

Baby Play Ideas to try at home

Treasure Baskets

Put a few items in a basket, bag, old biscuit tin or box. Anything that is safe for your baby to play with which include different materials (wood, plastic, metal, fabric), different shapes (round, long, flat, interlocking shapes), textures (cold and smooth, prickly and rough, spikey, soft, hard, shiny, heavy, light, hollow), make sounds, different colours and patterns, different weights. These different things help the baby become more curious and be able to choose and explore. For example: wooden spoon, wooden egg cup, plastic spatula, napkin ring, small wooden bowl, pastry brush, nail brush (clean), large pebbles, fir cone, metal spoon or scoop, loofah, new pan scourer, rigid bracelet.

Choose special treasure basket times, between 15 minutes and an hour, when your baby is well fed and not tired. Lie or sit your baby on the floor with the basket in front of them.

Boxes and Tins

Make a collection of boxes and tins of different shapes and sizes. Eg Toblerone box, egg box, shoe box, biscuit tin, boxes with lids or flaps, boxes with handle holes.

Babies love to put things in boxes and take them out again. Things like rattle, teddy, toy car, ball can be placed in a box. Say 'where's teddy?' then take the lid off to find teddy. Hide a toy in a box and shake the box saying, 'what's in here?'

Place baby on the floor, with the box or tin nearby and some objects for baby to put in and take out.

Sharing books

Make a small collection of story books and picture books, from charity shops and the library. Choose board books and cloth books that a baby can mouth. Share books with your baby several times a day. Use the same books over and over again.

Read aloud, point at the pictures, say what they are. Make animal noises, or car noises, and make your voice go high or low, loud and quiet, while you share the book.

Dance

Your child will enjoy moving their body to the rhythm and beat of any music and will love to copy your dance moves! Clear a space on the floor and help your baby sway, wiggle, turn, lift up arms and legsAll you need is some music and some space to move. Any music, whatever you both like, the radio, a CD or use your phone.

You could wave a scarf about in time to the music or put some dry pasta or rice into an old drink bottle to make a shaker.

Visual stimulation

Create your own mobile and hang objects such as a wooden spoon, strips of foil, an empty cotton reel, an old sock, ribbons, anything that dangles and moves over the baby.

Blow bubbles. Look in mirrors, metal bowls, windows, and spoons to see baby's reflection.

Place the pram or buggy under a tree or lie with baby on a rug on the ground under a tree and look up at the leaves and branches.

Try some different lighting effects, twinkly lights, natural light, dimmed light, lava lamps, torches, and toys with flashing lights.

Enjoy rhymes together

Find times each day to say or sing nursery rhymes with your baby. The best times are when you are carrying out routine activities such as changing nappies, feeding, getting off to sleep, dressing, or pushing the buggy for a walk. But lap times are good too, in fact any time and as often as possible!

There are many nursery rhymes, and each culture has their own. It is good to learn rhymes from different cultures. Find books and look online. What can you remember from when you were a child? Who could you ask for help?

Make up your own words that fit to well-known tunes.

Baby Play Ideas to try at home

Activities for touching and feeling

Human touch is so important, so stroke baby's hands, cheeks, feet, to sooth him or her, and play tickling games when they are more energetic.

Place objects in baby's hands for him or her to explore with their mouth. For example, a soft ball, cotton reel, plastic bottle, jam jar lid, clean spoon, and other everyday objects. Talk quietly to the baby about the object.

Activities for smelling

Find opportunities for baby to be nearby when you are peeling an orange or making toast or baking a cake. Say, 'mmm, I can smell orange' and breath in through your nose.

Make a few different fragrance bags by putting lavender, rosemary, mint, thyme or other scents into a baby's sock, secured at the end with a piece of string. Show baby how to put it near his or her nose and breath in the scent.

Mark Making

Mark making and messy play go together well. Try putting a tray in front of your baby and put different messy substances in the tray. You might need to put a little apron on your baby first! Try substances like shaving foam (for sensitive skin), children's paint (non-toxic), custard, yoghurt. Gently guide your baby to put his or her hands in the substance and move them around and make patterns with their fingers. You should put your hands in too and make circles, lines and dots, talking about what you're doing and making encouraging noises.

Once your child can grasp something, you can provide some chunky crayons and help them to discover the fun of scribbling on paper.

These are the very first writing skills a child has, and the more often they can experience this, the better.

Talking to your baby

It is so important to chat to your baby as often as you can. It is so rewarding to notice when your baby 'talks' back to you, with goo's, gurgles, chuckles, and a whole range of different noises, which are the baby's way of talking.

You can talk about what you are doing, make comments about what the baby is doing, perhaps staring at something, or waving their hands, or trying to roll over or sit up. Talk to your baby when they cry, using a soothing voice. Talk to your baby while you push them in the buggy, about where you're going, where you've been and what you have been doing and who you saw. Point things out as you pass them. Change your voice to high and low, loud and soft. Change your facial expressions to show happy, sad, and surprised emotions.

You can copy the sounds the baby makes too. Try to have a two-way conversation by saying something, then wait for baby to respond before you say something else. Look at your baby's face and make eye contact when you communicate and show your pleasure at being with them.

Sounds and Music

Listen out for sounds in the environment – an aeroplane, bird singing, rain falling, doorbell, phone ringing, dog barking – point to where the sound is coming from and say what it is. You can sometimes recreate the sound using your voice.

Provide a range of household objects that make sounds – bang them together and shake and rattle them. For example, saucepan lid, wooden spoon, biscuit tin, metal spoon, sticks, large pebbles, shells.

Play different types of music – pop music, classical music, jazz music, reggae and blues. Show your baby how much you enjoy it. Sometimes have times of absolute quiet and peace and notice sounds of nature.