



PLAYING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN 1

Playing with babies

THE IDEA

Warm and loving relationships are vital to a child's development. Holding, cuddling and talking to the baby helps them to grow and feel secure. In the first three months of life the baby is sleeping and feeding, close and warm next to their mother. This feeling of love and security is the basis for the baby's future physical, social and emotional development. Babies need to be stimulated and responded to from the time they are born. This can be done through play, sharing activities and talking, laughing and singing together. Older children can learn how to observe and listen to what babies and young children do. For example, if a baby makes a sound or gesture, they can repeat these back to the baby. This is how babies learn to communicate. It tells the baby that what she or he does is valued. Older children can learn about how babies and young children develop. They can learn how to play and respond to them in ways that help babies and young children to develop even better. However, it is important that older children are not burdened with adult responsibilities for caring for babies and younger children. Older children need time for play and their development must not be neglected. The activities in this sheet are appropriate for babies up to about two years old.

Understanding

Babies and young children learn through interacting with others. A baby who hears no language will not learn to talk. If a baby's sounds and actions are ignored they will not learn how to communicate effectively. A baby feels safe and valued if they are hugged, smiled at and shown love. A baby who is shouted at may become fearful and nervous and find it harder to learn new things. Babies like to watch things moving, like the shadow of a tree against the sun. Later they like to reach out to grab hair or pretty beads. When they can walk and run they also like to jump, skip and twist around. Games like hide and seek are fun for little ones. As soon as they begin to understand and use language they like to play games using words: 'Where's my nose?' or 'Find the cup'. We can encourage them to do all these things and more. Older children usually like to play with and help babies and younger children. They enjoy seeing how they respond and learning to do and say new things. They feel good when they see them smile and hear them laugh, especially if the older children understand more about how babies learn and develop.

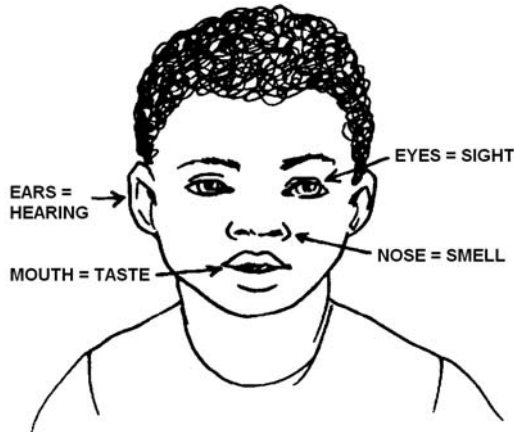


All children – girls and boys – need the same opportunities for play and interaction with all family members and friends. Sometimes children with disabilities are excluded from these activities. Stimulation and play and being included in all family activities can be even more important to children with disabilities than they are to their peers who do not suffer from disabilities. They may need extra stimulation to help to overcome difficulties in moving or hearing or seeing, for example.

Children play because it is fun, but play is also the key to their learning and development.

Playing helps children to:

- Look at things around them.
- Try out new actions and activities.
- Make their own experiments with their own hands, eyes and voices.



In this way they are always learning new skills, gaining confidence and finding out for themselves about new things, and learning how to:

- Use their bodies well.
- Use all five senses; seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching.
- Understand and use language better.
- Think and solve problems.
- Use their imaginations.
- Relate to other people.

By watching and imitating others, young children learn how to do things together. If we set a good example to them, children learn to share and cooperate with others and make them happy. Children learn by copying what others do, not what others tell them to do.

Playing with babies as they grow

A baby's brain must grow and develop. A baby cow or sheep is born with its brain and limbs well developed so that it can stand and follow its mother a few hours after its birth. The human baby has a much larger brain but it is not fully developed at birth. It goes on growing, especially during the first two years of the baby's life. This is why these first two years are so important. After this time the brain grows more slowly. During these first two years young children need food, love and stimulation to help their brains grow as fast and as well as possible.

Different kinds of play

All over the world families love and care for their children but unless babies are stimulated and responded to lovingly, something will be missing in their development. This is where older children can have an important role. It is not just babies and young children who learn from play. Older children learn by observing what babies do and by making toys and inventing games for them.

