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Building Strong Families Playing to Learn Training Manual

Cooperative Extension Service

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# Building Strong Families:

# PARENTING YOUNG CHILDREN



## Playing to Learn *Training Manual*

*Developed and produced by*  
Extension Home Economics  
Cooperative Extension Service  
Michigan State University



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Building Strong Families  
Parenting Young Children  
"Playing To Learn"**

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# **BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES PLAYING TO LEARN**

## **Introduction**

**"Beloved adults are your baby's best playthings. Your body is his gymnastic equipment; your muscles supplement his so that with you he can do a thousand things he cannot yet do alone. Your face and voice together are entrancing to him; the things that you do and the things that you use all fascinate him. If you will give him your attention, your affection and your help, you give him the best kind of play there is." 1**

**The purpose of "Playing to Learn" is to provide parents with basic information about play. It is our hope that after being exposed to these materials, parents will know that:**

- Play is learning.**
- Children's play changes as they get older.**
- Children's personalities and temperaments differ; therefore, how they play also differs.**

**These materials provide basic, necessary information for raising a child to be successful. We have included a list of references for parents who would like more information.**

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## PLAY

### What is it?

For children, play is learning. It is using all their senses to experience the world around them. It is endless exploration and it is fun. In the first three years of life, most play is in the form of manipulation and imitation.

### Why is it important?

Play is important for children because they learn about themselves through play. Through play, they develop their skills and interests, and they come to know their strengths and weaknesses.

They also learn about other people and how the world works. They learn how to cope with new situations. They learn about feelings -- their own and those of others. They learn how to behave in socially acceptable ways.

Play is also important because it develops a child's creative abilities. In a world that is increasingly complex and changing, versatility and adaptability are important life skills.

A newborn's play is sensory and centered on his body. Mouth play is first: sucking, blowing bubbles. Then comes hand play: hands and/or hand-held objects go into the mouth. An infant this age spends a lot of time looking and listening. Cuddling is a wonderful sensory experience also. It encourages physical and cognitive growth.

As the infant develops control, play becomes more object-directed. Providing increasing variety--things to hold, manipulate (change, rearrange) and climb on--becomes more and more important. What a young child knows is related to what he does. If he's not allowed to do things, he won't learn.

It's important that parents spend time watching their child so they know what he can do. Then they will know better how to play with him appropriately. They will be able to help him practice what he knows, and they will be able to challenge him to help him develop new skills, without frustrating him. Knowing what the child is capable of helps the parent choose appropriate toys and activities.



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## TEMPERMENT AND PLAY

### Temperament

The temperament of an infant can determine, to a great extent, how the parents will interact with him. Researchers have noted that an infant tends to have one of three types of temperament: easy (about 40%), slow-to-warm-up (about 15%) and difficult (about 10%) with the remaining 35% being a combination of the three types. The easy baby sleeps and eats on a regular schedule, does not cry very often and is easily comforted when he does. He adapts easily to new situations and new people, and a change of routine does not necessarily upset him. The slow-to-warm-up infant needs time to adjust to new situations and new people. He reacts mildly to his environment. Once he adjusts to people or things, he likes and enjoys them. The difficult baby is fussy and irritable, runs on an irregular schedule, and adapts to new places and people with difficulty. His mood is usually down.

It is important for parents to know that an easy or slow-to-warm-up child is not "better" than a difficult child. Each child must be accepted as he is. Parents also need to know that they did not "cause" their child to be one way or the other. Close observations of how the child acts and reacts to everyday situations will help parents to know their child. They can learn to treat the child in a way that best fits the child's temperament.

For example, if the child has trouble adjusting to new situations, the parents can try to prepare the child ahead of time by talking about what is going to happen, or by exposing him to the new situation gradually.

If an infant is fussy and cannot be comforted, the mother can tell herself that this is the way the child is, it's not her fault, the child isn't trying to

make her upset, and "this, too, shall pass." The parent must not blame the child or punish the child for his fussiness.

Some children like lots of handling and lots of stimulation. They love to be surrounded by activity and new things. Other children prefer to be handled less, like a calmer environment, less noise and less visual stimulation. Careful observation can help parents figure out what their child needs to be most happy.

Parents need to be aware of their own temperaments, too. A quiet parent and a difficult child can be a difficult combination. Awareness helps to keep expectations appropriate. The key is to accept and work with the existing temperament, not to try to change it. Self-esteem problems will develop if a child feels he is not ok. Forcing the child into the parent's behavioral style will lead to frustration and unhappiness for both parent and child.

An excellent resource for parents who have a temperamentally difficult child or a child whose temperament is different from theirs and therefore difficult for that parent, is Stanley Turecki's book The Difficult Child. He describes behavior, temperamental "fit" between parent and child, and strategies for handling difficult behavior. Parents will be encouraged by his conclusions that difficult children, if well managed, are likely to function very well in the long run. In fact, the characteristics that are a problem in childhood can become assets in adults. For example, a high activity level may be channeled into athletics or a competitive career in business or sales. A child with an irregular schedule may function well in a career calling for odd hours, such as restaurant worker, writer or musician.

Each type of difficult behavior can be viewed as a strength in the right situation.



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## **PARENTS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO PLAY**

**What can the parent do to make play a pleasant learning experience?**

- The parent can learn about basic child development. The parent then knows what children of various ages can do, what they need, and what they learn from various toys and play equipment.
  - The parent can express interest in the child's play.
  - The parent can avoid forcing the child to take part in an activity.
  - The parent can try to avoid making the child leave an interesting activity before he's ready to move on. This is not always possible, but minimizing interruptions helps make play a positive experience.
  - The parent can provide a safe, convenient and accessible space for the child's toys.
- The parent can provide a variety of play experiences: quiet play, active play, creative play, and group and make-believe play, if this is appropriate for the child's developmental level.
  - The parent can provide safe, well-built toys that the child can use in a variety of ways. Household items often make good toys.
  - If the child is old enough, the parent can provide opportunity for play with other children.
  - The parent can encourage the child to enjoy make-believe play. The best way to do this is to play with the child.
  - The parent can allow the child to be creative in his drawing or painting. The act or process of drawing or painting is more important than the finished product.

