

How to play with your child (0-3 years)

Playing with your baby or toddler

Play helps babies and toddlers find out about the world, and their place in it. Play is fun, but it is also vital for children's learning, development and well-being.

Why is play important?

Playing together helps you and your baby or toddler get to know each other. When you play with your child he learns to trust and depend on you, and the bond between you gets stronger. This helps your child feel loved and secure, which is important for his wellbeing.

Play helps your child learn how to talk and understand words. It also helps his brain to develop and supports his overall development and learning. This is because new play experiences help parts of his brain link together and grow.

Play helps you learn a lot about your child's personality. Rough and silly, or quiet and calm, you will soon know what your child likes.

Tips to help your baby and toddler play

Playing with your baby

For **babies**, play means you. Your face, touch and voice are your baby's most exciting and interesting playthings. Your baby loves moving his arms and legs and he will reach out to touch everything – toys, pets and brothers and sisters!

When your baby shakes a rattle, it shows him that he can make things happen. This makes him keen to see what else he can do.

As your baby grows, play becomes more active. He might start pulling out drawers, dropping cereal onto the floor, pushing any button he can find, and putting toys where they do not belong. This is how he figures out how things work.

Here are some fun play ideas to try:

- Blow kisses, poke out your tongue and make faces. Because babies love faces, these are all good ways to play with your baby.
- Make some noise together. Sing all kinds of songs, both loud and soft, and fast and slow.
- Play simple games like pat-a-cake and peekaboo. Your baby probably also loves touching different parts of your face, and having you touch his. These baby games can help your baby learn about turn-taking, and they also encourage moving.

- Read with your baby. Reading together can be a special time with your baby, even if your baby wants to read the same story over and over again. Hearing the same story is a way your baby learns about language.

Opportunities to help your toddler play

Your toddler is keen to explore. He will probably want time to look at and try everything he sees and see how things work. And he learns a lot through interactions with others. You are still the best toy for your toddler to play with – and the best toddler games still have you playing a very important part.

By the time he is three, ‘pretend’ games like playing house are likely to be favourite activities. This type of imaginative and creative play also helps him express and explore new emotions, like frustration, sadness and anger.

You can help your toddler learn and develop with these ideas:

- Sing songs and nursery rhymes. Your toddler will enjoy singing with you – and he will not care if you are singing out of tune!
- Read with your toddler. Reading expands your toddler’s knowledge of words and helps him learn to talk.
- Give your toddler things to draw with. He will enjoy scribbling on paper – and on the walls, floor, fridge, your good books and the dog – with crayons, pencils and paints.
- Try water play. Let your child empty and fill containers, play with the hose, pour water from a teapot into a cup or enjoy bath toys. Remember that constant supervision is the only way to keep your child safe around water.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

For some suggestions on rhymes, click [here](#) to download a booklet on rhymes!

Recommended Reads

- [Mindful mama, happy baby: over 60 calming techniques and creative activities for babies and toddlers](#)
- [How to connect with your baby in your first year together: learn to play like a baby](#)
- [The everything toddler activities book](#)

Engage your child with simple activities at home! Check out some of these things you can do together:

- [Alphabet Song](#)
- [Draw The Bus](#)
- [I am Special!](#)