

Power of Play (Excerpted from Kidspot.com and Zero to Three)

Play helps with communication

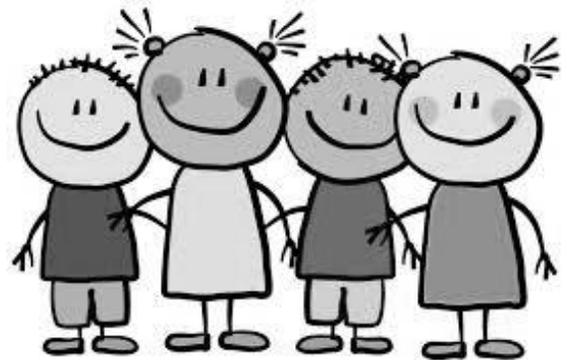
Play provides opportunities for children to develop **speech and language abilities** and also to practice **listening**. Whether their play is companion-based with a sibling, peer, or parent, or solo play using imagination, children talk and listen while playing.

Play helps with relationships

Play promotes **social interaction**, and **social skills**... Children who play, both with parents and peers, learn how relationships work through their play experiences.

Play boosts cognitive (thinking) development

Imaginative play and role-playing are particularly powerful kinds of play that help the **brain develop**... Children who engage in these kinds of play have more (advanced) interaction with others and with their environment than those who do not.



How play benefits parents

Parents who play get big boosts in self-esteem, and most important, significant increases in relationship satisfaction. This goes for both playing with their children, and also being playful with other adults, particularly spouses.

...playing with your child aged 0 – 1 year old

Talk to your baby

While your baby may not understand your words, they understand the feelings you share, and gain important security from hearing your voice. Tell your baby what you are doing, and why you are doing it. Explain where you are going and why, what you're buying in the store, etc. Your talk will stimulate brain activity and help your child develop.

Massage touch, and tickle your baby

Babies respond to touch, and thrive because of it.

Read to your baby

Children, even babies, love to have stories read to them. They enjoy the rhythm and rhymes of language in children's books.

Play peek-a-boo

Your baby will never grow tired of this game, will be delighted with you, and will begin to play the game with you.

Sing songs

Singing...songs and lullabies will aid in your baby's brain development, and be all the more exciting because it is your voice your baby hears.

Time for play

After the age of 6 months your child will be more interactive...Five minutes of play at this age is plenty... just enjoy a few minutes of the following activities:

- Tactile (physical) experiences are what they really enjoy as they make sense of the world. Play with food and play dough.
- Provide toys that rattle and make noises, such as crunched up paper.
- Enjoy paints, with handprints, footprints, and finger painting.
- Let your child crawl over different surfaces, like sand, dirt, grass, and wood.
- Introduce games like This Little Piggy Went to Market.

Your child will delight in the talking, touching, and play. Above all, keep communicating, describing, chatting, reading, and touching. (Children) need parents to be involved and to be supportive. When parent and child play together, both benefit.

...playing with your child aged 1-2 year old:

Your baby is now crawling and walking, and is beginning to talk. At this age, your child will respond well to 'functional' kinds of play. These types of play are repetitive in nature, and usually involve some kind of shaking, pushing, hitting, or other gross motor skills.

Read to your baby

All children should be read to, regardless of age. They love it! ...The most effective way to read to young children is to read slowly and pause frequently. This allows better comprehension. Asking questions can also help speech and language development. Use picture books and simply describe what is illustrated. Use books with short, simple sentences.

Talk to your baby

Research emphasizes the importance of talking to our babies. Language will develop as your baby hears you talking. Talk about what you are doing while you change diapers, cook dinner, drive in the car. Describe colors, actions, objects.

Sing to your baby

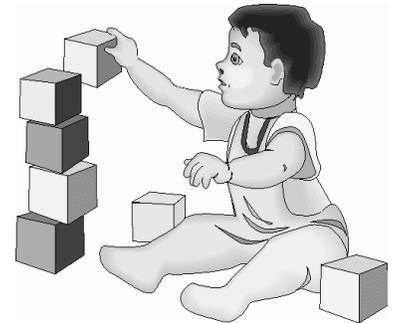
From age 1-2 your baby will respond to action-songs. These can include Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, Itsy-Bitsy Spider, and The Wheels on the Bus. Repetition is your baby's favorite way to play, and you can be sure that you will sing these songs thousands of times without her ever becoming tired of it.

Encourage exploration

Go for walks around your neighborhood or to the local park. Point out, and talk about, the noisy big yellow dog, the chirping pink birds, or anything else your child takes an interest in.

Building and crashing

Your baby will begin to understand (and enjoy) cause and effect at this age. Build a tower of blocks and let your baby push them over. Laughter is guaranteed every time.



Explore food

At this stage your child is also exploring by using his mouth. Provide tactile (touch) experiences with food, and even washing the dishes. Tea parties, mud pies, and sand-castles all work well for playtime with 1-2 year-old children.