Everyday activities, such as helping to prepare food for the family, provide many opportunities for learning about colour, shape and how to sort, match, count and so on. Older children can help younger children select eating utensils or sort vegetables for cooking. A variety of simple materials for play that are suitable for the child's stage of development such as water, sand, cardboard boxes, wooden building blocks and pots and lids are just as good as toys bought from a shop. Older children need to know how babies develop and to help them and play with them in different ways at different ages.

Remember: Every child is different and babies and young children develop at different rates. Babies who have not had enough to eat or have been ill need extra help. Some children with disabilities may need extra support and encouragement and may not do some of the things that other babies and young children do at a similar age. They will learn to do many things, especially if their difficulties are recognised early in life and they are given appropriate support.

Playing with babies and young children

There are many things to do and games to play with young children at different ages and stages of development. In the Planning and doing section of this Activity Sheet there are suggestions for activities that babies will probably be able to do in the first two years of their lives. As the older child plays with babies they will learn what each baby likes and they will think of new ways to play with, and respond to, the individual baby.

Older children have needs too

Remember that older children need time to play and to develop new skills. An older child's development must not be sacrificed by being given too much responsibility for caring for younger brothers and sisters.

When babies are quiet

Often babies of all ages can be quiet. They may be sleepy or not very well. Play quietly with them; sing to them. They still need gentle play (see Activity Sheet 1.2 **Playing with Young Children 2**).

Ideas for deepening understanding

Teachers and community workers can help groups of older children devise games and activities based on the knowledge they gain from playing with babies and young children.

- Children can tell, and then act, the stages they passed through from when they were very small until now.
 - *First we ... (smiled)*
 - *Then we ... (sat up)*
 - *Then we ...*
 - *Then we ...*

Other children (and the teacher or community worker) can challenge the order or suggest what has been forgotten.

- Children can brainstorm and make a bubble picture showing what babies and young children need to help them develop well.



- Children can identify all the hazards in the picture and then describe how to make the room safe for babies and young children to play in.

Finding out more

Older children can find out more about babies by playing with them and observing what they can do. They can talk to local mothers and child-minders and make notes about what babies eat and what they do at different stages.

They can talk to older people such as grandmothers. They can ask them about their experience of bringing up children and ask them to teach them their favourite songs and stories.

Carrying out surveys

School children in Mpika in Zambia carried out a survey of babies and very young children in their neighbourhood. They planned this in their English language lesson. As a follow-up to the survey they listed all the games and activities they played with younger brothers and sisters and what ones were considered the most fun. They did this second activity as part of a Zambian language lesson.

Planning and doing

Based on their observations children can plan and carry out activities at home, in school and as part of youth club activities.

Children can play with babies at home. They can help them to smile and laugh, to grasp and hold things, to hide and find things and to sit up and crawl and walk.

ALWAYS REMEMBER

Make sure all toys and games are safe.

Early play activities

During the first three months of life babies develop very quickly. Older children can ask the mother if they can hold the baby and watch what the baby does. They can talk and sing softly to the baby. If a baby's cheek is gently rubbed they will turn their head towards the child. The baby will hold the child's finger if it is put in their hand. After about six weeks they may begin to smile. They may turn their head to look at a bright object like a flower or a spoon if it is moved in front of their face. As they grow the baby will begin to show how much they enjoy being played with. They will smile or make happy noises and often stop crying if they are talked or sung to.

Here are some other things older children can do with and for the baby. Children will have many more ideas of their own. These are the sorts of activities that most babies will enjoy in the first two years of their lives.

- Children can tie or hang objects like spoons close to where the baby lies so that they can reach and hold on to them.
- Children can make a sound with a spoon and a tin, or clap hands so that the baby will look to see where the sound comes from.
- Children can cut a smooth ring out of bamboo. Let the baby reach for it and take it to their mouth. Make sure it is clean and that there are no splinters or insects on it.
- Children can find a smooth object and give it to the baby. They can notice if the baby drops the first object when offered a second one. If the baby with a disability cannot take the object, children can put it into their hand.
- Children can sing and rock and move the baby about to the rhythm of a song.
- They can make up games that make the baby smile and coo. These baby sounds

are the beginnings of speech. Children can learn that it is important to wait for the baby to make sounds and then repeat these sounds back to the baby.

- They can carry the baby about and tell them the names of objects. Even if a baby does not respond to this kind of stimulation because they may have a disability it is important to continue talking and singing to them.
- If one child is carrying a baby on their back, others can play with the baby and make them laugh.