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## Newborn to Three Months

### WHAT DOES A NEWBORN BABY NEED?

A newborn baby needs love, protection and good physical care. When these needs are met, he will develop trust. He will learn that his needs will be met and that the world is a good place to be.

Parents can show love in several ways :

- **Touch:** holding the baby in a gentle, secure way, giving tender caresses and affectionate hugs.
- **Sight:** looking at the baby eye-to-eye and smiling.
- **Hearing:** hum, whistle or sing. If the parent's voice is low, gentle, soothing, full of joy and love, the baby will feel it.
- **Rocking:** giving the above-mentioned "love messages" while rocking in a rocking chair.



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## **THE ROLE OF THE ADULT**

### **Protection**

Because of their lack of control, infants have an instinctive fear when the head is unsupported and the limbs are dangling. They are relaxed and happy only when someone supports them.

New babies also have an instinctive need for contact and are most happy when they are being held. It is not possible to hold a baby all the time, however, even if there is more than one person to care for the baby. Some of the baby's need for contact can be met by swaddling. This means wrapping the baby securely in a blanket. The wrapping itself gives a feeling of warmth and security and prevents his own jerky movements from making him uncomfortable.

Babies will let the parent know when swaddling is no longer necessary by stretching their legs out and trying to loosen the blanket or kick it off. This straightening out happens during the second and third months.

### **Response to their cries**

Many parents are afraid that picking up a baby when he cries will spoil him. Research in this area has found the opposite to be true. Infants whose cries are answered quickly cry less in the long run. They develop confidence that their needs will be met and are consequently more contented.

On the other hand, when adults do not respond or delay response to an infant's cries, the infant loses confidence, becomes anxious and is quicker to cry. It also takes longer to comfort such a baby. Parents can cause the very thing they're trying to avoid by not responding to an infant - - a demanding and whiny baby.

Other people can undermine new parents' confidence by telling them that their child is manipulating them. It's important for parents to know that newborn babies are not old enough to want anything that they do not need. Attention from adults is a need just as real and important as physical care needs.

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## **Keeping the baby clean and comfortable**

A baby does not need a bath every day but does need to be kept clean.

1. Because babies handle objects and put their hands in their mouths, it is a good idea to wash their hands a couple of times a day with soap, rinsing well so soap does not get into their eyes or mouth.
2. Keep fingernails trimmed with tiny, blunt-ended scissors. The nails will stay cleaner if they are kept short, and the baby will be less likely to scratch his face during hand play.
3. Wash milk or food from the face with plain water.
4. Change the diaper often and wash the bottom to remove urine and feces. If the baby's bottom get sore easily, use a diaper cream to prevent diaper rash.



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## **Responses to temperature changes**

Warmth is important to new babies. If they are kept comfortably warm, they can relax and can use energy for learning and growing instead of producing heat. The ideal temperature around the body is about 85 degrees. This can easily be maintained if the room temperature is 68 degrees. A T-shirt, diaper, stretch sleeper and blanket will keep the baby's body at a comfortable 85 degrees.

It is especially important to keep the baby warm while he is asleep. Letting a baby cool off too much while in a deep sleep could allow him to become chilled.

Chilling occurs when the body cannot produce enough heat to stay warm. Symptoms include cold hands, feet and skin, even when the child is clothed. Also, the baby will be very quiet and still, and not cry.

Just covering a baby with more blankets is not enough. The body must be warmed first by taking him to a warmer room, feeding him warm formula or cuddling under a blanket with another person. The other body will make the heat and the blanket will keep it in.

Neonatal cold syndrome is more serious than chilling and is a life-threatening situation requiring medical care. Symptoms are lethargy, difficulty waking up and inability to suck; hands and feet that are pink and swollen, and skin that is very cold to the touch.

Overheating is more often caused by clothes than high temperatures. Parents can keep the baby comfortable by taking off outdoor clothes indoors and by not overdressing in a warm room. During very hot weather, parents can make sure that the baby has plenty to drink, and wears loose, light weight clothes. Outdoors, they can keep the baby in the shade, making sure that air can circulate around him. Sponging the skin with warm water and fanning also will help in extremely hot weather.

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## **Development of the senses**

Newborn babies cannot do much, so they must depend on the outside world, especially their parents, for stimulation.

