



TODDLER

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

Structured Play

Structured play requires a child to follow directions or rules and is guided by an adult. This could include board games, puzzles, and organized classes like dance or art, or team sports like soccer. Toddlers should spend at least thirty minutes engaged in active, adult-led play.

Unstructured Play

Unstructured play allows for children to do whatever interests them, without as many directions or guides. This can be playing on the jungle gym, playing dress up, or exploring the outdoors. The possibilities are endless! Toddlers should spend at least one hour a day in free, unstructured play.



Please see below for some additional activities that you could try with your child.



Make Your Own Sand Box

Make your own “sand” box using cereal. You can play in a small, five-quart bin—it does not need to be large. Just use it like it is a sandbox or hide a few of your toddler’s favorite snacks inside for him to find.

Draw Pictures

This activity is a 2-in-1 for both sensory and fine motor development. Spread out some whipped cream, pudding, or applesauce and let your toddler draw shapes or letters with her finger. This is also good for little ones starting to eat purees. Put some of it on her highchair tray, and although you may not get shapes or letters, let her play around in it and feel a texture that might be new to her!

Make a Discovery Bowl

Make some JELL-O with your toddler and put a few edible snacks inside such as fruit. A clear bowl works great so your child can see the items inside, too! Then ask your child to squish his hands in the JELL-O to find the items. Make it a game by asking him to find a certain one or something of a certain color.

Let Your Toddler Be the Chef or Baker!

There are great sensory experiences that come with cooking. Try letting your toddler help by kneading dough or mixing ingredients.

Make a Cereal Necklace

Put some dry cereal aside for this fun, after-breakfast craft. String fruit oops or Cheerios onto a piece of yarn and tie the two ends together. Fine motor skills are put to use during this activity, and your child may not have felt cereal without milk before. This fun way of playing with food can also be a snack for later!

Do a Blind Taste Test!

Cover your little ones eyes with a headband or small towel. Give him different foods to touch such as dry pasta, a pineapple, or a carrot. Ask him to tell you about how it feels, the temperature, and how it smells. Have your toddler guess what food it is! This could also be fun with the same food in different forms, like an apple with and without the peel. Some kids may not like the blind taste test. If this is the case, do not force it. Instead, just have your child describe the food and try to think of other foods that feel similar.

I See Something That Is...

Invite your child to play a simple version of I Spy with you. Give two hints. The first hint should be about the color of the object, and the second should be about the object’s use. “I spy something blue. You drink from it.” Ask your child to touch the object when he sees it. Respond positively to his accomplishment. “Yes, that cup is blue. You can drink from it.” You listened very carefully! If you need to, make the game easier by placing three items in front of your child and ask for one of the objects using the same two clues.