

**Building Young Minds through Play**  
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As parents I am sure you are concerned with developing your child's mind. You want your child to excel in everything he does and even want your child to read and write as soon as possible. But let us be realistic . . . there are some things that we can not rush; learning is not all just reading and writing as we know very well. You can, however, help your child build the foundation he needs for the future.

Observe your young child and what does he usually do during the day? He plays! Your child is actively engaging himself with toys, the things in your home or whatever you have in your bag. He does love to touch things, right? Well, playing is a natural way of learning and an important part of development. Play is crucial for your child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth. It's your child's way of learning about his body and the world, and he'll use all five senses to do it.



Early childhood specialists give emphasis to the value of play in young children since play provides:

- stimulation,
- Increases skills and coordination,
- Helps children express their thoughts and feelings
- Enables exploration that leads to problem solving, understanding concepts, etc.

Children play because it is fun and pleasurable. Therefore, there is this desire to repeat an activity and with repetition comes mastery of a skill which then leads to a sense of accomplishment and confidence.

Now, what types of play are best for my child? It depends on the stage of development of your child. But since play is the tool your child uses to learn about the world, the skills he's working on right now are your biggest clues to choosing the best activities for him. Below are suggested play activities that promote each area of development.

**Infants (0-12 months)**

Your newborn infant may be lying down most of the time but all of his senses are working; he is taking in the sensations, sounds, sights, and scents of his world. Between 1-3 months your infant's movements are more of reflexes but as he gets older he gradually learns to control his own body and objects.

- Always talk with your infant. He may not understand everything you say. Name and describe objects he sees. Provide colored toys or pictures in books to look at, point to objects and identify.
- Provide your child with different objects to handle and manipulate. Just be careful and make sure objects are big enough not to swallow because most of the time it will place find its way into his mouth. His interaction with toys or objects will teach him many skills.



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*Published in Parents Guide, October 2007*

- Legs are also becoming stronger and soon your infant will be busy learning to move around during this stage. Play will center in motor activity so give him a lot of opportunity to do so. Remember, repetition of an activity aids in the mastery of a skill.
- Introduce your child to music by swaying and moving to the beat, singing a favorite lullaby or various types of music. Music can encourage memory, imagination and language.
- Expose your baby to other family members, children, friendly adults or babysitters. This will help your child enjoy and look forward to interactions with other people.

**Toddler (1-2 years old)** - Your child is now more mobile and will definitely be all over the place. Your toddler attempts to be independent but will not want to be separated from your very long.



- Make sure you child-proof your home so that your toddler can freely move around. Allow him to walk, run and experience different types of surfaces and slopes. He may fall most of the time but that is just fine as long as he does not hurt himself. Mobility allows him to explore the environment.
- Your toddler will enjoy shaking, pounding, poking, and throwing objects. Playing with objects teaches him how to solve simple problems and learn concepts such as soft and hard, heavy and light, up and down, in and out, etc.



- The toddler will invent his own play activity, imitate things he sees and will use objects for their intended purposes. He will put a glass on his mouth as if to drink from it; put on lipstick all over his mouth and face, or he will use the phone to “talk” to you. This helps him figure out how objects are interconnected.
- He recognizes familiar faces and has now formed relationships while continuously learning social skills. Expose him to other people, places and events.

**Preschooler (3-5 years old)** – Your child has gone a long way from being an infant, to a toddler and now a preschool child. Your child is now more capable of understanding his world but still has to a lot of growing to do.

- Your child is still learning to control his fine motor muscles. He enjoys activities using that make use of his hands. Provide him with construction toys such as legos or blocks, or manipulating play dough. He will also discover on his own the materials he will like to play with. These activities will be useful later on for writing, feeding, and accomplishing art projects.
- His drawing now starts to contain shapes and eventually will represent objects or people. His attempts to write his name but sometimes may miss some letters or a reversal of letters may arise. Well, this just shows that the mastery of this skill is still being learned and is just normal occurrence with this age.



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- He has gained several concepts about his world. He attempts to use this acquired knowledge in certain situations. Through his play which involves exploring and experimenting he learns concepts such as textures, weights, taste, sounds, letters, numbers, weight, and time to name a few.



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- As your child turns to age 4 or 5 his play becomes more of a social type of play which involves learning to share, cooperate, developing language skills, and dramatic play in shared activities.
- Your child will also explore playing other roles, for example playing a mommy, daddy, policeman, doctor, and even a dog! Remember these times! Children are also given the opportunity to express their fears and fantasies, especially through dramatic play.

### School-aged children (6- 12)

A significant difference can be observed in the way school-aged children play and think.

- He still engages in some fantasy play but starts to enjoy competitive games and sports, and formal board games. This type of games can teach important skills such as turn-taking and cause and effect.
- Your school-age child is now ready and may want to do things for himself such as taking a bath, preparing a meal, or dressing up etc. The things he used to play have prepared him for self-help tasks. For example, the “cooking” play activity has equipped him with skills to prepare his simple snack now. Remember, he used to dress up the doll but now he can dress up on his own. His earlier art activities (painting, pasting and cutting) has prepared him to carry out required projects in school.



- Through social interactions, school-aged children begin to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and abilities.



Play continues on in life which makes it truly a crucial part of growing up. As we have seen earlier, the skills children need to develop into functioning, productive adults originate from play. These skills will include literacy, mathematical reasoning, logical thinking, creativity, and social skills. Among the social skills learned are; the ability to share, be a team player, negotiate, make and revise rules, and take the perspective of others. Therefore, build your child’s mind as well as develop the other areas of development through play. Make sure he has a chance to play!

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