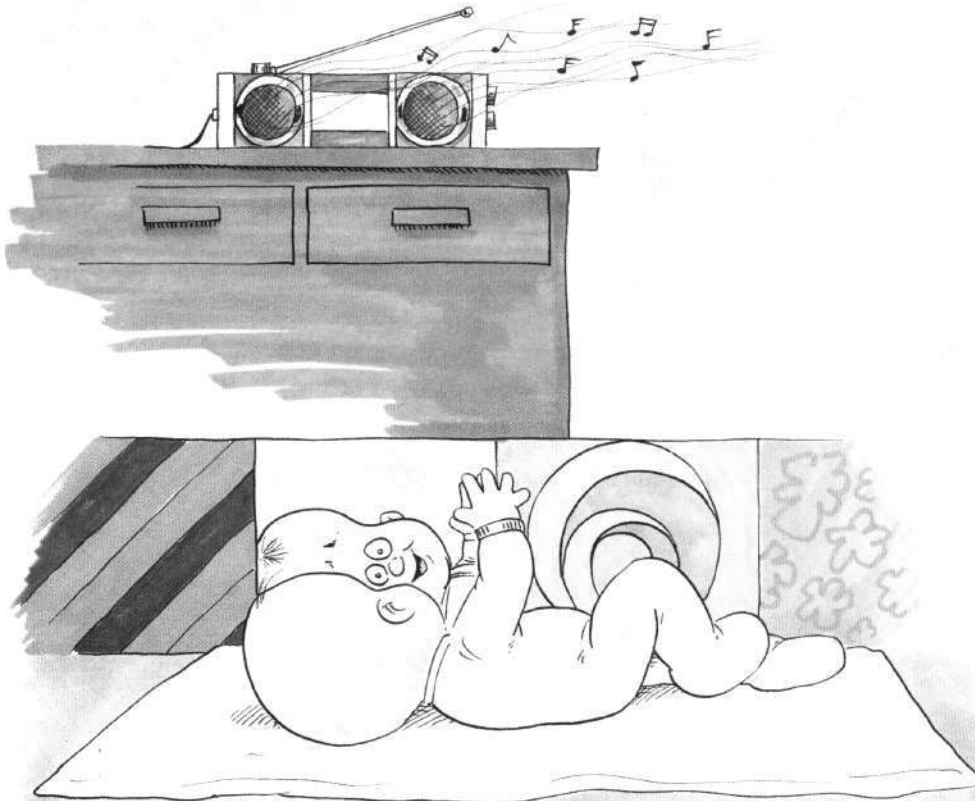
**Sight:** Babies like to look at bright colors and simple patterns. They like to look at faces, both real and those that are simply drawn. A newborn baby can focus his eyes at about 8 to 10 inches from his face. If the object is moved slowly, he can follow it with his eyes.

**Hearing:** During this time, babies react to a wide variety of sounds. They are startled by sudden loud noises, and they are soothed by soft sounds such as music. Middle range sounds are important, too, as they tend to intensify what ever feelings are there to start with.

**Touch:** The sense of touch is very important for infants. They need to be held close and hugged. For variety, the parent can give a gentle massage by rubbing him gently with their hands. Rubbing the skin with soft fabrics feels good, too. Parents need to be sensitive to the child's reaction. If he seems to dislike it, they should stop.

**Motion:** Babies like motion. They like to be rocked, taken for rides in a stroller, or be carried in a front carrier or a back pack after they can support their head. A ride in a car puts many babies to sleep.

Touching, cuddling and rocking are not only pleasant for the infant, but necessary for proper development.





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## GAMES/ACTIVITIES

-Repeat the gurgling sounds the baby makes. Baby will smile and eventually repeat the sound after you.

-When changing the baby's diaper, let him push his feet against your stomach. Gently move back and forth.

-Tickle. Stop when it is no longer pleasant for the baby.

-Dance. Children love music and rhythmic movement.

-Sing simple rhymes.

-Let the baby bite your finger. You react with mock cries, exclamations and hugs.

-Let the baby grab a finger and pull. This is his first game of tug-of-war.

These games, though physically stimulating, are also social in that there is a give and take interaction between two people. Simple games are an important means of making and maintaining contact and developing communication.



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## Four to Six Months

### WHAT THE CHILD CAN DO

By 4 months, the child recognizes his mother. He is beginning to develop an awareness of himself as a separate being and he wants to be part of social activities. By 6 months, he wants to interact with other children. Play objects or toys are becoming more important, and he will play for longer periods of time.

A baby this age has better control of his body.

- \* He can hold his head up, but he still needs help to sit up.
- \* He has better control of arms and legs.
- \* He can hold and grab objects.
- \* He can touch his face.
- \* He can roll over.

He is much more aware of his surroundings, and attention and activity are beginning to be directed away from his body to other things.

He is beginning to see that he can make things happen and anticipate what happens next.

### Gross Motor Development

At 4 months, being pulled to sitting is a favorite activity. He will also begin pushing up on his hands and knees. This is the beginning of learning to crawl.

Standing comes after sitting or crawling as muscle control moves downward; control of legs develops after control of back and hips. The knee-straightening games (almost like jumping) that begin at 5 or 6 months are good practice for later walking. They help to strengthen the legs.

### Fine Motor Development

Eye-hand coordination is just what it sounds like: the eyes and hands working together. This is an important skill for the child to develop in the first 6 months. It is also complicated. The child sees something, wants it, estimates how far away it is, and then uses the arm and hand to get it. Adults can encourage development of eye-hand coordination by giving the baby interesting things to look at, handle and reach for.



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## THE ROLE OF THE ADULT

The adults in a child's life can benefit by learning about child development. They will learn to know how a child's needs change as he grows and how to provide stimulation and encouragement without adding unnecessarily to frustration.

This is a time babies begin to develop a sense of control and power over their environment. Parents can let the child know that his efforts are having an effect. This makes him happy and encourages him to keep doing things. When he makes a sound, there is a response. When he turns his head to see where a noise is coming from, he sees it. When he reaches for something, he can touch it or hold it. Help him use his body.

- -Give him one or two objects to choose from that he can pick up with his hands. If you want him to let go of something, offer something else in its place. He cannot yet release it on purpose and he will not like to have it removed by force.

- -Let him practice sitting by supporting him in a seated position. Use your lap, infant seat or a highchair with a tray. This is a way to bring him into the center of family activity. He'll like being able to see what is going on. An adjustable seat is best - - it can be made more upright as he gets more control and he'll like to have people smile at him and talk to him.



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## TOYS

Four-to-six-month-old babies enjoy playing with:

- Teething rings.
- Squeaky toys.
- Rattles.
- Large, soft balls and other safe things he can pick up.
- Household objects.

