

Play is a key way that your toddler develops and learns about the world around them.

What Does Play Teach Your Child?

Play helps your child grow in all 5 major areas of development. It builds:

- **physical skills** like crawling, climbing, walking, running, using their fingers, seeing and hearing
- **social skills** like cooperating, sharing, being polite, taking turns and leading and following others
- **emotional skills** like identifying and dealing with feelings
- **cognitive skills** like problem solving, using their imagination, figuring out how things work, and learning shapes, colours and numbers
- **language skills** like learning the names for things, forming sentences, telling stories and listening



KEY TAKEAWAY

Play is a big part of how your child learns about themselves, others, and the world around them. Giving your toddler lots of time to play is good for their development. And it's also a wonderful chance for you to show interest in the things that they like to do.

Play by Age

6 to 12 months: Explorer

Your baby may:

- grab at things
- search for things you hide
- enjoy dumping, stacking and pouring things

Try giving them:

- balls
- sturdy toys on wheels
- blocks
- nesting toys
- rattles
- bowls of different sizes



TRY THIS

Use supervised bath time to interact with your toddler or child. Playing with water is fun and soothing for a child.



DID YOU KNOW?

Outdoor play helps your child develop in all areas. They'll use their imagination, learn to play with others and build their confidence by trying new things, like going down a big slide for the first time. See appetitetoplay.com and outsideplay.ca for more information.

12 to 24 months: Mover and Shaker

Your toddler may:

- be able to handle smaller toys
- show their personality through play (they may be active or quiet, focused or multi-tasking)
- take part in "parallel play" (playing beside another child but not with them)

Try giving them:

- balls to chase (and when they're a bit older, to kick and throw)
- pop-up toys
- sit-and-ride toys



MONEY SENSE

Let your child play with things you already have around the house, like cardboard boxes or pots and pans. Many libraries have free kits you can borrow, too.

24 to 36 months: Dreamer and Connector

Your toddler may:

- play with another child
- enjoy imaginary play

Try giving them:

- dress-up clothes and props

Importance of unstructured, outdoor play

It's been shown to be important for children to try something without knowing the outcome. Unstructured, outdoor play can help children plan, risk manage, develop social skills, manage stress, build self-esteem and build resilience. Examples: playing on a log or climbing a tree.



BRAIN BUILDER

Expand your child's imaginary play by showing interest, asking questions and playing along.



DID YOU KNOW?

Many toddlers aren't ready to play with other children until they're 3 years or older.



HOW TO

Encourage your toddler to play

- ✓ Provide a variety of toys suited to their age.
- ✓ Offer them choices and let them decide what they play.
- ✓ Set aside time to play with them each day.
- ✓ Encourage both active and quiet activities.
- ✓ Give them praise and proudly show their work.
- ✓ Take a break when they seem tired, hungry, uninterested or over-stimulated.
- ✓ Give them lots of free, unscheduled playtime for them to be creative and see where their imagination leads them.

5 ideas for playing together

1. Pretend to be animals.
2. Show them how to do something you enjoy, like puzzles or dancing.
3. Go outside to crawl over logs, look at bugs or pick stones.
4. Wash the dishes or tear lettuce together.
5. Get out some paper, paint and glue and be creative.



TRY THIS

When time is short, sing or play word or guessing games while you're doing other things.



TRY THIS

If your toddler is in child care, spend some time observing them there to see if you can pick up ideas for play at home.

