

PLAY AND DEVELOPMENT



Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Play is a big part of how your child learns and grows. Kids learn best when they are having fun and doing things they enjoy!

You are one of your child's first and most important play partners. Playing can be simple, like making funny faces or singing a song together. The **Early Connections team** put together these ideas to help you and your child have fun.

What to expect

Your child's play will change as they grow.

- **Tuning into the world:** Babies start to calm and to notice the world around them. They move their bodies to learn what happens. Those are the first steps of playing and learning.
- **Connecting with their family:** Babies start to reach out to the people around them. They make sounds or gestures to show they are ready to connect.
- **Back-and-forth:** Infants "talk" before they even have words! This can look like taking turns making sounds, rolling a ball to someone, or smiling back.
- **Communicating for learning:** Young children start to solve problems. They experiment with objects to see what happens. They also experiment with people. They might point, look at you, and make a sound, so that you'll turn and look.
- **Pretending:** Children start to pretend. They might copy what their parent does like pretending to sweep the floor or cook. Or they might pretend with play animals or dolls.
- **Story-telling:** Pretending starts to get more complex. Children start to tell stories with their play. They can tell you about something that happened that day. They also ask lots of questions.

Why play with your child?

- Helps you and your child feel close
- Lowers stress for you and your child
- Helps your child handle new things and different feelings
- Builds your child's talking and listening skills
- Teaches your child how to take turns and pay attention
- Helps you understand your child's feelings so they feel safe and heard
- Fosters creativity





TIPS FOR PARENTS

How to play to help your child grow

Follow their lead. Play is more fun when it's about what your child likes. If your child looks at a mirror, look at it with them. If they sing a song, sing along!

Copy them. Do what your child does. If they smile, smile back. If they stack blocks, you can stack blocks, too. This helps them learn how to go back and forth in play.

Repeat and add. Say what your child says and add more. If they say "truck," you can say, "Yes! That is a red truck!" This helps your child learn new words.

Describe what they're doing. Talk about what your child is doing. If they grab a toy, say, "You're picking up the dinosaur!" You can also say how they might feel: "You look so excited!"

Take turns. Taking turns teaches your child how to play with others. You can roll a ball back and forth, play peek-a-boo, or take turns making sounds or talking.

Have fun and enjoy the time together. Children love playing with you and their brains develop best when they are having fun.



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Where can I find online resources for more support?



Play in Early Childhood: The Role of Play in Any Setting

Center on the Developing Child
at Harvard University

Video: bit.ly/44mbp4F



Activities for Infants, Toddlers, and Children

Center on the Developing Child
at Harvard University

[developingchild.harvard.edu/
resources/handouts-tools/
brainbuildingthroughplay/](https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/handouts-tools/brainbuildingthroughplay/)



My Toddler and Me: Connecting With Your Toddler Through Play

Karitane

Video: bit.ly/4nFEOOJ



Topics of Development: Play

[pathways.org/topics-of-
development/play](https://pathways.org/topics-of-development/play)



Tips to Help Grow Your Child's Brain Power

vroom.org



Power of Play in Early Childhood

American Academy of Pediatrics

[www.aap.org/en/patient-care/early-
childhood/early-childhood-health-
and-development/power-of-play/](https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/early-childhood/early-childhood-health-and-development/power-of-play/)



Child Development Resources for Families

Zero to Three

[www.zerotothree.org/
resources/for-families/](https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/for-families/)