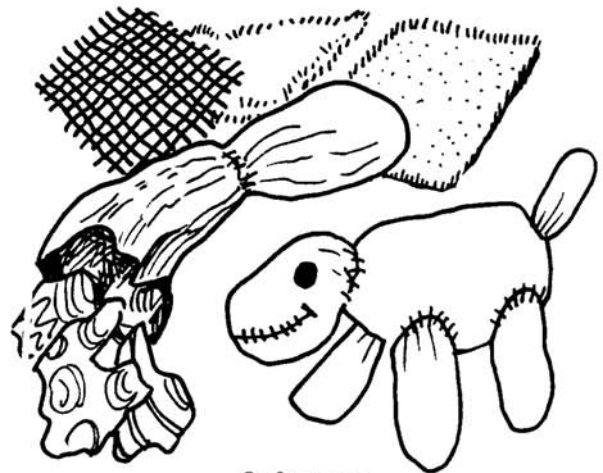
Later play activities

- Later on the baby will want to sit up. If the child has disabilities that make moving difficult, older children can help them to sit up for games and give support if needed. They can call their name from different places and see if they turn their head to find them.
- They can encourage the baby to hold their arms out to another child. If they cannot do this, one child can hold the baby's arms out to the other.
- A child can put a cloth over the baby's head and encourage the baby to pull it off.
- Children can teach the baby to drink clean water from a clean cup.
- They can give them smooth objects and encourage them to give them back and to pass them from one hand to another.
- They can give them a tin or a block. They will enjoy throwing it on the floor and looking for it. They will like doing this again and again.
- They can play games with the baby's fingers and toes.
- As the baby grows, older children can play games to encourage the baby to crawl, stand and walk. For example, they can pretend to be a mother animal and the baby is the small animal. They can hold the baby's hand and take them for a walk. They can show them things and talk about them. If the baby cannot move without help because of a disability, two children can support them to crawl with a band of cloth around their waist and use this to lift them onto their hands and knees.

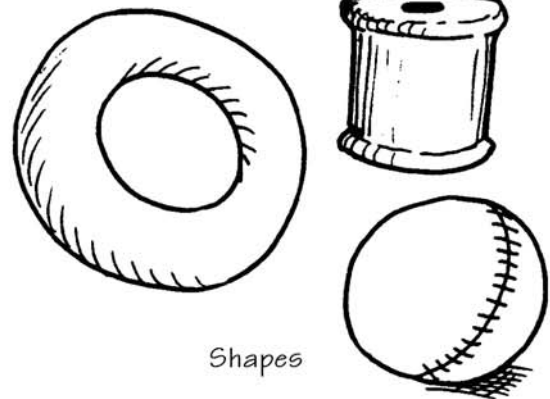
Another child can encourage them to crawl by holding out a toy or some fruit.

- They can encourage them to clap their hands and wave 'Good-bye'.
- They can hand him or her objects to hold between his or her finger and thumb. They can help him or her to hold and feel things if they find this difficult.
- By now, the baby may like throwing things as well as dropping them. Children can make a soft ball to throw.
- They can give them two objects and hold two more. They bang their objects together and see if the baby can copy them.
- They can give him or her a box and things of different sizes to put in and take out.
- They can hide something under a cup or piece of cloth as they watch and see if they can find it.
- They can make a doll and tell the baby stories about it.
- They can tell the baby stories and sing songs with actions.
- When the baby can walk, older children can see if they can walk a few steps backwards. They will learn to climb up steps but will need help getting down. At first they will come down backwards.
- They can make a toy on wheels that the baby can push as they walk, like a box on wheels with a handle.
- Children can do drawings in the sand or mud with a stick or a finger and see if the baby can copy them.
- They can encourage the baby to feed him- or herself.
- They can encourage him or her to fetch things and take them to his or her mother. This shows how much they understand.
- They can encourage him or her to name things around the home.
- They can walk around the place where they live and name the things they see. When they show the baby an animal, they can make the sound the animal makes and ask them to repeat the sounds.
- They can show the baby that they are pleased when he or she tries to do and say new things. They can praise him or her with words and by smiling, patting or hugging them.

