

## PLAY: THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOUR CHILD CAN DO!



### What is play?

Play is an enjoyable activity through which your child learns about the world around him/her.  
Play is finding out.

### Why is play important in helping your child to talk?

- \* Play is very important for helping children to grow up because it is through play that we learn;
- \* Play is natural and allows children to have fun while learning;
- \* Play doesn't necessarily mean with toys; babies and children learn about their world by playing facial games; e.g., "peep-bo";
- \* There should be lots of opportunity for play, not only alone, but also with an adult;
- \* Playing helps children to develop new skills;
- \* Playing helps children express themselves;
- \* Through play, children learn to look at things, explore, copy and work out how things work;
- \* Play allows children to practise skills already acquired;
- \* Play helps children to identify with other rôles through make-believe and rôle-play;
- \* Play helps children to express themselves and release energy;
- \* Play helps children to listen, look, touch, smell, taste, copy and imagine or pretend;
- \* Children also learn language through play; if they learn that toys are symbols for real objects, it is easier for them to understand that words are symbols for real objects;
- \* All these abilities are needed to help your child learn to talk.



### How can you help your child to play?

Make sure there is

- ~ a choice of things with which to play.
- ~ someone with whom to play as well as a little time to play by themself.
- ~ space in which to play.
- ~ time to play and learn.

Talk about what your child is doing rather than giving directions; e.g., "That's good, you've put teddy on the chair."

### What sort of toys?

You do not need to buy any special toys. You can use magazines, dressing-up clothes, wooden spoons, old saucepans, etc., which you can find around the house.  
Other toys can be borrowed from toy libraries.



## How does play develop?

There is a pattern which children follow as they develop their play skills. Following are examples of the types of play and the way in which play develops. In order to help your child move to the next stage, decide which level you feel s/he is at and work towards the next level. For instance, if your child seems to be at the exploratory level (shaking toys), encourage him/her to bang toys together.

### \* Exploratory play

All these activities help your child to explore and learn about the objects/toys with which s/he is playing. Children will explore by:

- \* putting objects in their mouth.
- \* shaking (the object).
- \* hitting (the object).
- \* feeling/rubbing.
- \* throwing.
- \* dropping and watching it fall.



Toys should be interesting and colourful, with different textures and noises (e.g., rough, smooth, hard, soft, musical).



For example - musical toys, finger puppets, feely books, mobiles, face play, peek-a-boo, activity centres, mirrors, rattles, wooden spoon and something to bang, sealed containers with dried pasta, rice, lentils, etc. (you can make these yourself!).

Let your child play with the toy how s/he wants, then you can show him/her something else to do with it.

### \* Relational play

These activities help your child to understand how objects relate together. Children will do this by:

- \* banging two toys together;
- \* taking toys out and putting them in boxes;
- \* putting objects on top of things.



Toys should still be colourful and have different textures.

For example - stacking rings, building beakers, shape sorters, pop-up toys, simple books, bricks, posting boxes, push and pull toys. Don't expect your child to stack graded rings or bricks in the right order yet, though!

### \* Self-pretending

Learning how to do things that s/he sees being done; copying modelled behaviour. Children may do this by:

- \* Feeding themselves with a toy cup and spoon.
- \* Making symbolic noises; e.g., a drinking sound.
- \* Brushing their own hair.
- \* Pretending to sleep on a doll's pillow.



Toys are often your child's own things (e.g. brush, cup). Looking at books, doll or teddy with clothing. Cars, trains, garages. Hammer toys, musical toys. Play-dough.

Your child will really enjoy you playing with him/her, as well as enjoying playing with his/her peers.

## Doll pretending & small-world play

Learning to do things to teddy or doll or smaller toys that s/he sees done at home. Children may do this by:

- \* feeding teddy/doll;
- \* brushing teddy;
- \* putting doll to bed;
- \* kissing teddy;
- \* putting doll in buggy;
- \* bathing doll.



Children will create sequences, small at first, then linking more things together. For example, your child might cuddle teddy and put it to bed. Another time, s/he might 'bathe' teddy, then cuddle it and put it to bed. S/he may then develop to 'feed' teddy, 'bathe' it, read it a story and put it to bed.

Toys will be more varied. The same toys are suitable for boys and girls.  
For example - doll, teddy. Everyday objects (e.g., spoon, cup, book).

At the same time, your child will be really into working things out and will enjoy toys where s/he has to work at it, either by working out where things go, how they fit together or what will happen next.

Toys will encourage your child to work things out for him/herself.  
For example - sorting toys, construction toys, puzzles.



## HELPING YOUR CHILD PLAY

### RELATIONAL PLAY: RELATING TWO THINGS TOGETHER

#### **Aim**

This type of play helps your child to understand that two objects can relate together. Sometimes, one object affects another. This is called 'cause and effect'. Between twelve and eighteen months, your child begins to understand cause and effect. It develops at the same time as relational play. Let your child play with the toy how s/he wants, then you can show him/her something else to do with it.



#### **Noise-making**

Give your child a variety of noisy toys and show him/her how to make sounds, guiding his/her hands, if necessary. When s/he is able to make the sounds, let him/her make them on his/her own.



#### **Banging**

Take advantage of your child's interest in banging objects. Give him a small stick and lots of different objects to hit: a cymbal will sound and feel different to a soft cushion; an empty tin will sound different to a full one.



#### **Relating things together**

Provide opportunities for relating two objects together; e.g., filling and emptying containers with coloured water, buckets and spades in sand play.



#### **Taking things out & putting them in**

Put some objects into a box, then take them out one by one. Once your child can take an object out, show him/her how to put it back in.



#### **Things that go together around the house**

Encourage your child to relate objects in his/her environment that go together; e.g., spoon in cup, pillow on bed, chair under table, brush for hair, brush for teeth, etc.