They will learn about the objects. They will also learn how they can influence their environment. Because everything they hold also goes into the mouth, all the objects they play with must be clean and safe. They must be too big to be swallowed, with no sharp edges or points or parts that might break or come off.

The baby will also enjoy hanging toys/mobiles and things that move and make sound above his bed. About 6 inches above the chest is good. As the baby moves, these things will also move and make noise. The baby will discover that moving his hands and feet on the bed will make interesting things happen.

After the baby can grab things, keep hanging toys out of reach.



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## GAMES/ACTIVITIES

A baby this age will be very interested in his hands. He will spend lots of time looking at them.

Four-to-six-month-olds will make gurgling sounds. When you repeat these sounds to the baby, he will try to make the same sounds back to you. You will be having your first conversation.

During this stage, the baby learns to control his hands and fingers. Let him sit on your lap, hold him with one arm, use your other hand to offer a rattle or small toy that he can grab. With practice, he will be able to reach and hold onto things. Let the baby grab and hold the toy. Talk to the baby about the game while you play.

Rhymes such as “This Little Piggy” show babies their own bodies and help them to see that they are separate people.

To play track the rattle, hold it about 12 inches from his eyes and move it so he can follow it with his eyes.

**On his stomach:**

Face him and dangle the rattle directly in front of his face. Slowly lift the rattle so he has to raise his head to follow it. If he pushes up on his arms, smile and lower the rattle and repeat.

**On his back:**

With the baby on his back, hold the rattle about a foot over baby’s stomach and shake it until he notices it. Move it down so he can reach for it and grab it. Let him pull it down. Then gently move it up until he releases it and continue this back and forth between you and him until he indicates he’s had enough. Talk while you play these games.



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**At about 5 months, begin these activities.**

Two-way stretch; put objects on both sides of the baby (baby is sitting with your support). He'll reach for things with either/both hands and transfer them from one hand to the other.

Looking in a mirror. This is another way for him to get an idea of who he is.

Show a toy in the mirror. See if he reaches toward the mirror or turns around for the toy.

Knee games, such as "Ride a Cock Horse" or just bouncing the baby on your knee.

Encourage the baby to laugh.  
Laugh when he laughs.

Tickle.

Blow raspberries on his stomach.

Play "Pat-a-Cake."

Play "This Little Piggy."





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## Seven to Twelve Months

### WHAT THE CHILD CAN DO

A whole new world begins to open up for children when they reach 7 to 12 months. They:

- Sit without support.
- Become more mobile and begin to crawl.
- Gain improved finger and hand control.

— Begin to use language.

— Develop the concept of object permanence.

The child needs:

- Toys that allow him to use his new abilities.
- A safe environment in which to explore.
- Praise and encouragement to keep trying new things.



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## THE ROLE OF THE ADULT

### **Provide appropriate play experiences**

Providing appropriate play experiences is important not just for learning, but also for development of self-esteem. Children who feel good about themselves feel in control, self-confident and supported. They have the best chance for future success.

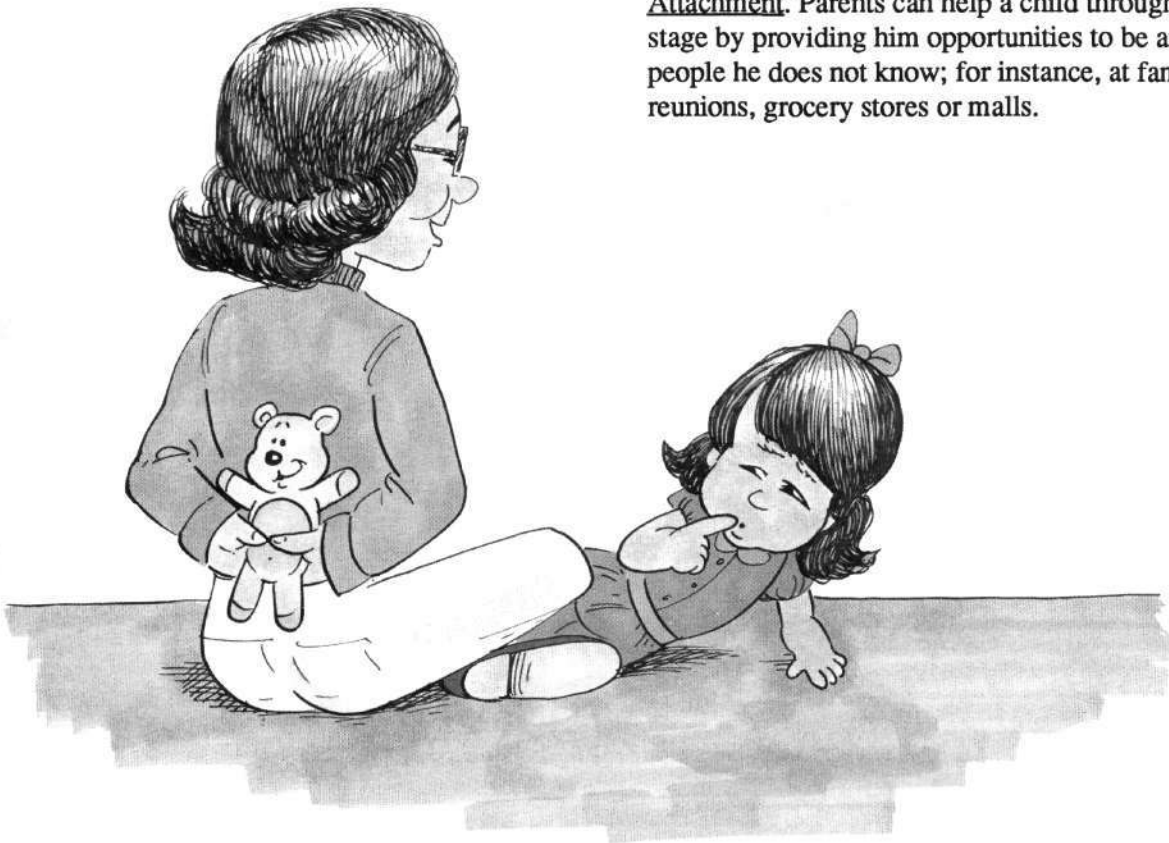
Curiosity is natural and important to learning. Learning to move, for example, is the result of curiosity about the environment. Parents can encourage curiosity and, therefore, learning by making the baby's world interesting. Providing a variety of objects to explore and joining in the baby's excitement will make learning fun. Something that is fun will most likely be repeated.

