

Brain-building through play: Games to play with babies (12 months)

Why is play important for babies? It helps develop sturdy brain architecture, the foundations of lifelong health and the building blocks of resilience.

Playful interactions with adults also help babies develop executive function skills, e.g., organizing and planning, paying attention, starting tasks and staying focused. Hiding, finger play and conversation games, like the ones below, teach them to focus attention, use working memory and practice basic self-control.



**BABY
READ** |

CAREN
VON HIPPEL

When you play with a baby, follow their lead! Play games they show an interest in and, whenever possible, let them determine how long to play and when to move on to something else.

TODDLER SEE, TODDLER DO!

Encourage a toddler to copy your actions while you play. For example, place toy animals in a group, line up toy cars or stack building blocks. When baby does the same, praise them. “Wow! Look at the tower you built!” or “Awesome work on lining up the cars!”

EXPLORE ON THE FLOOR

It’s fun for babies to explore their surroundings, crawling around, standing with help or beginning to walk. Stretch out, sit or kneel on the floor near them and join them for play. Encourage them to explore and come to you. Make sure you place pillows or cushions on the floor to create a safe environment.

‘IT’S FOR YOU!’

One-year-olds are beginning to understand the concept of imaginary play. Encourage them, for example, by holding a toy, banana, brush or hand up to your ear and pretend to talk on the phone. After your pretend call ends, make a ringing sound, answer the phone and give it to the toddler to “play” talk. Hold the phone up to their ear and prompt them to say “Hi” and talk away. You can join in and ask, “who is on the phone?” or “what are you talking about?”

DUMP AND FILL

Toddlers love to fill up containers and dump them out repeatedly. You’ve probably seen a toddler empty out a laundry basket full of clothes or a bin full of toys that you just put away! Encourage this fun activity by providing them with a variety of containers, such as mixing bowls, boxes or baskets, and safe items to fill them up with, such as toys, socks or plastic cups.

SIMPLE HIDE AND SEEK

Toddlers enjoy hiding and listening to you search loudly for them. Keep the game exciting by exaggerating movements and words, looking in silly places and narrating your search: “Where is baby? Is baby under the table? Is baby behind the couch? I found you!”

Written by Julia Robinson-Schultze.

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BABYREAD’S MISSION is to raise the literacy level in Oconee County by encouraging moms/caregivers to read daily to children from birth. This prepares children for success in school and in life. Readers read with moms/caregivers in person at town or school libraries. We have a COVID option. Questions? Contact Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., president, at babyread@charter.net or (864) 643-8083 or visit babyread.org.