What parents need to know about play for 1-2 year olds

Remember, at this age, your child will not play well without direction. It is also important to note that whatever you play is likely to make a mess. It may not be delightful for you, but the messier it is, and the more your child can touch the mess, the more she will love it!

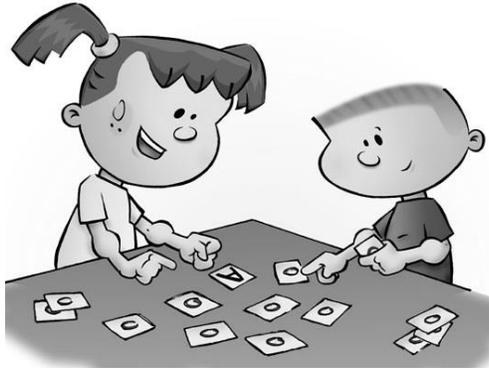
When parent and child play together, both benefit. Your child will not necessarily know how to involve you, but by engaging with your child, you will enjoy positive learning experiences together – that are fun.

...playing with your child aged 1-2 year old:

Playing with an older toddler does not have to involve expensive toys, learning games or anything too tricky. It's important to simply engage in a way that is fun and makes your time together happy. Toddlers love physical activities where their naturally boisterous energy can be expressed. But did you know toddlers of this age can actually play more complex games? Try these ideas...:

Memory games

Memory is too difficult for a toddler under the traditional rules, but try this variation which is just about recognizing colors and images.



Begin by only pulling three or four matching sets of cards (you can use a traditional deck of cards and choose the jack, king, queen and ace of one suit or buy a more child-appropriate deck like a Fish or Old Maid game). See if your little one can find the matching cards and then add more cards as you see their skills increase.

Card games

So your child may not be ready for complex card games, but there are some fun things to do with cards even for the toddler crowd. Grab an old container and a deck of cards. Cut a slit in the lid of the...container big enough to slip cards through and then let your toddler post all the cards.

Simplicity of functional play

At this stage your child will love tactile experiences with food and even washing the dishes. Tea parties, mud pies, and sand-castles all work well for playtime.

...playing with your child aged 3-4 year old:

Constructive play

When your child uses their imagination and skill to create something - a performance, a finger puppet show, block building or making a bug collection, they are engaged in what's known as constructive play. Constructive play develops problem solving skills, imagination, fine motor skills, and self-esteem. The thing to remember is that it's only considered play if your child decides how it is played - if parents determine the outcome, or the child isn't enjoying the activity, then it is not play.

Social play

This is playing with other kids - whether it's an incidental game at the park with a complete stranger or a set-up play date between peers. It teaches social skills, like empathy, and broadens the child's world.

Dramatic play

A tea party, playing dolls or cars, playing house or playing doctors and nurses are all forms of make believe or symbolic play. It tends to peak at about 4 or 5 years of age and is a lot of fun for the parent as well as the child. This type of play helps to develop your child's imagination and social skills.

Sensory play

More common in younger age groups, but this type of play stimulates the senses; for example, tactile, movement, sound, and visual experiences.

Practice play

This type of play involves the repetition of new skills as they are being learned - things like throwing or kicking, twirling, hopping and physical mastery of skills used in sport or games. Practice play is one of those forms of play that continues into adulthood. About one-third of a preschooler's play is practice play, compared to about one-sixth of a child at primary school.

...playing with your child aged 4-6 year old:

Reading

Keep reading to your child, and encourage him to read to you. Read slowly, pause, ask questions, and guess what will happen next. Your child will enjoy it if you ask him to 'make up a new ending' to a story. Ask 'what would happen if...' and let them use their language and speech skills, their imagination and creativity.

Talk together

Instead of doing all the talking and the describing yourself, ask your child to describe things to you.

Let the games begin

Your child is ready for games with rules. Games like Jenga and Chutes and Ladders can be terrific for understanding rules, using constructive play, enhancing coordination, and spending quality time together for children at this age.

Outdoor activities

Ball games and outdoor activities will be lots of fun for children at this age. Ball games will teach coordination with catching, throwing, and kicking. Any activity is important. Research indicates children should be spending at least one hour every day in physical activity.

Parents and play

Remember that all your child really wants is for you to be involved and to be supportive. At this age you will also see that your child is eager to play with peers. You are still important in your child's play, but play is more-or-less self-directed and autonomous now. It is up to you to make playtime fun or your child will choose peers or TV.

Now, the parent can facilitate opportunity for play rather than doing all the play yourself as with previous age groups. Have a craft box nearby, a dress-up box, or other activities that you can enjoy with your child.

Remember that screen time is still ideally limited to one hour a day at this age.

When parent and child play together, both benefit. Your child will still not necessarily know how to involve you, but by engaging with your child, you will enjoy positive learning experiences together – that are fun.