### **Help the child cope with fears and anxieties**

Separation anxiety and stranger anxiety are real fears at this age. The best way to help the baby cope with them is to take his fears seriously and to help him feel as secure as possible.

Separation anxiety, the fear of being separated from the parent, is common between 6 and 8 months. The infant wants to keep the parent in sight all the time; when he cannot, he will be upset. This stage will be less traumatic if the baby is left with someone with whom he has a safe and a loving relationship.

Stranger anxiety is the fear of people the baby does not know. It is common at the end of the first year but may appear as early as 6 months, according to researcher John Bowlby in his book Attachment. Parents can help a child through this stage by providing him opportunities to be around people he does not know; for instance, at family reunions, grocery stores or malls.



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## **Help keep the child safe**

Increased mobility presents new hazards.

**Sitting:** The baby in the early months of this age group may still need a little support, such as cushions next to him. The ability to lean forward now makes infant seats inappropriate - they may tip. Safety straps are a necessary precaution in high chairs, strollers or shopping carts.

**Crawling:** Many babies learn to crawl at the same time that they learn to sit alone. Part of the desire to crawl is the desire to get hold of things. Safety-proofing is a must. Parents need to be vigilant about keeping the floor free of objects that could choke, poison or cut the baby. Stairways need to be closed off to prevent falls.

**Standing:** The baby will pull himself to stand when he's ready. Parents need to make sure that furniture is stable so it doesn't tip when pulled on. Remove tablecloths that the baby can reach and pull on, and keep electrical cords out of reach.

**Walking** is easier in bare feet than hard shoes. Shoes are appropriate for outside, where they protect the feet. Socks are dangerous on smooth floors because the baby may slip and fall.

**Pushing** a child to walk before he's ready may delay development of that skill. One of the ways a child prepares himself for walking is to pull himself up and cruise around the furniture.

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## **The Parent's Role in Play**

- - Know the general pattern of development.
- - Watch the child at play to see what the child is trying to do.
- - Balance the child's day; that is, make sure he has the time with parent, time alone, time with others, time inside and outdoors, and time to rest.
- - Avoid pressure on the child to "perform". Teaching occurs all the time in normal interaction and modeling. Allow the child to set the pace of play, and then play with him.
- - Keep the play area uncluttered. Too many choices are confusing. Save some toys in the closet and rotate them with toys that have been out for a while.

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## TOYS

Toys allow him to use his developing skills. He can manipulate, experiment and learn new things with them. Knowing he can make things happen will make him feel good.

At this age, babies like:

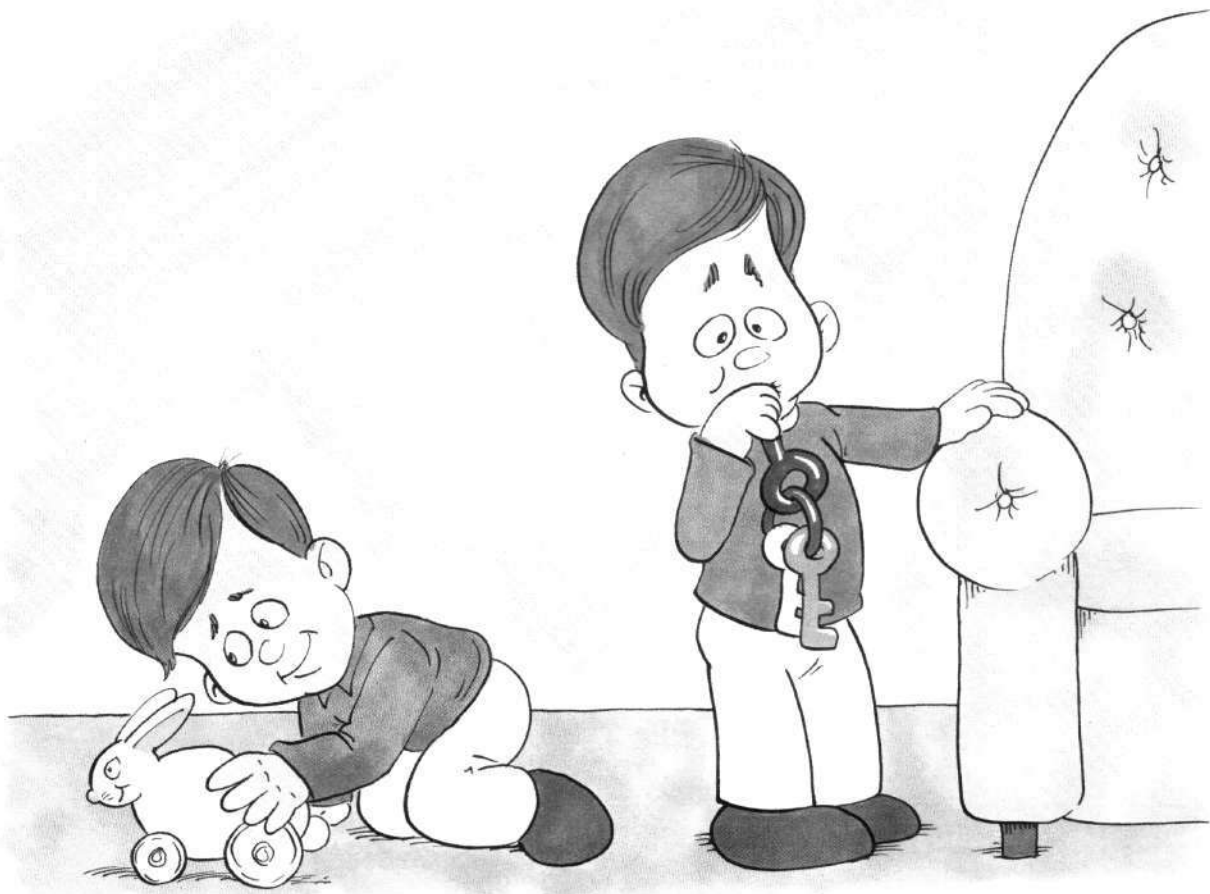
- Push and pull toys.
- Stuffed toys.
- Small rubber toys.
- Plastic keys.
- Balls.
- Clothes pins (no springs)  
to be dropped into containers.
- Cardboard picture books.
- Boxes to climb into and out of.
- Kitchen utensils, containers.

