

# Play and Have Fun!

Play is important for children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. When children have opportunities to practice new skills, the development of these skills advances. Below are some simple ways you can encourage your child's development through play.

## Infants

- Play music with a repeating melody; this is very soothing to an infant.
- Develop a newborn's (birth to 3 months) vision and hearing by making different facial expressions and sounds when looking at your baby (stick out your tongue, sing a song using exaggerated mouth movements, make lip sounds, etc.).
- Play bicycle. Place your baby on his back and move his legs as if he were riding a bicycle. Sing a song while you move his legs.
- With your baby in your lap, sit in front of a mirror. Ask simple questions like, "Where is baby's hand?" Wave your baby's hand and say, "There's your hand." Continue with other body parts and motions (wave bye-bye, clap hands, etc.).
- Bounce your baby in a variety of ways: on your lap, laying her tummy on your knees, laying on her back on your knees, etc. Bounce baby to the rhythm of your words. Always support baby securely when playing bouncing games.
- Repeat the sounds and words your child uses and have back-and-forth "conversations."
- Talk about what you do together as you play, do errands, visit friends and family, etc.
- Encourage child to explore toys in new ways – stacking, shaking, banging, etc.
- Talk or sing while feeding, bathing, diapering, etc.
- Point to and name objects in books when reading together.
- Show photos of family and friends.
- Place baby in different positions to help develop new skills like rolling, creeping, and crawling.
- Encourage play time on tummy as well as on back.
- Offer toys that have different shapes, sizes, textures, and sounds.
- Comment on what baby does to make things happen. ("You want me to keep playing peek-a-boo?")
- Strengthen fine motor skills by letting baby practice picking up baby-safe foods (banana slices, etc.).
- Vocalize baby's feelings.
- Allow lots of time and a safe place to practice developing skills such as crawling and walking.
- Create a "toy trail" that baby can crawl and explore.
- Talk to your baby when holding him, feeding him, changing him. ("Are you hungry? Okay, time for milk.")
- Narrate what you are doing in your daily routines. ("We are taking a walk in the park." "Into your car seat you go.")
- Respond to your baby's sounds and attempts to talk. ("Are you cooing? Well, hello to you too!")
- Read to your baby, especially books created for infants that focus on basic words, including shapes, colors, and sounds.
- Take baby's hand and move it gently over your hair, nose, and mouth. Talk about what you are doing. Repeat using your hand on baby's face.
- Use nursery rhymes as you play.