



Play to Learn

How we learn through play.

Children learn best through play experiences. Play enables them to explore their creativity, enhance their problem solving skills and is also beneficial to your child's emotional health. Through various play experiences, children are able to expand in many areas of developmental skills. With social interactions, children are able to learn how to share, take turns and cooperate with on another. Play promotes healthy development of children's brains, strength and coordination. With the assistance of a caring adult, play provides the opportunity for children to learn proper behavior, how to treat others out in their communities.

In Early Learning and child care settings, the educator plans a variety of developmentally appropriate activities and allows the children to choose where they want to play, giving the children the ability to make choices. The children are given a variety of play areas. One could be building a shopping mall with blocks, another exploring art using cotton balls, and another could be in the family area making dinner for their friends. As educators we place ourselves in these different areas to be a play partner for the children as well as take the opportunity to help the child expand on their thinking. With the child that is building the shopping mall, we could ask, I

wonder what would happen if you added another level to the mall. Or the child that is in the art area, offer them some clothes pins and say show me how you could use the clothes pin in your art. The child that is making supper for their friends, the educator could point out and say "I see you have 4 seats at your table for dinner but you have 6 friends coming for dinner. It doesn't look like you have enough seats for everyone, how can we solve this problem." Educators encourage the children to play with things that interest them, then to put them away where they belong so they are there for the next time they want to play with that object.

Playing to Learn for 0—3 Months

Children learn everyday. Even as early as the day they were born. Ways to support a new born learning can be done by speaking to the baby, acknowledging the sounds the baby makes when they are hungry, happy and tired. For example, you could say "I hear

you crying, that sounds like a hungry cry, lets get you something to eat." During bath time for your infant, play with their toes, saying this little piggy went to market. Exposing your infant to different textures by touching their hands on it or rubbing it on their tummies. When applying baby lotion

to your baby's skin, say the body parts as you gently massage each part. Say the names of the people that are interacting with your baby. For example, Daddy is feeding me. During a walk outside, say the different objects that you see and explain what they are.

Playing to Learn for 3– 6 months

When getting ready for feeding time, take your child's hand and try the following finger play. "Round and Round the Garden, goes the teddy bear One step Two step tickle you under there." Using your fingers to walk around your child's palm. Take steps with your fingers up their arm, and then tickle their arm pit, chin or feet. When your baby can sit upright in a highchair or on your lap, allow your child to have a set of spoons to play with. When

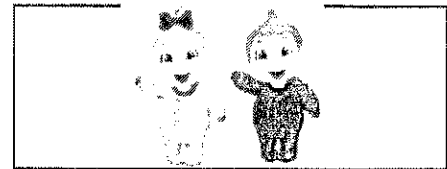
solids are introduced, your child will enjoy holding a spoon while being fed. After a diaper change, hold your baby's hands and wrist and count "One, Two, Three Up." Gently pull your child to a sitting position and then lower them back down to a laying position. Repeat. Go on a nature walk with your child. Collect natural items, such as, grass, leaves, sticks, acorns etc. When you get home, place the objects in a clear plastic bottle, and secure it with

glue or tape. Let your child explore the items in the bottle. Read stories to your child. Allow the child to explore the pictures in the book. Explain what the objects are. When it is nap time or bed time, turn on a flash light and say look at the light. Slowly move the light around the darkened room, focusing on different objects and explain what the objects are. Have an open space for your baby to practice rolling and resting.

Playing to Learn for 6-9 months

During meal time, bring your baby to the table and give them finger foods, like cut up bananas or cheerios. This will allow your child to practice picking up small items. Help your baby to discover why and how things happen. When your baby drops a spoon, pick it up describing what happened. Example, "You dropped your spoon and it made a loud noise." Babies

learn by doing the same thing over and over again. Give your baby a rattle or toy to splash with in the bath. This will allow your baby to explore cause and effect. Place a toy just outside of your baby's reach. This will encourage your baby to crawl or move to get it. Shake it or move it to get your baby's attention. When a friend or family member is leaving, hold your baby's hand,



waving it and say good bye. By modeling how to say hello, your baby will learn how to respond in a similar way.

Playing to Learn for 9–12 months

Babies will try new foods more willingly by feeding themselves. Place small pieces of new food in front of them. Allow them the time to explore it. Give your baby plastic food containers to stack. Show your baby how to put one on top of the other. While making meals, put on some music to encourage your baby

to bounce and move to the music. During bath time, play the name the body part game. Ask questions like, "where are your toes?" or say show me your hands." Introduce art and painting while in the bath. Give your baby a paint brush and allow them to paint with water on the walls. Make a book with different

textures for your baby to feel. When your baby touches each page explain what it feels like and what it is. Count your baby's toes as you take off their socks. Sing the song "1,2,3,4,5, once I caught a toe alive, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 then I let it go again."

