

Language & Learning

Learning Through Play

Play Changes As Babies Grow Older

Babies go through changes in their play. When your baby is very small, toys and objects are things to touch and taste and grab and hold. By 3 months of age, your baby will recognize favorite toys, and will begin to reach for them. Pretty soon, toys with large parts that move or bend or make noise become fascinating. By 8 months, your baby is playing with toys in special ways: pulling, stacking, and pushing them back and forth with you. Before your baby is 1 year old, sorting toys with holes of different shapes, big single shape puzzles, and balls that roll away from you and come back are all a lot of fun. Soon, toys that look like real objects, like toy doctor kits, dishes, and plastic work tables, will let your baby copy the actions he sees in the world. Before long, as a toddler, she will be making up sequences of actions: building a house, taking care of a doll, cooking a meal, putting out a fire, or planting a garden. Later on, as children begin to play together, the language of play will be very important. Children tell each other what they are doing and what roles they will play in their creative world of pretending. Early in the development of play you will want to provide and encourage the language that will be needed later.

- When your baby can sit up, there is a world to see and sound to call attention to. When your baby shows interest in something she sees, talk about it. Suppose your baby looks up at you because she hears a sound. Maybe she can't tell yet what the sound is or where it is coming from. Tell her, "You hear that. That's the phone ringing. Let's go see who it is."
- When your baby can stand, hands are free and there are things to reach for. They all have names. Tell or sign the names for things that capture your baby's attention. Deaf mothers often bring the sign into the baby's visual space by signing right on the toy.
- When your baby can walk there are places to go and lots of language about getting there. Babies who start walking are interested in movement. Talk about what he is doing and where he is headed. You can also point out the uh-ohs for the spills he takes.

Your conversations will be about different topics, but the rules of the learning game stay the same. Make the language fit the play. Keep the conversation going. Don't hog all the turns. Have lots of fun.