### Toys that roll

Let your child have a selection of toys that roll. These can include cylindrical toys, toys with wheels, balls or balloons.

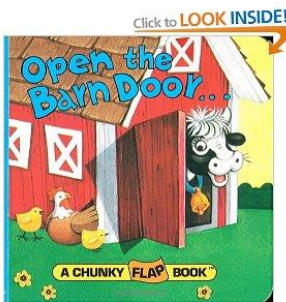


### Bottle music

Fill some bottles with different amounts of (coloured) water. Show your child how to blow across them and listen to the different sounds.

### Pop-up toys & picture books

Use pop-up toys that your child releases by performing an action; e.g., pressing a button; Look with your child at pop-up picture books where s/he can make things move by opening flaps or pulling tabs.



### Inset puzzles & hammer boards

Show your child how to do simple inset puzzles; It's possible to buy a board with holes, into which they can hammer wooden pegs.





**RELATIONAL PLAY: BUILDING THINGS**

**Aim**

This type of play helps your child to discover different shapes, sizes, weights and colours. Building activities (e.g., making a tower) require co-ordination of hand and eyes and the ability to plan what to do; e.g., the child decides what to do, starts his tower and finishes it.



**Fitting things together**

Your child will enjoy opening lids and containers, screwing on tops, putting objects in boxes and replacing the lids.

**Threading (i)**

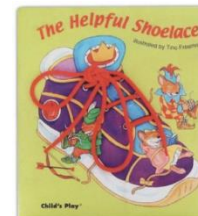
Help your child to thread a shoelace, and undo and do up poppers, buttons and zips.

**Threading (ii)**

Help your child to thread large beads onto string to make a necklace.

**Art**

Colouring, drawing, painting and cutting (with help!) are useful activities.



**Building (i)**

Use bricks to build towers.

**Building (ii)**

Use Duplo, Lego and any other construction toys to encourage your child to build.



**RELATIONAL PLAY: MATCHING THINGS**

**Aim**

This type of play helps your child to realise that toys and pictures are symbols of real objects, in the same way that words are symbols of real objects.

**Object-picture matching**

Find four clear objects of pictures (e.g., ball, hairbrush, shoe, apple). Find four matching objects. See if your child can match the object to the picture.



**Toy-picture matching**

See if your child can match a toy to four pictures (e.g., a toy car to a picture of a real car, a baby doll to a picture of a baby, a doll's shoe to a picture of a real shoe, a toy boat to a picture of a real boat).



**Gesture-picture matching**

Find four clear pictures and see if your child can match a gesture to the correct picture (e.g., a sleep gesture to a picture of a bed, a driving gesture to a picture of a car, a drinking gesture to a picture of a cup, etc.).



**to drink**



## HELPING YOUR CHILD PLAY

### SELF- & DOLL-PRETENDING AND IMAGINING

#### **Aim**

This play is very important in the development of talking.

Pretend play helps the child develop thought and imagination and act out what he sees in everyday life.

#### **Early pretending**

##### **Watching**

Your child starts by imitating or copying what s/he sees other people doing. First, encourage your child to watch you in your activities around the home. Let him/her watch you:

brushing the floor	brushing your hair
doing the shopping	cleaning the car
putting away the shopping	washing up
digging the garden	putting away the toys
watering the garden	etc.



All small children model themselves on their parents and they enjoy pretending to be Mummy/Daddy. Talk about what you are doing as you do it.

##### **Helping**

Then you can let him/her help you by using everyday objects and demonstrating; e.g., pretend to “drink” from a cup, brush hair, “feed” him/herself with a spoon.



Give your child some common objects such as a brush, cup or spoon. S/he may just pick them up or bang them. See if s/he will copy you pretending to drink, brush your hair or eat.

See if your child can give a doll or teddy a drink or some food, or brush its hair. If you do it first, s/he may copy you.

##### **Doll or teddy play**

##### **Include doll/teddy in everyday activities**

It may be useful to include your child’s doll or teddy in everyday activities; e.g.,

dolls’ tea party	doll/teddy at the doctor’s
bathing doll/teddy	doll/teddy in hospital
putting doll/teddy to bed	doll/teddy goes shopping
dressing doll/teddy	



Continued...



### **Child copies your activities**

Encourage your child to copy your activities; e.g., dusting the furniture. Make the doll dust the furniture too.



### **Doll copies your activities**

Play some games that you and your child can make the doll copy; e.g., going to sleep, jumping, waving.



### **More imaginative play**

#### **Toy telephones**

These will provide lots of opportunity for make-believe play. Act out scenes such as ringing someone up and asking them to tea, then have the tea-party.



#### **Making things**

Encourage your child to make things; e.g., out of old grocery boxes (boat, 'plane, etc.). You will probably need to show him/her first.



#### **Pretend games**

Give your child a collection of cars, small houses, etc. See if s/he can play constructively with these toys; e.g., making the people walk to the houses, etc.

Use miniature toys (e.g., dolls' house, play people) to play pretend games, such as an outing to the park or going shopping.



#### **Dressing-up**

Save old clothes for dressing-up games.

#### **Home corner**

See if you can make a 'home corner' in a corner of a room where toy cooking equipment or bed equipment could be kept. Try and change it regularly. It could be a kitchen, a bedroom, etc.

#### **Shop**

Make a shop using empty food packets and a toy till. Use a purse, bag and pretend money to act out a shopping trip.

#### **Hospital corner**

Change the "home corner" into a hospital corner. You could have a bed, a nurse's uniform, a toy doctor's kit, etc.



#### **Puppets**

Animal puppets are fun to encourage your child to pretend to be different animals and make the noises they make.

