



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.

## 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.

## Toddlers and play: 1-3 years

At this age toddlers will become more mobile, curious and energetic as they begin to gain greater control over their own bodies. This stage is an exciting time for children as they learn what is fun and what they are capable of doing. The speed of your baby's development is extremely rapid, so try to create new play opportunities as well as repeating past activities.

This repeating of play allows your toddler to develop in a familiar and emotionally secure environment.

Children who experience quality play and positive attention have a rich childhood and will benefit both intellectually and socially. Although most parents have busy lives, it is still very important to encourage, participate and explore play experiences with your child.

## 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.

## 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)

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## FOR YOUR TODDLER AND YOU

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

### WHAT TODDLERS CAN DO

#### 1-2 years

- Your toddler will be keen to manipulate and investigate objects.
- Your toddler will start to be mobile through crawling or walking.
- Some toddlers may be able to start using their coordination skills by helping to feed themselves and through early pretend play.

#### 2-3 years

- Your toddler's imagination is starting to develop so pretend play becomes more important.
- Your toddler may be walking and starting to try to talk, so communication is key to their play world.
- At this stage your toddler will begin to enjoy playing with their friends and siblings, as well as you.
- Toddlers will be more able to play with intricate objects as their concentration, ability and coordination become finely tuned.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

#### 1-2 years

- You can encourage dancing and singing as they become more mobile on their feet.
- If your toddler looks for help in play - such as helping them stack bricks - then be there to assist.
- Offer encouragement and praise when they complete new tasks or do something well.
- Try not to interfere or take over any of the games - your toddler has to learn for themselves.

#### 2-3 years

- Try to provide an environment where make believe play can be acted out with companions.
- Have patience when your toddler tries to learn new skills and attempts new tasks.
- Share your child's pleasure when a task is performed well, such as pouring a drink or threading an object onto some string.
- Try to stimulate your toddler's imagination and curiosity by providing interesting new challenges.

### SUITABLE GAMES/ACTIVITIES

#### 1-2 years

- Show your toddler how to imitate: they love copying you.
- Encourage a sense of humour by showing your toddler that they are funny when they try to make you laugh.

- The more you laugh the more inventive your toddler will be.
- If you buy suitable activity games make sure you set aside the time to explain the game and play along.
- Explore the feeling of water in the bath or at washing up time.

#### 2-3 years

- Outdoor play can be great fun for toddlers as they will be noticing the sights and sounds as well as what other children are doing.
- As your child becomes more coordinated you will be able to engage in more complex activities such as counting or memory games.
- Everyday tasks can be of great interest to a curious, helpful toddler.
- Engage your toddler's inquisitiveness by letting them help you run the bath, wash up, cook or sweep the floor.

### SUITABLE TOYS

#### 1-2 years

- Only buy toys that are suitable for your toddler's age & stage of development.
- Toddlers start to enjoy turning the pages of books so have suitable large print, colourful books to hand.
- Paints can be messy but a lot of fun for your toddler as can colouring on paper with thick crayons that are easy to grasp.
- Building blocks and shape sorters are of great interest to children of this age.
- Waterproof toys will be of great interest at bath time.

#### 2-3 years

- Imaginative play is very important at this stage of development. Try to provide some dressing up clothes to aid this pretend play.
- Balls are of interest to your toddler as they can be used for so many activities such as throwing, kicking and catching.
- Soft toys and dolls can be used for your toddler's imaginative play as well as offering a comfort when in the car or away from home.
- A paddling pool can be fun, as your toddler will love to sit splashing around, filling objects up and pouring the water over the side. (Never leave a toddler unattended in or near water).

