



Play Time for Toddlers and Preschoolers

To enable your child to achieve his full developmental potential, it is important for him to play, and not just alone or with his peers. It is an essential part of development for your child to play with you, his caregivers or his siblings.

Why is play important?

Play helps your child to develop cognitive, motor, language and social skills in a fun and enjoyable manner. It allows your child to explore and interact with the world around him. Your child will learn how to manage his feelings in relation to others and about the functions and properties of daily objects. It also provides an ideal opportunity for you to bond with your child.

How can you play with your older child?

Play ideas for toddlers (12 to 24 months old)

As toddlers start to move independently, they need to practice motor skills such as pushing, pulling and developing eye-hand coordination. As they start to talk, they need opportunities to practise speaking. Their attention span is short and they need a lot of changes in activity. Their world is also expanding and they like to attend small outings.

- Blow bubbles for your child to burst.
- Use a bucket and shovel (or large spoon) to scoop up water or sand.
- Scribble on paper using washable crayons or coloured pencils.
- Sing along to nursery rhymes and make up actions for your child to imitate (e.g. Twinkle Twinkle Little Stars, Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes).
- Pretend to cook and share a meal using a toy cooking set or tea set.
- Go for a walk in the park and listen to different sounds (e.g. birds, cars, footsteps).
- Find different surfaces to walk on, maybe even barefoot on grass, sand, concrete pavement and leaves.
- Jump on each other's shadows.
- Collect interesting objects in a wagon and get your child to push or pull it.
- Play outdoors on a swing and see-saw, throw, kick and catch a ball together.

Some parents often feel that they need to buy lots of toys for their young children. However, many toys may not allow children to use their own imagination and create their own games. This can lead to children playing with them for a while and then wanting more.

Rotate a few toys and resources that allow your child to be creative. These will be more valuable than a large number of expensive toys.

Play ideas for preschoolers (24 to 30 months old)

Preschoolers are beginning to learn to share and take turns, and they like imaginative and pretend play. They also like activities which allow them to move about freely, such as running, climbing and riding pedal toys.

Try out the following activities with your preschooler:

- Paint using interesting textures such as sponges and toothbrushes or try finger or foot-printing.
- Organise a baking session and let your child knead dough, cut cookies and decorate cupcakes.
- Lie on a large sheet of paper and draw around your outlines, then fill in face and body details.
- Model objects and figures with clay or playdough.
- Tell stories using hand puppets.
- Construct a homemade telephone with two plastic cups and a string.
- Pretend an object is something else (e.g. use remote controls or bananas as a telephone).



Examples of valuable 'toys' for your child are as follows:

- Wooden blocks
- Pots, pans and cooking sets
- Boxes of all shapes and sizes
- Large sheets of paper and washable crayons or watercolour paints
- Animals, toy people and vehicle sets
- Old clothes for dressing up and pretend play
- Toys to ride on or pedal

Toy safety

- Check that the toy is of sound quality or has a Safety Mark (e.g. CE) or LION Mark.
- Make sure that the age range of the toy is suitable for your child's age.
- Check for loose parts, small detachable parts or sharp edges.
- Any cords or ribbons should be less than 15cm to prevent accidental strangulation.
- Avoid giving your young child balloons, small balls, marbles or magnets.
- Check toys regularly for wear and tear. Discard if broken.
- Keep batteries locked away. Toys should ideally have a screwed-on battery compartment.
- Follow the instructions and warnings provided with the toy.
- Supervise your young child during play at all times.
- Tidy up after playing to prevent tripping.
- Ensure that playground equipment is robust and stable, and keep continuous supervision on your young child using them.
- Ensure that your child uses the appropriate safety gear when on a bicycle, skateboard or rollerblades.

Things to note

- Play with your child but do not take over. Let your child determine the game.
- Talk about what your child is doing and encourage him.
(e.g. "It looks like Dolly is going shopping. What does she want to buy?")
- Appreciate and encourage your child's efforts (e.g. display his work on walls or fridge).
- Always ensure a game is safe, especially if using small toys or objects that can easily be put into his mouth.
- Play is about focusing on the process, not the end product.
- Have fun teaching, learning from and bonding with your child!

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