

Supporting Your Baby's Learning: Play in the First Year

Your baby is now ready to play! Play helps babies learn about their bodies, practice communicating and interact with their world. Play for babies is not just about toys. It is a whole-body, sensory and social experience. Caregivers are an important part of play and toys support the learning!

As a caregiver, you can support your baby's learning through play

- Rock your baby
- Go on walks with your baby
- Sing and talk to your baby
- Provide tummy time
- Cuddle your baby
- Sing or read to your baby
- Name body parts, objects and people
- Enjoy and have fun with your baby



Great toy ideas for babies

- Mirror (shatterproof)
- Mobile
- Rattle
- Board books
- Balls
- Stuffed toys
(parts cannot be swallowed)
- Cause-effect toys
(buttons, light, sound)
- Blocks
- Musical toys
- Cup and spoon
- Push-pull toys
- Teething toys

Children's Therapy

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Play ideas to get you started, arranged by age, through one year

0 – 2 months

- **Silly Faces:** Smile big at your baby, stick out your tongue, open your mouth, widen eyes while stating your baby's name or having a conversation
- **Copy Cat Voice:** Imitate your baby's noises back to them
- **Body Groove:** Move your baby's legs as if pedaling a bike or clap your baby's hands while looking, smiling, and talking to your baby
- **Take a Look:** Hang a mobile above the crib or hold up cards of black and white bullseye or target symbols for your baby to look at
- **Rattle and Shake:** Shake the rattle to encourage your baby to turn and look, move the rattle slowly 10 inches away from their face for your baby to attempt to visually track its movement
- **That's Me:** Hang a small mirror on the wall of the crib, tap mirror to encourage your baby to look

3 – 6 months

- **Mirror Fun:** Sit in front of a mirror with your baby, smile, laugh and touch the mirror
- **Making Music:** Place a rattle in your baby's hand for your baby to grasp and hold, bring to mouth, or shake
- **Playmat Playtime:** While supervising your baby, place them on their back or tummy to look and interact with visually-stimulating, suspended toys
- **Peek-A-Boo:** Hide your face with your hands or a blanket and then peek out to surprise your baby
- **Stuffed Animal Parties:** Line up stuffed toys around your baby and make them move, dance and talk—encourage your baby to reach and grab them
- **Let's Dance:** Play music or sing a song or lullaby while holding your baby and swaying

7 – 12 months

- **Container Construction:** Empty and fill empty containers with balls, beanbags or blocks
- **Rock Band:** Bang drums, shake shakers, ring bells, push xylophone or piano keys
- **Cause and Effect:** Push buttons on toys for lights, sounds and/or movement
- **Dance Party:** Play music and dance
- **Push Play:** Push cars and balls across space and crawl or walk to “chase” after it
- **Bubble Pop!** Blow bubbles toward your baby, catch a bubble on the wand and let your baby pop it



Online resources

For more information about early development, play, toys and games, check out the Children's Therapy website: valleymed.org/childrenstherapy.



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425.690.3513 valleymed.org/childrenstherapy

3600 Lind Avenue, SW, Renton, WA 98057