



**BabyRead Columns
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**January – June
2023**

2023 *Journal* Column (January – June)
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Brain building through play with 6-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, build their memory and practice basic self-control.



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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. Peekaboo!

Babies love hide-and-find games. This type of play challenges babies to remember who is hiding and helps them practice basic skills of self-control. Vary the game by having baby wait for you to reveal your face or letting baby control the timing.

2. “Pat-a-Cake”

Sing “Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker’s man. Bake me a cake as fast as you can! Roll it and pat it and mark it with a [first letter of baby’s name], then put it in the oven for the baby and me!” Clap, roll and pat baby’s hands gently as you sing.

3. Hiding Games

Hide a toy under a cloth or cup and encourage baby to look for it. Once baby finds it quickly, hide it, show baby that you moved it and encourage them to find it again. When baby finds the object, show excitement and say, “You found it!”

4. Conversation Games

Six-month-old babies begin to make sounds like “ga,” “ma,” and “ba.” With baby facing you on your lap, make silly sounds, pause and wait for baby to respond. When baby babbles, squeals or makes a silly face, make the same sounds and face back to them. Story telling can be fun. Tell baby about the day baby was born or an important event in your life, such as getting married. Ask baby questions and wait for a response. Even though you won’t get “real” answers, baby will add their own colorful details.

5. Fingerplays

Babies love songs and chants with simple hand motions. With practice, baby can learn to copy motions and remember sequences. Some examples of fingerplays are “Eensy Weensy Spider” and “Where is Thumbkin?”

6. “Trot Trot to Boston”

Put baby facing you on your knees and gently bounce baby up and down while chanting, “Trot trot to Boston, Trot trot to Lynn. Watch out little [baby’s name] or you might fall in!” Vary the pace of the chant and watch baby react.

Abstracted from Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2023, Julia Robison-Schultze

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 libraries generally twice each month. 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.

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



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conversation games, like the ones below, teach them to focus attention, use working memory and practice basic self-control.

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)

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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,



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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.

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.

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TODDLER SEE, TODDLER DO!

‘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.

Abstracted from: Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University.

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7 reasons why more outdoor time will make your kids better people, part 1

In today's technology-saturated world, kids are spending more time looking at the screen, not playing in the green. Kids don't easily see the benefits of outdoor play like parents do — we grew up in the days of playing outdoors every day. So the next time your child wants



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to power up the screen, nudge them to spend time outdoors soaking in nature and all she has to offer. Follow along as we help make the case for playing outside this summer and beyond!

Movement outside makes everything better, especially creativity. According to experts, free play improves everything from creativity to academic success. In his book "Vitamin N: The Essential Guide to a Nature-Rich Life," author Richard Louv references the Theory of Loose Parts, which suggests that the more things kids can manipulate, see, touch or feel, the more creative they become. Outdoor play is great for the imagination!

A healthy dose of sun exposure increases vitamin D and improves mood. Vitamin D in children actually helps strengthen bones and prevent both heart disease and diabetes. The best way for your child to absorb vitamin D is through limited exposure to the sun without sunscreen. Low levels of vitamin D can cause moodiness and other health concerns. Play in direct sunlight will do wonders for children's mental and physical health. Arrange a play date outdoors with friends and family to get the children outside soaking up the sun!

Kids who engage in outside free play are more successful in math and reading. School is out for the summer, so let's increase outside play time! Keep children in their school and day care routine and ensure they are spending a set amount of time outdoors. After lunch is a great time to burn energy. Play can be organized or free flowing, just like school outdoor time. The more they roam and engage their creativity, the better their test scores will be when school starts in the fall.

Encouraging kids to get super dirty makes them super healthy. Stronger immune systems are built through children's dirty play. According to the National Wildlife Federation, "When we let our kids play in the dirt, we're not only allowing them to explore the wonders around them, we are also exposing them to healthy bacteria, parasites and viruses that will inevitably create a much stronger immune system." Encourage children to get "down and dirty," play with their hands in the dirt, mud or whatever makes them happy. An outdoor scavenger hunt around the house or at a park will get the children close to nature.

(Abstracted by Julia Robison-Schultze, a BabyRead volunteer, from an April 2023 article by Janelle Connor in "BabyTalk.")

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Why more outdoor time will make your kids better people – Part 2

In today's technology-saturated world, kids are spending more time looking at the screen, not playing in the green. Kids don't easily see the benefits of outdoor play like parents do. We grew up in the days of playing outdoors every day.



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Follow along as we help make the case for playing outside this summer and beyond!

Kids who play outside after a down-pour develop a greater appreciation for all life. Most children won't need any coaxing to go outside after a rainstorm. But you can further coax them by going to a local park to study worms or walking through the neighborhood. Encourage the kids to play superhero and save the worms flooded out of their homes. Some kids are squeamish when the worms wiggle in their hands! For kids that are not fans of worms, try one of the sidewalk science experiments at <https://tinybeans.com/awesome-sidewalk-science-experiments/>. Search the sky for rainbows and talk to kids about how they are formed and enjoy their beautiful colors.

Kids who encounter more greenery have better focus. The digital world makes it difficult to get a kid's attention, let alone keep it for more than a few minutes. And it's especially challenging for parents with ADHD kids. Several studies published by researchers at the University of Illinois discovered that "children with ADHD who play in outdoor green spaces have milder symptoms than those who play indoors or in an urban setting." Add some fun with water games, go to a park and play a game of identifying bugs or flowers or plant a garden and watch it grow.

Children gain confidence and climb the social ladder. Summer is the perfect opportunity to reacquaint little ones with fresh air and rekindle their first love, the playground. According to Maria Magher, "Children who are allowed to explore through play can learn new skills and overcome challenges, which can promote self-confidence, resiliency and self-advocacy, all of which can help children learn how to develop healthy relationships and to become leaders."

Abstracted by Julia Robison-Schultze, a BabyRead volunteer, from "7 Reasons Why More Outdoor Time Will Make Your Kids Better People," *BabyTalk*, University of North Carolina.

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