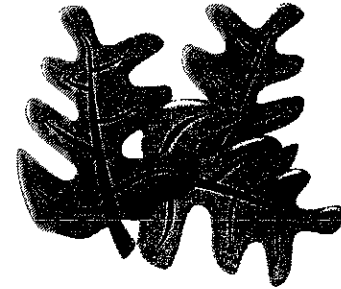


Play to Learn for 12–18 months

Allow your child the time to practice feeding himself/herself with a spoon and drink from a Sippy cup. Give opportunities to your child to pretend to feed a doll or stuffed animal. Provide play food, plates, pots and pans, and cups for your child to “cook” with. Enjoy the pretend meal together. Simple sign language can help your child communicate while language is being developed. Teaching them the signs for, “eat”, “more milk”,

“please”, “Thank you” and “finished” Go to <http://www.parenting.com/gallery/baby-sign-language-words-to-know> to find out how to sign each word. Freeze a small toy in water in a paper cup. Peel off the paper cup and watch the ice melt in the bathtub. Make sure the toy is big enough to prevent possible choking. Encourage your child to throw, push and kick a ball forward. Give your child a wagon to go on a nature walk

with, to collect, leaves, sticks, pine cones and acorns. Toddlers love to fill and dump things over and over again.



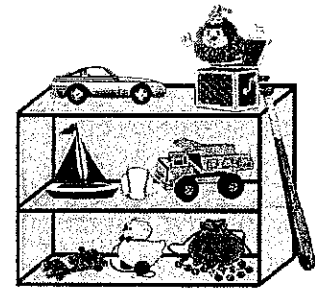
Play to Learn for 18–24 months

Make pudding together. Help your toddler pour and stir the ingredients. Describe the ingredients to help expand your toddlers language. Talk about how vegetables grow. Plant a bean seed with your child and help them take care of it. During bath time encourage your toddler to name different body parts as he/she washes. Use a variety of materials to wash,

like a sponge or wash cloth, to experience different textures. Allow your child to use a wet cloth or a sponge to wipe the countertop and the table. Give your child a child size broom and mop so they can help with the cleaning. Take your child outside and play toss the ball, so your child can practice throwing and catching. Allow your child to look at books independently so they

can tell the story to you. When it is time to clean up, sing “Clean up, clean up everybody every where. Clean up clean up everybody do your share.”

While helping your toddler clean up.

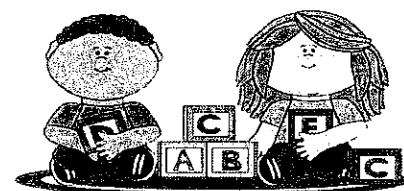


Play to Learn for 24-30 months

Visit a local farmers market. Talk about what kinds of food come from a farm. Enjoy some locally grown foods together. At home when getting ready for dinner, count the number of place settings at the table. During bath time, take a plastic jug and put holes in it. Be careful that there are no rough or

sharp edges. Put the jug in the bath tub. Your child will enjoy filling it and watching the water pour out the bottom. Lay down on the grass on a sunny day. Have your child share what shapes he/she sees or find a certain shaped cloud and ask your child to look for it. Have lots of conversations with your child to

boost their language skills. Invite a friend over for a play date so they children can play together and be social.



Playing to Learn for 30 - 36 months

Try new fruits and vegetables with your child. Discuss the taste, shape, texture and smell. Compare what the fruit or vegetable looks like on the inside and outside. Time your child when he/she brushes their teeth. Play one of your Childs favorite songs and get them to brush until the song is over. Encourage creativity in the bath tub. Make homemade bath paints with your child using, 1 TBSP of corn starch, 1/2 cup dishwashing soap (eco friendly) and food coloring. Allow your child to paint away. Go outside and scatter birdseed or stale bread crumbs around. Make predictions of how long it will take for the birds to come. Talk about the colors of the birds, and the size. Bring paper and

encourage your child to draw a picture of what he /she sees. Read stories out loud to your child. Your child will enjoy hearing the same story over and over again. Repetition helps children learn the structure of the stories which prepares your child to become a reader and a writer. When picking your child up from a play date or day care, ask your child about their day. Listen closely to his/her response and offer other questions or comments to the conversation. The number of words exchanged truly matters in language development.



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