

## *Brain building through play with 9-month-olds*

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.

### **1. Dickory Dean**

While sitting with baby on your lap, bounce baby up and down and chant, “What’s the matter with Dickory Dean?” Then lift baby high and say, “He jumped right into the washing machine!” Then swish baby side to side while saying, “Chug, chug, chug, chug” twice. Bounce baby and chant, “Nothing’s the matter with Dickory Dean.” Now, slowly say, “He dove in dirty ...” and drop baby down between your knees and exclaim, “And he jumped out clean!” Babies will remember the game and anticipate the thrill of the movements!

### **2. Baby See, Baby Do!**

Make simple gestures — wave your hand, stick out your tongue, blow a kiss or tug your earlobe. Babies love to copy adults, so wait for baby to imitate you. Later, if baby makes the gesture, imitate them back.

### **3. Where Is It?**

Get a safe object that makes noise — like a set of keys, measuring spoons or toy. Jiggle the object to make a sound and once baby seems interested, hide it behind your back. Say, “Where are the (object)?” When baby finds the object, enthusiastically say, “You found it!”

### **4. Boom!**

Drop a small toy into a container, and when it hits the bottom, say “Boom!” Baby might laugh or clap in excitement. Repeat a few times, and then drop the toy in the container without saying anything, and see if baby responds with “Boom!” If baby says “Boom!,” say it back. Next, let baby to drop the toys in the bucket and say “Boom!”

### **5. Grocery Store Explore**

At the grocery store, tell baby about different foods you see or foods baby points to. Talk about the kind, color, taste or smell of the food. “I see red and green apples. Strawberries are sweet.” Even though babies at this age can’t respond in words, they still learn language skills by listening to you.

*Abstracted by Julia Robison-Schultze from Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University (2022)*

**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 in public places only, e.g. town libraries. We have a COVID option. We have great incentive programs, e.g. gift cards to Aldi. Questions? Contact Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., president, at [babyread@charter.net](mailto:babyread@charter.net) or (864) 643-8083 or visit [babyread.org](http://babyread.org).