

Playing With Your Baby

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You've bought your baby a new toy and you decide to free up some quality time to spend with her; but will you know how to create a pleasant and supportive play environment? Will you know how to interest and stimulate your baby's curiosity? You can start by listening to your intuition and becoming familiar with your baby's developmental stages, so you can adapt your play to her changing needs, and create the appropriate play environment for her age and development. Following are some basics to aid you in gaining maximum enjoyment from your play time together

The Right Time

Enjoyment – The First Requisite for Successful Learning

The first condition for successful learning is that the learning experience should be enjoyable. A positive play experience will make your baby feel "I am good, I am successful", which will increase his motivation to look for new learning opportunities. But if the experience is repeatedly frustrating or if he is trying to learn when he is not physically or emotionally ready, he will develop unpleasant feelings that will suppress his desire to continue learning.

The Appropriate Time for Learning

Choose a time when your baby is alert and relaxed, and not when he is hungry and tired. Be receptive to any signs of discomfort, boredom or distress that he may express, so that he will feel that you understand him. This kind of sensitivity on your part will make him feel safe and want to dare to experience and learn more and more together with you.

The Convenient Time for You

It's important that the time you choose is also convenient for you. If you decide to play with your baby when you come home tired and agitated from work and play with him by force and out of a sense of duty, you will no doubt transfer this feeling of apathy, frustration and even

anger to your baby. Don't force yourself to devote quality time to your baby when you are preoccupied, or not calm and relaxed.

Attention and Interest

Your Baby's Attention Span

Remember that a newborn's attention span is very short: After birth it will only be between a few seconds and a few minutes. Adapt yourself to this span, which is continually increasing as your baby grows. Activities of just a few minutes can be as valuable and as significant as longer activities. Be aware of your baby's needs and abilities, and be sure to stop the game when she indicates that she has had enough.

What Interests Your Baby? Mostly – You!

Your role in the game changes from month to month. From motivating, navigating and activating your newborn baby, you become a supportive haven for your baby who is developing her personality and independence. During the first few months, much of the social game between you and your baby involves face-to-face interaction: face your baby up close, talk to her, smile at her, make noises and sing for her, and create a direct bond with her. Try following your baby's actions and "bring" her the things that she shows a natural interest in. Control this interaction gently, slowly -- don't continuously move from one activity to another.

The More She Grows, The More Active She Becomes

After several months, your baby will learn to control and direct her movements and she will become more active in her games with you. At about five months, you will notice that she is not satisfied with just looking at your face and hearing your voice. She is now more curious and wants to examine you using all her senses. A game involving sounds and different noises, played by the two of you, will allow your baby to experience cooperation and interrelationships and to learn her body's boundaries. They also help her to begin developing her own identity as an individual, separate from you.

You As A Secure Base From Which Your Baby Can Go Exploring

During the final months of her first year, and afterwards, you continue having a significant role in your baby's play. This role will sometimes be less active -- the role of companion, advisor, and supporter: a secure base for your child, from which she can go out and explore while returning from time to time for encouragement and comfort when she fails or is afraid. During this period it is important to allow your baby to act and experiment on her own, and not for you to solve all problems for her. Help her, when necessary, create a safe environment for her, and of course, watch her closely to prevent her from hurting herself or having accidents.

And What About Toys?

They Are Not "Just Toys", They Are Baby's Learning Aids

During the first few months, when your newborn is still totally dependent on you, and cannot yet control his movements, it is important to provide your baby with stimuli that are appropriate for his senses.

Once You Have Selected The Appropriate Toy

Show the toy to your baby: Hang it above him, placing it in front of him when he is lying on his stomach, or put it next to him.

Allow him to spend time exploring and examining the toy in his own way, at his own pace:

Sometimes, he will stare at the toy for a long while before trying to touch it or play with it.

Don't overwhelm him with stimuli: Give him one toy at a time and try to remove unnecessary stimuli from the area. When he loses interest in that toy, you can give him another one.

Try to draw his attention to the toy: Pass it in front of his eyes and place it in his hand. Allow him to explore the toy in his own special way. Let your baby choose and decide what to do with the toy.

One toy, many uses: Over and above the specific task of a specific toy, it still has infinite, creative uses for your baby to try. Remember that each action or experience has developmental value. Don't try to constantly direct him towards specific actions that interest you, he will get the message, directly or indirectly, that what he is doing is wrong and will develop feelings of failure.

Your Busy Little Explorer

After the age of six months your baby becomes a relentless explorer. He is not satisfied with only watching. He investigates every toy in every possible way. He grabs it with his hand, puts it in his mouth, he sucks and “chews” it and then feels it with his fingers. He rubs it, squashes it and squeezes it and throws it on the floor. It is very important to allow your baby to play this way with toys and with other household objects that are safe and suitable for this kind of exploration.

Note: Some parents try to stop their baby from putting things into his mouth. By doing this they prevent their baby from using one of his most important investigative tools for exploring the world available to him. So, don't prevent your baby from putting things into his mouth. Just make sure that the objects within his reach are not hazardous.

Help Him Broaden His Experiences

At this stage it is possible to offer your baby more than one toy at a time, but it's also important not to overwhelm him with stimuli. Make an effort to get to know your baby well and to broaden his experiences or to notice the stimuli that he spontaneously turns to. Express his experience in words. Describe what he is doing, expand on what he is doing and try to associate it with other experiences that he is already familiar with.

Alone, Together and In-Between

Let your baby decide when to be together with you and when to be on her own. Your baby needs to spend some time to learn on her own, freely, without your help. It allows her to learn about herself, to learn to solve problems and develop her independence.

Any advice and information provided in this publication is given as suggestions only and should not be taken as a professional medical diagnosis or opinion. We recommend you also consult your healthcare provider, and urge you to contact them immediately if your question is urgent.