



## Time to Play

Play is fun, but it's also important! Play is a young child's way of learning, and the opportunity to learn or practice something new makes play fun. Your child *needs* to play to develop socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically. Support your child in his learning through play by following his lead, encouraging his curiosity, and respecting his interests.

- Remember that your child has one ambition—to learn about everything—and is easily drawn to new things and events. Don't get frustrated if his focus changes or his attention shifts. He's exploring!
- To explore, your child must get up and move. Children learn through play, indoors and outdoors. Make sure there are safe places for your child to walk, run, climb, and jump. Visit new places to play and explore, such as an indoor gym, a playground, park, museum, aquarium, library, pond, or beach. (Your library may have free passes to local museums.)
- Play has many different looks. Stomping through a mud puddle, squeezing balls of play dough, seeing what floats, and emptying the silverware drawer are all play to your child. Set limits but provide places where your child can safely explore and play.
- Discover what makes your baby smile, and what makes her laugh without getting overwhelmed. Laugh along with your toddler's attempts to entertain you, and support her emerging sense of humor.
- Playful activity like running, jumping, dancing, digging, and climbing uses and builds muscles your child needs for other activities like writing and drawing.
- Give your toddler uninterrupted time to play and solve problems on his own. This may mean your child will want to do something over and over again to figure out how it works. Realize this can get messy when he's trying to understand what happens when he kicks and water splashes in (and out of) the tub! Be prepared for these kinds of explorations with extra towels, play clothes that can get dirty, or a plastic tablecloth under your child's highchair.

- Toys for your child don't have to be fancy or store-bought. In fact, simpler toys such as balls, blocks, and dolls encourage more creative and imaginative play.
- Use household objects and recycled materials to make simple toys.
  - Young babies like: things that move in interesting ways; things to shake and make noise with; things to bat at, grab, pull, and kick; and things to squish, stroke, mouth, hold, and transfer from one hand to the other.
  - Older babies like things to bang, drop, roll, retrieve, knock over, and get in and out of small places.
  - Toddlers like things to empty, fill, tote, and tote things in; things to climb on or into; things to dress up and pretend with; things to take apart and fit together; and things to use as, or with, tools as they imitate grown-up activities.
- It's true—you *do* know more than your child knows, but try not to take over your child's play. It may take some time for her to figure out where the puzzle piece fits, but when she does it all on her own, she'll be more confident in her skills and abilities. Give her plenty of time to make her own choices.
- Help your child find friends of different ages to play with. Babies like to watch other babies and older children, and may coo at, follow, or imitate them, or even engage in back-and-forth, interactive "conversation" with familiar people.
- Toddlers often choose particular children to play with or alongside of. They learn from imitating and talking with older children, inventing games with peers, and being gentle leaders to children who are younger or less mature.