

## Play Helps Children Grow and Develop

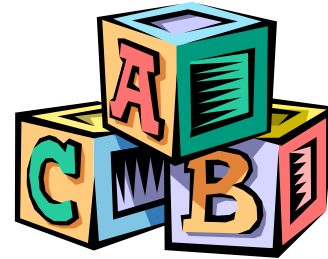
### Play is a way a child learns new skills.

Taking time to play with your infant is important. This is how Baby learns to use her senses and muscles. Play is as important as feeding, bathing, and dressing your child.

### Consider these ideas as you help your child learn through play.

- **variety:** There should be a variety of things for Baby to look at and to play with around her. All the things around a child provide her with experiences. You can feel, look at, and talk about all that is around her.
- **show Baby:** Babies need someone to watch and listen to. They learn a great deal from watching other children and adults.
- **attention and encouragement:** Attention is a reward to an infant. By giving a child some attention, she is encouraged to try new activities. She also watches you for signs of success — the hug, the kiss, the little cheer, the clapping hands.
- **talk, talk, talk:** As you are doing something with Baby, tell her what you are doing. Show her how things work. As you show her, tell her what you are doing. This helps her learn.

Look at your home through your baby's senses. What can she see or hear from where she is? Can she see what you are doing? What does she feel? What does she smell?



### Infants need someone to guide them in their play.

Offer your infant new experiences that will help her learn. This guidance can take many forms.

- Place a developmentally-appropriate toy around your infant. An infant may "use" a toy at first by looking at it. As an infant gets a little older, she will reach for it and try to put it in her mouth.
- Show your child how to use the toy. Most toys come with suggested ways to use the toy with your child.
- Play with your infant as part of the day-to-day activities of feeding, dressing, and bathing. Talk to your baby, move her arms and legs, and show her what is around her. These are all ways to help baby learn.

**While you are with your infant,**

- talk to her about things around you.
- let her feel a safe object.
- let her hold safe objects.
- show her what she can do with objects.

**Research shows that infants who are involved in play activities learn skills more quickly than those who are not involved in play.**

**Make a time to play.**

Pick a time during the day when you are not tired and you know that your baby is not tired or hungry. Plan to enjoy "play time" together.

Use some of the activities that have been listed in issues of *Great Beginnings*. He will like some activities better than others. Continue doing the activities he likes. Try the activities he doesn't like in 2 or 3 weeks.

**Many items can be used during "play time."**

You may not really need many toys. "Play time" is the time when Baby is doing something with someone or some item, or both.

Repeat the sounds your baby makes. Watch what happens when you and Baby are in front of a mirror. Describe what you are doing and feeling as you take your infant from place to place.

Even though your infant is very young, you are preparing Baby to respond to the world around him.

**How do you know your child likes an activity or a toy?**

- Does this toy or activity catch her interest, cause her to explore, and get involved in the activity?
- Does the toy (or can you) let your child know that she has been successful with the activity?
- Does the toy or activity allow your child to do something new and different when she is ready?

**Use developmental abilities to select toys and activities for your child.**

Look at your child's strengths and needs. Look for toys that match your child's developmental stage and interests.

**Look for a toy lending library.**

Some communities have toy libraries. These centers sometimes have play sessions for children and their families.

Trained leaders help family members learn how to help their child through play. Toys can be borrowed from the play center to be used at home.

### More resources for you.

More and more people are concerned about toys and play activities for the child with a disability. These organizations have information on toys for children with disabilities and delays.



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Toy Manufacturers of America  
<http://www.toy-tia.org/> (212)  
675-1141

National Lekotek Center 1-800-366-7529  
<http://www.lekotek.org>

Toy store personnel may also be able to direct you to toys that would be appropriate to your child's interests and needs.

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