Use of hands and fingers develops in the following sequence. Keep this in mind as you provide objects for the child.

6 mos. -Uses his whole hand for grasping and picking things up. He uses both hands together like tongs to pick up large objects.

7-8 mos. -Begins to use fingers and thumbs for grasping and holding.

9 mos. -Has control over separate fingers. He can use his index finger to point or poke.



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## GAMES/ACTIVITIES

Besides being an enjoyable way to spend time with your baby, games are a good way for the baby to learn new things. Word games are especially appropriate now.

- "Pat-a-Cake" and "This Little Piggy" are still fun.
- Touch and name is good for learning names of body parts.
- Peek-a-boo and hide-the-toy teach that things that are out of sight are not necessarily gone forever.

Talking to the baby about what you are doing and about toys, and describing and naming things will add to his vocabulary. When he starts to say words, praise his efforts and listen to him. This will motivate him to talk more.

Begin to read to the baby. Choose books with simple, colorful pictures and few words. Pictures of familiar objects to point at and name are fun for children this age. Do this as long as the child is interested.

The following activities help build listening skills.

- Give him simple directions such as "Give me the teddy bear." Make it a different object each time, something that is familiar to him. Praise his accomplishments.
- Use the tune "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush" and add your own lines, such as: "This is the way we wash our hands, wash our hands, wash our hands. This is the way we wash our hands so early in the morning." Other short phrases such as "eat our soup," "comb our hair" or "brush our teeth" can also be used. Teach your child a gesture to go with each phrase.
- Let him listen to people on the telephone. Let him say a few sounds or words back. Children this age are curious about voices on the telephone but say very little themselves until they become more familiar with it.





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## One to Two Years

### WHAT THE CHILD CAN DO

This is a very active time in a baby's life and, consequently an exhausting one for parents. New skills - - walking, running and climbing, open a whole new world of exploration and discovery.

Other new skills are stacking blocks, scribbling and talking. Toddlers learn many things by imitation and practicing their new skills by repeating them over and over.

With increased mobility, toddlers can find out about so many more things. They are not limited to what an adult sets in front of them.

As the toddler learns about objects, he begins to notice similarities and differences in how things look and what he can do with them. He begins to group or sort things. For example, he can put all the cars together or all the blocks together.



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## THE ROLE OF THE ADULT

The child depends on adults to provide him with:

- -A safe and stimulating environment.
- -Love, encouragement and discipline.
- -Appropriate toys, materials and experiences.

### Safe and Stimulating Environment

Toddlers like to play close to the parent, so an area for their toys where the parent spends most of his/her time is the most useful. It also allows close supervision. An uncluttered and somewhat organized play space is the most inviting.

Outdoor play is important. There is no other way for children to learn about the natural world. They must experience sun, rain, mud, water, grass, trees, hills, etc.

### Love, Encouragement and Discipline

The best way to provide love, encouragement and discipline is to give your child your attention. Some positive ways of giving attention are: playing with the child, giving physical help when it's needed, following the child's lead in play, offering casual demonstrations and suggestions rather than commands; being a partner, rather than always the leader, in play. It's important for parents to know that they teach all the time by example.

Allowing children to do things for themselves and to solve as many problems by themselves as they can gives them confidence and encourages independence.



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## TOYS

### Appropriate toys, materials and experiences

Appropriate toys, those that the child can use successfully on his own, are important. Toys that are too difficult or sophisticated can make a toddler feel inadequate. Pushing a child to do something before he's ready or when he's not interested hinders learning instead of promoting it.

"No" is a favorite word for toddlers. This negativism is common at this age. It's important for parents to know that this is a normal, important part of growth. This is one way that children strengthen their individuality. The best way for parents to deal with negativism is to be loving but firm.

These toys teach fine motor control, cause and effect, and size and shape relationships. They support the imitation of adult actions and the beginnings of creative play.

- -Dolls.
- -Containers for sand and water play.
- -Bath toys.
- -Measuring cups.
- -Bowls and blocks for nesting and stacking.
- -Fitting toys/shape sorters.
- -Hook-together toys.
- -Threading toys.
- -Cars and buildings.
- -Simple musical instruments.

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## PLAY

Physical play is important for children in this age range. There should be lots of opportunities for:

- -Climbing, including stairs.
- -Balancing.
- -Swinging.
- -Pushing/pulling.
- -Riding.
- -Throwing/catching.
- -Acrobatics.

