lively music, and let your child march around the house carrying the flag.
8. **Organize closets.** Have younger children help you sort and older children can be assigned a particular closet to do by themselves.
9. **Play trains, blocks, or arts and crafts.** Challenge your imaginations. Here are two quick ideas:

- a. Make a bouquet of flowers out of opened-up cupcake liners. Write a message at the center of each flower for someone special. Glue or tape a straw or Popsicle stick for a stem. Tie the flowers together with a ribbon.
- b. Make a collage by cutting out pictures of healthy foods from magazines and gluing them on construction paper. Then try to eat those healthy foods throughout the day.

**10. Plan the night before.** Take a few minutes to discuss the routine with your child before bed the night before. For example, "In the morning, we aren't going to watch TV. When we wake up, we'll get washed and dressed, eat breakfast, and then do x, y, or z."

#### Sources:

*About Learning and Play.* Retrieved from [www.yourtotalhealth.com](http://www.yourtotalhealth.com).

*The Value of Play.* Retrieved from [www.babycenter.com](http://www.babycenter.com).

*TV-Free Ideas for Your Toddler.* Retrieved from [www.parentsplace.com](http://www.parentsplace.com)

*Welcome baby is excited to announce that our playgroup curriculum is now available online! The lessons can be accessed at [www.babiesandmomsradio.com/playgroups.html](http://www.babiesandmomsradio.com/playgroups.html). Parenting is a hard job, sharing experiences and knowledge with other parents is one of the best ways to rejuvenate yourself and keep your parenting skills sharp. Please feel free to use Welcome Baby's curriculum and let us know if you have any questions or suggestions for future lessons. Contact us at [BWelcome@unitedwayuc.org](mailto:BWelcome@unitedwayuc.org) or (801)691-5304.*

## Community Events

- **Ready to Learn**—April 16th, Utah County Health Department, 12–1 p.m., receive a complimentary book, RSVP [stephanie.anderson@byu.edu](mailto:stephanie.anderson@byu.edu) and put "Welcome Baby, Yes" in the subject line or call 422-1807.
- **Nutrition Class**—If interested in a private home lesson on nutrition and cooking, call Jackie Robins at 801-376-9559.
- **Spanish Parent Group**—April 24th, Topic: "Safety at Home", Utah County Health Department, Rm. #2501, 6–7 p.m.
- **Car Seat Safety Class**—April 10th at 10 a.m. and April 28th at 4:30 p.m., Utah County Health Department, Rm. #2700