

Language & Learning

Building Concepts

Let Me Explore

All babies love to explore. They explore themselves, their homes and the outdoors. They explore the ways that things relate to each other. Giving your child the opportunity to explore may be messy, but “hands on” is the best way for your baby to learn. Exploring increases your baby’s knowledge about the world, and you can have conversations about that world.

How can your baby explore size? Do you have a floor level kitchen drawer that seems to draw your baby like a magnet? Instead of putting a baby lock on that one drawer, put a big colored flower or frog or butterfly on the drawer that says, “This one is for you to explore.” Inside, you can put all sizes and kinds of plastic lids. There is the screw-off lid from a peanut butter jar (too big to be swallowed), the square lid of a sandwich container, the big round lid of a coffee can, a clear lid and colored lids, huge lids and smaller lids, or any lid without small parts to be chewed off and choked on. While you are cooking, or paying bills, or working on the computer at the kitchen table, your baby can open the drawer, take out the lids, chew on them, hold them, bang them, wave them around, and gradually begin to stack them, sort them and pretend they are hats and plates.

How can your baby explore volume? Put a washtub in your bathroom, full of plastic cups (with and without handles), measuring cups, plastic bottles with narrow necks, sand toys or a plastic colander with holes, and other enticing containers for pouring. At bath time, put the containers in the tub for some “exploring.” Guess what? Things feel lighter when they are empty. When you pour water out of a little container into a big one, the big one doesn’t fill up. When you pour water from a big container into a little container, the little one overflows. Water doesn’t stay in a container that has holes! Think of the conversations you can have!

How can your baby explore the outdoors? Do you have an old blanket? Spread it on the grass on a nice day, and bring just a few things to the blanket at a time: a flower, a leaf, a rock too big to swallow. Or go for a walk with the stroller and walk up to the object your baby notices. Birds fly over, and grasshoppers jump, and if you are lucky, a squirrel may run up a tree, but remember that trucks and cars are interesting, too; so are boats and bicycles in people’s driveways, and water sprinklers, and fire hydrants, and sirens and doors. If you live in the city, look outside and think about the things your baby might like to see, or places that you could go and explore safely.

Of course, some places are not safe to explore. Electrical outlets, cupboard doors under the sink and busy sidewalks need to be put off limits. Remember that your deaf or hard-of-hearing baby may not be alerted by loud, startling sounds. But as you set up barriers for your baby’s safety, remember that inside those barriers you can look for or set up chances for exploring.

Remember that any daily experience can become a language experience. The coffee can lid is BIG and SMOOTH. The cup is FULL of water and then it is EMPTY. The flower smells SWEET and the siren is LOUD. While making juice, your child may discover that the water is COLD, the juice tastes SWEET and the drop of concentrate on the table is STICKY. You can take advantage of many simple daily routines for introducing concept words. The list is endless: grocery shopping, doing laundry, walking the dog, or even cleaning the refrigerator. Have fun exploring together!