



INFANT

Learning Through Play

“Play is the work of childhood.” - Mr. Rogers



Why Does Play Matter?

It is more than just fun and games!
Play matters because it:

- Helps children learn about themselves and the world around them
- Allows them to explore different interests and passions
- Encourages interactions, sharing, and socialization to help develop social-emotional skills
- Develops important life skills

What Is Play?

Play is “any spontaneous or organized activity that provides enjoyment, entertainment, amusement or diversion.” In simpler terms, it is a time when we are:

- Having fun
- Being creative and spontaneous
- Creating original ideas and acting on them
- Engaged and concentrated

How Old Does my Baby Need To Be to Play?

Your baby can play at any age! Play is a great way to promote motor, sensory, communication, and social-emotional development—so it can start as soon as your baby comes home. Of course, play will look different as she ages, but here is a look at early play with your baby. As your little one becomes a toddler, she begins to bring more communication and interaction into her play. As her communication skills get better, she will be able to follow directions while playing games. She will also use her motor skills to do more physical activities and play with toys, and learn important social skills like sharing.

How Often Should my Child Play?

Think of play as a prescription from a doctor. It is something your child needs every day and should be a balance of structured and unstructured play.



What Skills Does Play Develop?

- Knowing what to do when no one is directing you
- Problem-solving
- Creativity and imagination
- Interacting with others and negotiating
- Resilience
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Willingness to take risks and try new things
- Processing emotions
- Understanding social situations
- Discovering interests
- Building confidence

Play Ideas for Babies

Playing with your baby can be rewarding for both of you! Here are a few examples of how you can play with your young infant.

- **Beep Baby:**
Tap baby in different places and say the name of each body part. Then say “beep” or make another sound after each new body part you touch. Your baby may start watching your hands and anticipating each touch. This helps your baby develop sense of touch and body awareness.
- **Raise to Sit:**
Place your baby on his back facing you. Put your hands behind his shoulders and head for support and slowly raise him to a sitting position. Keep repeating this movement. Once your baby can support his head, you can practice while holding his hands. This helps your baby build strength.
- **Mirror on the Wall:**
Put up a child-safe activity mirror on your baby’s crib where she can see it. Say a rhyme: “Mirror mirror on the wall, who’s the coolest baby of all?” Tap the mirror so your baby will glance at it, and eventually, she will learn that it is herself in the mirror! This helps your baby to develop vision.
- **Rattle Up and Down:**
Move and groove with a rattle – up and down. While your infant will not be able to shake the rattle on his own yet, his reflexes will allow him to grasp the handle and enjoy the sounds as you help shake it. This helps your baby continue to develop hearing.
- **Dropping Objects:**
Invite your baby to practice dropping things, especially things that make a noise when they land. Show her a toy in your hand. When she looks at it, open your fingers and let the toy drop. Repeat the motion, saying, “Drop” as it falls. Keep a short dropping distance so she will be able to see your hand and the dropped object at the same time. Encourage her to try after you have shown her several times. Give an enthusiastic response with each attempt she makes. “Wow! You dropped the block by yourself!” Play again using a ball that bounces or a bell that makes a noise when it hits the floor. She may show more interest in a toy that produces a sound when dropped. Listen for any sounds she makes when she lets go of the ball. This is her attempt to imitate you when you say, “Drop.” Picking up and dropping objects helps your baby gain more control of the muscles in her hands.

