

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.

Preschoolers

- Respond to and have conversations with your preschooler. Preschoolers love to ask questions. Answer them and ask your own.
- Talk about what your child is doing and what you're doing. Ask questions that extend thinking. ("Tell me about your drawing." "You're doing a good job of cleaning up." "What do you think will happen next in the story?")
- Practice taking turns in conversations. ("What did you do at the park today?" "Wow! Do you like to go high on the swings? I like going really high.")
- Read with your preschooler and involve her as you are reading. Ask questions about the story. (Why did that character _____?) Not only will you encourage conversation, but you are also stimulating analytical thinking.
- When reading a story together, ask your child to predict what might happen in the story or what the characters might be thinking or feeling.
- Tell stories to your child about your childhood.
- Act out stories with your child. Encourage him to retell the story with puppets, toys, or through drawing/painting/sculpting.
- Create a birdfeeder together. Find a pinecone, spread peanut butter on it, and roll in a shallow pan filled with birdseed. Hang outside a window. Discuss the kinds of birds that come to eat off your birdfeeder.
- Play Simon Says.
- Cook together.
- Go on a nature walk in your neighborhood. Ask your child to point out what she sees.
- Write the numerals 1 through 10 on paper plates, one numeral per plate. Encourage your child to clip the same number of clothespins to each plate.
- Create a pattern using blocks, plastic animals, or other toys. Ask your child to replicate it. Encourage him to create his own pattern for you to replicate.
- Play simple board games together like Candy Land.
- Go on a shape, color, or letter hunt when reading a familiar book. How many circles did you find? Can you find the first letter of your name?
- Look for shapes in nature and around town. Photograph items (street signs, plants, tires, etc.) and invite your child to sort by color, shape, or other characteristics. You may repeat this activity using letters of the alphabet.
- Encourage your child to create her own greeting cards for special occasions (birthdays, thank-you notes, etc.) or just for fun.
- Help your child write the letters of the alphabet on index cards (one letter per card, all lowercase letters). Each day, take one letter index card and go on a scavenger hunt in your house for items that begin with that letter (refrigerator = r, table = t). Make a list of all the items you find for each letter.