

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.

Toddlers (12–24 months)

- Sing children's songs and recite nursery rhymes; encourage child to join in.
- Invite child to turn pages while reading together.
- Build together with blocks, cardboard boxes, empty food boxes, etc. Suggest child knocks down the tower and build another.
- Sandpaper, bubble wrap, aluminum foil, and other household items offer ways to explore using the senses.
- Turn everyday routines into playful learning moments. Sinking/floating and wet/dry can be explored during bath time.
- Provide opportunities for your child to fill and dump (water, sand, toys, etc.).
- Reinforce waving good-bye to family and friends.
- Play pushing games with your toddler. Choose lightweight objects (stuffed animals, a small toy, a push toy) and encourage her to push the toy on the count of three.
- Hold your child close and sing some favorite children's songs.
- Point to pictures in books and name the various objects.
- Sit on the floor and roll a ball to your child. Encourage him to roll it back to you.
- Talk about the sounds that different animals make. Look through an animal picture book, point to the animal, and make the sound of that animal. Add other sounds too (car driving, fire engine, etc.). Encourage your child to make the animal sounds on her own. ("What does the cow say?")
- Use descriptive words as you talk about a particular subject. For example, you may say "This bunny feels soft and cuddly," or "The toy fire truck is red and has a ladder."
- Add simple movements when singing songs and encourage your child to mimic you.
- Develop fine motor skills with playdough, knob puzzles, and stacking toys.
- Repeat and extend upon the verbalizations your child makes.
- Help your child explore vocabulary describing feelings and emotions.
- Give simple instructions. ("Give me your bowl." "Wash your hands.")
- Match your child's speech in length and complexity. ("Drink?" "Drink juice?")
- Respond to your child's communication and stay on topic. Whatever she talks about, follow her lead. See where the "conversation" goes.
- Read and have your child join in. As you read, have him turn the page and ask questions related to the images on the page. ("Can you point to the cow?")