These activities are a positive outlet for the toddler's endless energy and will strengthen muscles and improve coordination.



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## GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

Keep playing games such as, peek-a-boo, hide-and-seek, dump and fill.

Let the child climb on you, wrestle with you and ride piggyback.

As the child gets older, these games will naturally become more varied and sophisticated.

Other games a child this age might enjoy are:

- -Chase or be chased.

- -Hide the toy. Cover a small toy with your hand and let the child pull your hand away to find it.

- -Hugging. Make a game of taking turns. You can add a pretend element by saying, "Hi, I haven't seen you in so long!"

- -Emptying and filling. Adult fills, child empties. Take turns at this if the child is willing.

- -Catch. Toss soft, large balls or pillows to each other. Sit or stand only a few feet apart.

- -Roll a ball. The child sits on the floor with legs apart; adult rolls the ball to him.

- -Simple finger and hand games.



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## Two to Three Years

### WHAT THE CHILD CAN DO

Children this age have developed many skills, including gross motor, fine motor and cognitive skills.

Gross motor skills include:

- -Jumping off a step.
- -Throwing, catching and bouncing a ball.
- -Beginning to hop.
- -Pedalling a tricycle.
- -Climbing stairs, one foot per stair.
- -Turning somersaults.
- -Beginning to balance on one foot.

Fine motor skills include:

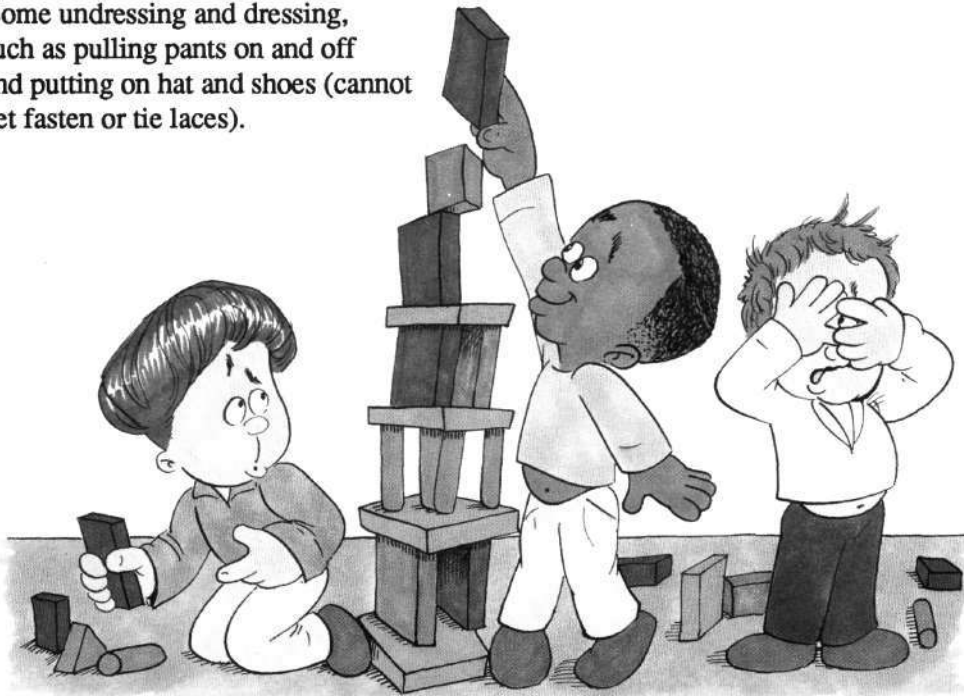
- -Holding crayons and pencils and making controlled marks.
- -Building a 6-block tower.
- -Winding up toys.
- -Some undressing and dressing, such as pulling pants on and off and putting on hat and shoes (cannot yet fasten or tie laces).

Cognitive skills include:

- -Pointing to body parts, including fingers, toes, stomach, back, knee, chin, teeth, heels, fingernails.

At this stage, children's attention span is longer. They can play with things for a longer period of time and in more creative ways. They like to listen to stories now, in addition to just looking at picture books.

Early in this age range, children still prefer to play alone or with adults. During this year, solitary play gives way to parallel play, and by age 3 we see the beginnings of cooperative play in some children. The development of cooperative play, which is not common in children until about age 5, will depend on how much time the child spends with other children.





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## THE ROLE OF THE ADULT

There is increasing emphasis on helping children develop skills through creative or make-believe play. Child development researcher Brian Sutton-Smith puts great emphasis on the importance of teaching children how to play make-believe. He believes that make-believe play has implications for future success in the modern work world. Much work of the future will have to do with computers and automation. This involves working with symbols rather than things. Much of the functioning in the modern world involves words, pictures or numbers, all of which are symbols. Make-believe play is symbolic play - - that is, play with representations of things, rather than with the things themselves.

Another important aspect of make-believe play is the development of versatility. Sutton-Smith believes that versatile people are both creative and flexible. In a world where jobs can be rendered obsolete several times in a person's lifetime because of the advancements of technology, it is easy to see how versatility plays an important part. The creative, flexible person will have an advantage over the person who cannot adapt to change.

John Fisher, another specialist in early child development and play, offers additional reasons for encouraging make-believe or, as he calls it, fantasy play in children.

He says that children deal with insecurities through fantasies. The feelings of power that they have in fantasy help them feel strong and good about themselves. Children can work through some bad feelings in fantasy play by creating an unpleasant experience and changing it to meet their needs.

