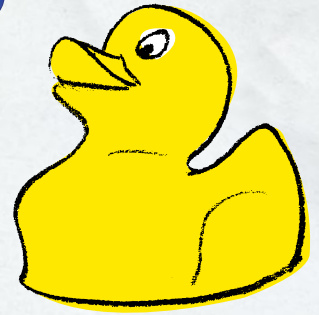


From birth through to adulthood, everyone enjoys playing. Play is an essential activity which takes place across the world, in all cultures and at all ages. This leaflet has been researched and produced to enable you to look at your child's development and choose toys, activities and games to suit their developmental play stage.



# Babies and Play

## What is play and why is it important?

Play provides your child with the opportunity to interact with others, both adults and children, at an appropriate level. This will help them acquire valuable social skills. Most importantly, play is fun, which is why children enjoy it so much. Playing allows children constantly to learn about themselves, their environment, and the people around them.

## Play in early childhood

From conception through to birth, your baby is developing both physically and mentally. This development continues after birth at a very rapid rate. The experiences your baby is exposed to enable the brain to create millions of nerve endings that will increase their learning power and enjoyment of life. Play is crucial to your infant's brain development and contributes to the development of motor skills, perception, attention, emotion regulation, gender roles and coping with stress.

In order to support the role of play, create a positive, safe and happy environment for your child to play in and learn from. Reward good behaviour with praise, reassure your child during play without taking over and allow your child to explore and create, even if it does create a mess!

## Ages and stages of play

Children differ enormously in their rate of growth and development, so toys should keep pace with children's changing needs and ability levels. As a parent, be sensitive to the interests, abilities and limitations of your children in deciding when they are ready for their first puzzle, book, bike or computer game. Here are some guidelines on the types of toys best suited for different stages of development.

## Babies and play: 0-12 months

The needs of your newborn baby are very different to those of older children. Babies take an interest in everything that appeals to their senses, which is why communication from the

earliest age is important. Your newborn baby will grow and develop rapidly throughout this first year. Even the simplest activities will be great fun for them. Through their enthusiasm, pleasure and excitement, it will start to be clear what your baby enjoys. As they grow older their communication skills will improve along with their eagerness to explore and be adventurous.

Young babies are naturally curious and require continual reassurance and encouragement. Over the months, encouraging babies to extend themselves without overstretching their abilities will improve their physical development, learning, confidence and sociability.

## Safety in play

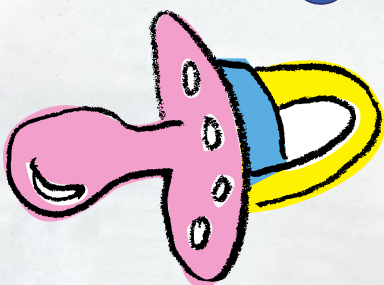
For play to be of benefit, children should have access to safe and secure environments along with your supervision and participation. All toys, games and objects provided should conform to recommended safety regulations.

It is very important to read and follow the instructions and warnings that accompany toys – no matter how simple the product might appear to be.

## Small parts

Little children can easily choke on small objects. Under-3s are especially at risk since they place everything into their mouths to explore the shape and texture. It is impossible to watch a child all the time. Even if you think your child has understood your warnings, a small toy can prove tempting. A safety message such as 'not suitable for children under 36 months because of small parts' therefore must be taken literally.

You will see the 0-3 picture on an increasing number of toys and toy packaging. This toy labelling indicates they are safe and suitable for children who are 3 years and older, but unsafe for younger children. The picture means: Warning – do not give the toy to children less than 3 years old, nor allow them to play with it.



# Babies and play

## FOR YOUR BABY AND YOU

It is important for parents to note that all babies develop at their own pace and this table is for guidance only.

### WHAT BABY CAN DO

#### Newborn

- Your baby can start learning to focus & communicate through their voice.
- Movement is attractive to babies, as they find it hard to concentrate on any one thing. Your baby will be listening & trying to see everything.

#### Older baby

- Babies begin to enjoy playing alone and alongside others.
- Your baby will begin to be able to control hand to eye coordination, and be able to hold a toy or try to shake it.
- At around 6 months, your baby will be able to sit and balance, use both hands to explore and will be able to drop objects, much to their delight.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

#### Newborn

- Always try to communicate to your baby whether it is through speaking, singing, touching or tickling.
- The more you communicate the better, as it all helps your baby learn and develop.
- Make the time to enjoy one-to-one play.

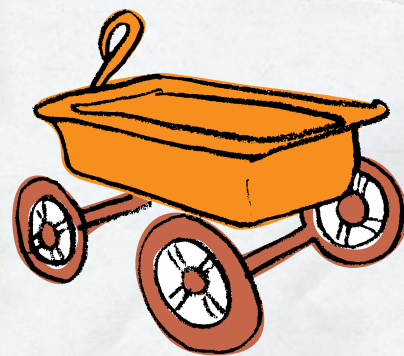
#### Older baby

- Give your baby plenty of time; they are still learning what they are capable of.
- Be sensitive to your baby's body language and expressions.
- Talk to your baby, explain what you are doing. Hearing a parent talk develops your baby's language skills.
- Don't spend too long on any one game or toy as babies tire easily.

### SUITABLE GAMES/ACTIVITIES

#### Newborn

- Peek-a-boo
- Sing lullabies or songs to your newborn.
- Talk to your baby frequently, even if you are just walking to the shops.
- Watch your baby try to copy you as you pull faces.
- Tickle your baby, as all babies love to be touched.
- Hold your baby while you dance to music.



#### Older baby

- Clapping, singing and dancing are all great stimulants for your baby.
- Start to encourage physical play.
- Be outside as often as possible as babies like to watch and hear new sights and sounds such as cars, dogs and trees.

### SUITABLE TOYS

#### Newborn

- An activity mat will allow your baby to explore colours, sound and touch.
- Mobiles in cots are a focal point for all young babies as they often are brightly coloured and have soothing music.
- Toys that make a noise or are brightly coloured such as rattles are a good starting point.
- Pram beads on a pushchair will attract their attention whilst you are busy pushing the buggy or shopping.
- Books with big, bright pictures to gaze at. Babies love faces as they start to be able to make out shapes & colours.

#### Older baby

- Small balls and cuddly toys can be introduced and used for gentle throwing or tickling.
- Babies like to explore everyday objects such as pots, pans and wooden spoons.
- Age-appropriate toys that can be put in the mouth as babies start to be able to coordinate picking a toy up and placing in the mouth.
- Toys such as rattles or squeaky animals that are easy to grasp and drop.
- Stacking rings that are large enough for your young baby to lift, move and play with.

#### For further information:

ATA, PO Box 74, North Melbourne VIC 3051

Also visit [www.austoy.com.au](http://www.austoy.com.au)

The ATA acknowledges the work of the National Toy Council (UK) in the development of these materials.

This leaflet is available for download from the Parents Section at [www.austoy.com.au](http://www.austoy.com.au)