

Play at HOME



Play to Learn

Your infant as a play partner

Babies learn in the context of relationships. You are your child's first play and learning experience.

Cuddle your baby and kiss his fingers one at a time, counting aloud as you go: *One little finger — kiss! Two little fingers — kiss!* and so on.

Play bike rides with your baby. Lay him on his back, hold his feet gently and move them so he's making small, slow cycling movements.

Offer your baby toys that are made to be put in the mouth. Look for ones with several different textures -- such as bumpy, rubbery and smooth — that your baby can grip easily.

When your children play with you, they are also learning — that they are loved and important and that they are fun to be around. These social-emotional skills give them the self-esteem and self-confidence they need to continue building loving and supportive relationships all their lives.

Your toddler as a play partner

The most important asset a toddler has is his curiosity. Thinking skills such as flexibility and an understanding of cause and effect are beginning to develop. Your toddler is ready to make discoveries with you as a play partner.

Play with a ball - whatever its size and whether it's made of foam, plastic, rubber rolled up socks, or yarn. Start with rolling the ball across the floor and move to throwing and catching.

Blocks are a versatile problem-solving tool. Use your creativity — you can make them out of household items like cereal boxes or used margarine tubs.

Your toddler's imagination is growing. Help him pretend with tea parties for dolls or stuffed animals, imitations of cooking and cleaning, or pretend repair jobs around the house.

Experiment with making sounds. A toilet paper, paper towel, or wrapping paper roll can become a megaphone. Your child can have fun making animal noises, whispers, shouts, and other sounds and hearing how different they sound through the various sizes of tubes.

Your preschooler as a play partner

Pretend play leads your preschoolers play preferences at this stage of development. Research is beginning to support the belief that high-quality pretend play is an important facilitator of perspective-taking and, later, abstract thought; that it may facilitate higher-level cognition; and that there are clear links between pretend play and social and linguistic competence.

Help your child make a secret hideout by putting a blanket or sheet over a table or chair. Boxes can become furniture, and toys and books can help create a "home."

Pretend to be different animals, making sounds like that animal and moving around (crawling, jumping, or running) as that animal moves.

Preschoolers love to dress-up and pretend. Provide your old clothes, purses, phones — anything that encourages creative and dramatic play.

In our hurried, harried, "Roadrunner"-type society, in which parents work feverishly to give their children every educational advantage, the concept of simple interaction —and of adults sitting down and playing with their kids — should be at the forefront of youngsters' learning. Joining children in play is perhaps the hardest challenge parents have to meet.

Your school-aged child as a play partner

Your child's day is now more structured to fit around school, with lots of rules to follow. Play opportunities give your school-age child time to create, think through ideas and imagine. Your child still needs time to let thoughts roam, to explore ideas and to just run around for fun.

Get outdoors for a treasure hunt! You or your child can make a list of things to find (or draw pictures of them) -- things like leaves, a stone, or a twig.

Build a safe outdoor obstacle course with nearly anything you've got on hand --stones, lawn furniture, wastebaskets, hula hoops, boxes! Your child can make up rules for the course and change it to keep it challenging.

Play storytelling games anytime -- in the car, at bedtime, in a waiting room, etc.

Have your child draw a map of your route to school, grandma's house or some place you visit often.

Resources: playingforkeeps.org, zerotothree.org, ecrp.uiuc.edu/v4n1/bergen.html. *Einstein Never Used Flashcards*, Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff