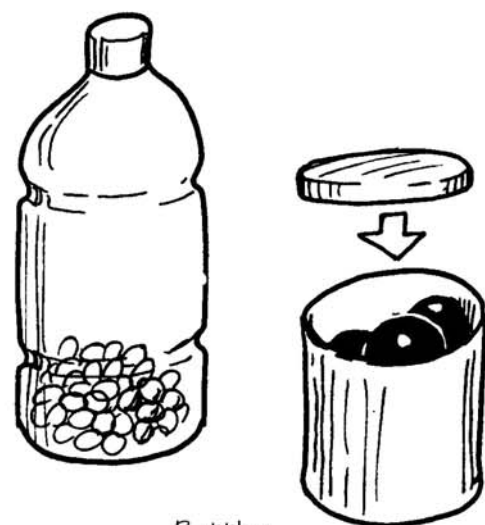
Toys for very small babies



Soft toys



Shapes



Rattles

WARNING: All babies put things in their mouths. Be careful what you give them.

(The Child-to-Child reader **Teaching Thomas** has ideas for toys and games made by Samuel for his younger brother Thomas.)

In school, children can:

- Design toys in mathematics lessons.
- Make toys in handicraft lessons.
- Write about younger brothers and sisters in language lessons.
- Make an illustrated class book of games for babies.
- Study child development in science lessons.

Groups of schools can organise toy competitions with special sections devoted to toys for very young children. There could be prizes for different sections, for example:

- Mobiles
- Rattles and other instruments
- Building blocks
- Dolls and animals
- Picture books.

Making a record

If there is a new baby in the neighbourhood, children can make a record of the baby's first 15 months of life. Take a sheet of paper. Put the baby's name and the date they were born at the top. Mark the sheet into 24 sections down the page as is partly shown in this diagram.

Toy-making workshops

Toy-making workshops were organised in a refugee camp for the Afghan people living in Pakistan. Older children, helped by parents, used simple odds and ends of cloth, paper, wood and other material, donated by local shopkeepers. Children made a whole range of toys and games such as mobiles, rattles and soft toys for babies, puzzles, hoops and rollers for toddlers, and picture books and word and counting games for older children. Through making toys, older children developed their design and craft skills. They also became aware of how the younger ones develop and how toys can help them to develop better.

The sections down are the months 1–24. Label the section 1 month, 2 months, 3 months, 4 months, 5 months, etc. up to 24 months in the left-hand side.

Each month ask the baby's mother what the baby is doing and record this in the chart.

For example:

In month 2 he smiled at me.

In month 4 he first lifted his head to look.

In month 9 he said 'Mama'.

The chart can be decorated around the edges and be displayed at home or at school.

| Baby's Development Card | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------|
| Name of baby: | | | | |
| Date of birth: | | | | |
| Month | Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 |
| January | Baby turns eyes when I clap | Grasps wooden brick | Finds his mouth with his thumb | |
| February | | Baby takes bamboo ring to his mouth | | |
| March | Baby drops a brick and takes a second one | | Baby makes cooing sounds | |

Discussing the results of activities

After doing these activities children ask each other questions such as:

- *Are we playing with our baby more? Differently?*
- *Who talks to the baby now? Is there a change?*
- *What toys have we made? What are children's favourite toys?*
- *What games have we played?*
- *Are play areas well organised, safe, clean and tidy?*

Doing it better

This is an ongoing process. There may be activities that the teacher or community worker or the children themselves feel need repeating in order to improve their own understanding and skills and those of other people in the community. There may be mistakes that need correcting or written materials that need rewriting to make the messages clearer. It is important that time is spent doing this. Other issues, problems or anxieties may have come up that the adults need to explore further with the children. New topics can be discussed and selected with children at this stage.

USING THIS SHEET

Teachers can develop these activities in health, language, science, mathematics and other lessons and by their own example as parents.

Teachers in colleges and in-service training can learn about the importance of play and make and record observations on individual children of their own or in the community. Colleges can have a special place where mothers can work and bring their young babies to play. Students can work and play with them.

Health workers can work with schools and youth groups.

Women's groups and mothers' groups can spread the message and develop toys.

Non-formal teachers in **religious groups** and **parents' classes** can spread the ideas.

Curriculum workers can ensure that this vital knowledge is incorporated in school programmes.

This sheet can be used together with **Playing with Young Children 2: Play for pre-school children**. It is about stimulating children, but remember that good food is also important, see the Activity Sheets on nutrition (2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4).

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