According to Fisher, studies show that fantasy has correlations with other skills. These skills include:

- -Performance on thinking skills tests.
- -Ability to entertain oneself.
- -Attention span.
- -Vocabulary skills.
- -Creativity.
- -Flexibility.
- -Spontaneity.
- -Ability to adapt to new situations.
- -Ability to work with symbols rather than things.



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## How can parents foster fantasy

\* Expose the child to a variety of new experiences through:

- Reading books.
- Making up stories.
- Going on outings to zoos, parks, museums, libraries, stores.

\* Provide toys and props such as:

- Dolls and stuffed animals.
- Plastic dishes.
- Old clothes, purse, briefcase, hats, sunglasses, gloves.

\* Encourage imaginative thinking by:

- Being imaginative.
- Playing pretend.
- Giving suggestions for extending imaginative play.



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## **TOYS**

Toys that encourage use of imagination are important now. Such things as dolls, blocks and household items are especially good for encouraging make-believe.

Children at this age also need opportunities to be with other children their age. This is how they will learn to get along in social situations.

## **GAMES/ACTIVITIES**

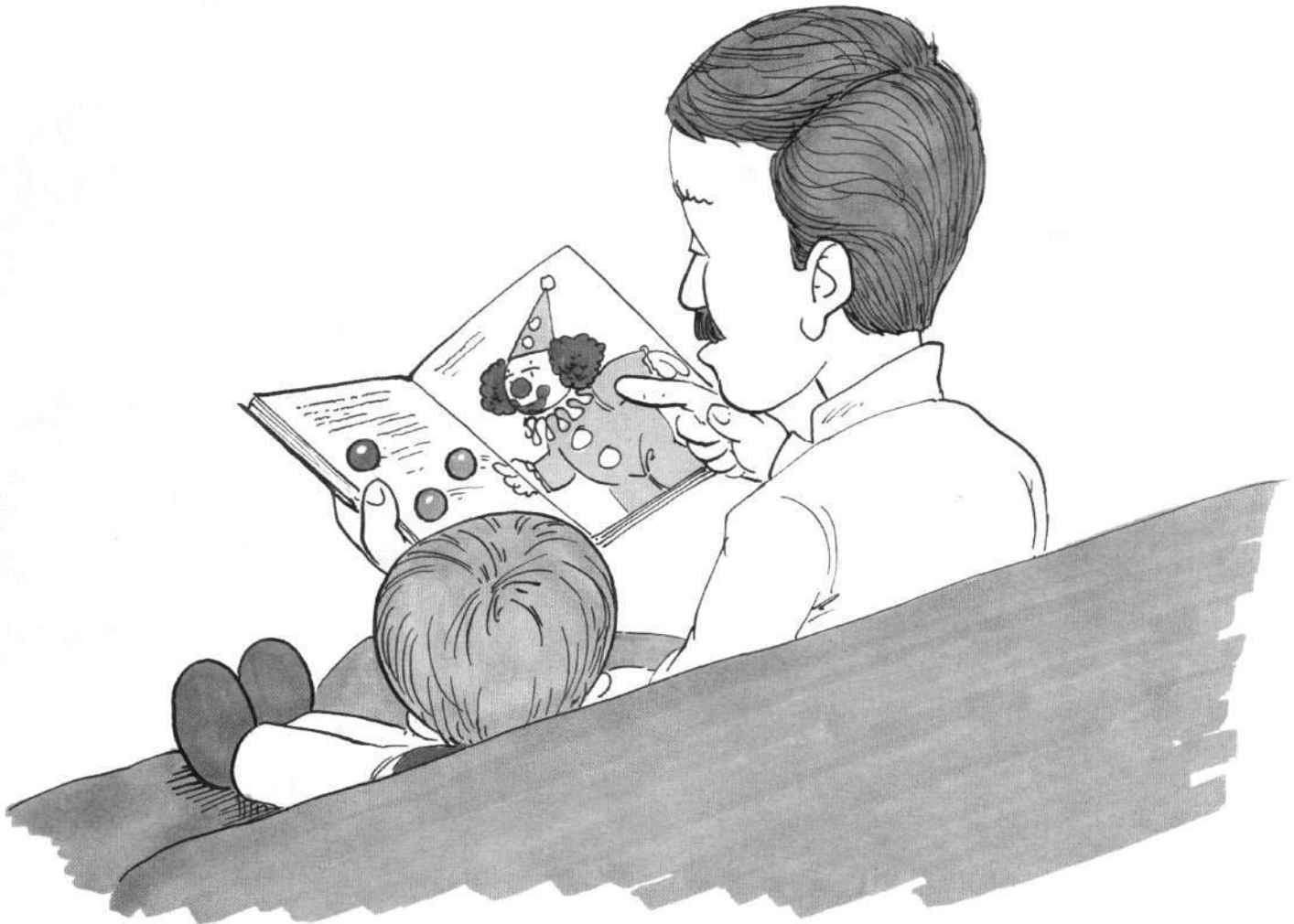
By now the child enjoys lots of games. Parents can keep playing the old favorites, adding variations to make them more interesting.

- Roughhousing is fun as long as it's not too rough. Parents need to be sensitive to the child's reactions. If it's not fun for the child, then they should stop. Not all children enjoy this type of play.
- Chasing. Children love to catch adults and love to be chased.
- In make-believe (or a game) reverse roles. Let the child be in control and the adult be the powerless one, for example, the child is the parent and the adult is the child.
- Ring games such as "Ring around the Rosy."
- Hide and seek. Let the child hide an item and the adult find it.
- Follow the leader.

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## Books

It is important to keep reading to your child. Choose books with more words as the child's attention span increases. Get him involved in the story by letting him tell you the next part or trying to guess what happens next. Do this as long as the child is interested. Books should be fun, not a chore. There is much evidence that children who are read to in their early years perform better in school later on.



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# NOTES

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