



Your Child and Play From Birth to 3 Years

Through play, your child learns and develops, and sees how people relate to each other. Through play and curiosity, your child develops language skills, social skills such as cooperation and sharing, and physical and thinking skills such as how to do things or how things work.

Your Child and Play

Babies develop quickly due to rapid physical growth and brain development. You can support your baby's healthy development when you respond to and play with your baby in a caring and nurturing way.

As a parent, you are the first to play with your baby, the one who provides a safe place to explore, and who offers fun and interest. Babies are very social beings and they enjoy play. Take time to play and get to know your baby. Watch to see what your baby likes best and when your baby likes to play most.

While there are general guidelines about child development at different ages, remember that each child is unique and develops at their own pace.

During the first 6 months of babies' lives, they grow very fast and learn new skills every day. First they find their fingers, and then their toes. They start to reach for things and realize they can get what they want by themselves. They hold up their head, look around and discover the world. They rock from side to side, and they roll over. Then they learn to crawl and walk.

To ensure safety, stay ahead of your baby to keep them from grabbing dangerous things or falling down steps. Child-proof your home and create a safe place for play. For more information on keeping your child safe, see BC Children's Hospital's Home Safety Checklist at www.bcchildrens.ca/Child-Safety-Site/Documents/homesafetychecklist.pdf, or visit Health Canada's Is Your Child Safe? at www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/consumer-product-safety/reports-publications/consumer-education/your-child-safe.html.

Types of Play

Although you may organize your child's play activities at times, most play should be spontaneous and unstructured. When toddlers have the freedom to explore and move at

their own speed, they learn the most. Follow your toddler's lead and offer new toys or activities for fun and interest. Children learn through various types of play. You will probably see your child play in the following ways:

- Solitary play – This is when your child plays by themselves. All children like solitary play at times.
- Parallel play – This happens when your child plays beside another child, but they do not interact or play together. Toddlers enjoy parallel play where they observe and often imitate what others do.
- Imitative play – Children imitate or copy each other.
- Social activity – This is the first step toward playing and having fun with others. Before 2 years of age, your child will offer toys and communicate with other children.
- Cooperative play – As your child gets older, they will start to play with other children, usually at 3 years of age or older.

Play for Babies

The first year is an important time to develop your baby's speech and language skills. Talk to your baby. Point out your eyes, ears and nose, and show them new things and colours. By talking to your baby, you are helping them learn language and communication skills.

Take time each day to cuddle and play with your baby. Hold your baby close to you so you have lots of face-to-face contacts. This will help your baby connect with you and grow in healthy ways.

Babies also learn through touch. Help them explore their world by giving them lots of different shapes and textures. Talk to them as they feel different things, such as a soft stuffed toy. Babies like to make noise, so give toys such as plastic keys or rattles.

Check the size of toys and make sure a toy cannot be made smaller. Any toy that fits completely into your child's mouth is too small and can cause choking.

Babies love to watch you. You can put your baby in safe place on the ground where your baby can watch you make

dinner or clean the room. Using simple words and sentences to talk about what you are doing.

Babies love to look at new things, such as mobiles made with bright colours and shapes. Put colourful pictures up where your baby can see them. Start your baby's own personal book with photos including family and friends. Babies love books for the pictures and for the sound of your voice reading. Read to your child every day.

Tummy time - lying on their tummies or sides while they're awake - is important for babies' healthy development. You can put your baby on the floor, on a safe firm surface, on your lap or on your chest - whatever works best for you. This is a time when your baby will exercise muscles or discover new ways to move.

Start tummy time when your baby is a newborn and do it after every diaper change. Add one minute of tummy time each day. If your baby gets very upset, increase the time more slowly. Here are some tips for making tummy time enjoyable for your baby:

- Talk, sing to, and comfort your baby.
- Gently touch or massage your baby's arms and legs.
- Give your baby interesting things to look at, such as brightly coloured toys or a mirror.
- Get down on the floor so your baby can see your face.
- Put your hand under your baby's chin to support the head until your baby is strong enough to do it by themselves.

You can also roll up a towel and put it under your baby's chest with their arms propped up for support.

Babies also like music. Play the music you like and your baby will probably enjoy it too. Remember to keep the volume low. Babies like the sound of singing, so sing to them as well.

Babies enjoy walks in a baby carrier or stroller to start. As they get older, babies like to play and move around outdoors.

For more information about social and emotional play, visit Leap BC's guide Move with Me from Birth to Three at www.decoda.ca/wp-content/uploads/MOVE_Family_Resource.pdf (PDF 4.18 MB). This guide contains 40 fun filled activities to support your child's development.

Play for Toddlers

As your child grows, experts recommend that parents support and encourage their children to play as follows:

- Play actively – Toddlers need at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day to build strong bones, muscles, heart and lungs. Try dancing, skipping, jumping or running.
- Play with other children when possible to help develop social skills such as sharing.
- Play in ways that foster your child's creativity and self-expression.

Children enjoy opportunities to go out and around the block, to the store, play at the beach, or visit family or friends. These are all adventures and learning opportunities.

Children do not need costly or fancy toys to grow, learn, and develop. What they need is someone to talk to them, notice what they do, and comfort them when they are upset. They need playful chances to learn about and explore the world.

As your child grows, they will learn best when they can choose what they want to do from a few options. With time, toddlers will also offer to help parents with activities around the house. Find creative and safe ways that your child can help you. Through play, children are learning cause and effect, new skills, new words, and knowledge of the world.

For More Information

For more information about child health and development, see the following resources:

- [HealthLinkBC File #92b Your Child's Development from Birth to 3 Years](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92c Your Child's Feelings](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92d Toilet Learning](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92e Time for Bed](#)
- Healthy Families BC - www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting
- Baby's Best Chance (PDF 16.67 MB) - www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2017/BabysBestChance-Sept2017.pdf

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