

Creative play (0-3 years)

Creative play

Creative play is unstructured, open-ended play where your child uses his imagination to decide what to do and how to do it.

Why is creative play important?

Creative play is the main way that your baby or toddler explores and develops his imagination. It is a central part of his learning and development at this age.

What to expect with your baby's imagination

From 8-18 months, your baby can use his imagination to enjoy made-up games and open-ended play. In this type of play, your child might turn a carrot into a rocket, your sweater into a hat or a piece of cloth into a flag.

What to expect with your toddler's imagination

Dressing up and pretend play start at around 15 months. Your child might imagine he is driving a bus or putting out a fire as a firefighter.

Your toddler learns by copying what others do – especially you! For example, your two-year-old might pretend to talk on the phone by holding a spoon to his ear and babbling to himself. Or he might pretend to cook dinner using leaves and grass he has found outside.

Listening to songs of all sorts can have your toddler imagining fantastic things like flying or floating in space.

Tips for creative play with your baby and toddler

Lots of different experiences will help your child's imagination to grow. Here are some ideas to boost your child's imagination, creativity, learning and development:

- Share stories, read books or sing nursery rhymes using actions together – for example, twinkly star fingers while singing 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star'.
- Listen to different types and styles of music. Or why not make some music? You could help your child make musical instruments – like a cardboard box and wooden spoons for a drum, with saucepan lids for cymbals.
- Play dress-ups. This is great fun for children from about 12 months on. If you provide plenty of props, like old clothes and hats, it gives your toddler lots of ways to play at being a grown-up.
- Have some messy play using sand, clay, playdough or paints. For example, you can make shapes with playdough, or just squeeze it between your fingers.

- Play with water from 12 months. A shallow tub of water and a few plastic cups are all your baby needs. Bath time is good for water play too, with lots of splashing! Make sure you constantly supervise your baby around water to keep him safe.
- Show your child how to stuff old stockings with paper to make a snake or caterpillar.
- Fold newspaper into a hat. Let your child decorate it with markers and paste on coloured pictures cut from old magazines.
- Let your child's imagination turn old cardboard boxes into toys – a car, tent, shop counter or kitchen stove.
- Tape some scrap paper together to make a simple book for your child to 'write' in. Encourage all his efforts – even scribbling builds your child's skills for when he will really write and draw.
- Offer your child toys he can use in lots of different ways. This lets him use his imagination and builds his creativity. Blocks are a good example. When your child uses his imagination, blocks can become rocket ships, presents or even a bag of potatoes.



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

Recommended Reads

- [Let's play and learn together: fill your baby's days with creativities that are fun and enhance development](#)
- [The everything toddler activities book: over 400 games and projects to entertain and educate](#)
- [The playful parent](#)

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

- [Animal Masks](#)
- [Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes](#)
- [If You're Happy and You Know It](#)
- [One, Two, Buckle My Shoe](#)
- [Teddy Bear Song](#)