

# GET YOUR PLAY ON!



Play is an essential part of every childhood. It's the way children explore, create and discover. Through play, children learn about themselves and the world around them.

## WHY IS PLAY IMPORTANT?

Play is how children learn. Play supports children's social, emotional and intellectual development. Play provides your baby with the opportunity to engage and interact with others. Most importantly, play is fun. This is why babies and children love it so much! Toys are a vital part of play. Toys spark ideas and inspire babies and children to play and learn.

### PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

From conception through to birth and beyond, your baby is developing rapidly, both physically and mentally. Every experience your baby has fosters their brain development. Play contributes to the development of motor skills, problem solving, concentration, emotional regulation and coping with stress.

You can help by creating a positive, safe and happy environment for your child to play in. Play alongside your baby, you are their favourite playmate!

## AGES AND STAGES OF PLAY

Children differ enormously in their rate of growth and development. Toys to support play should be appropriate to children's changing needs. As a parent, pay attention to your baby's interests and abilities, you will know when they are ready for their first book, puzzle or bicycle.

### BABIES AND PLAY: 0-12 MONTHS

Babies enjoy play right from birth. The needs of your newborn baby are very different to those of older children. Newborn babies sleep for about 16 hours per day, so there are only small windows for play. Simple activities like listening to you read or sing, or taking a walk in the stroller, will be great fun for your baby. The best play for your baby will have you right by their side.

Young babies are naturally curious. Encourage your baby to play, but be patient as they develop new skills. In time you will see gains in your baby's physical development, confidence and sociability.



## A WORD ABOUT SAFETY

Babies need your constant supervision and participation while playing. Provide your baby with a safe environment, and stay with them at all times. 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.

Little children can easily choke on small objects. Under 3's are especially at risk as they tend to explore new things by placing them in their mouths. Even if you think your child has understood your warnings, a small toy can be tempting.



A safety message such as 'not suitable for children under 3 years' must be taken seriously. You will see the 0-3 symbol on toys and toy packaging. This means the toys are suitable for children 3 years and older, but not suitable for younger children. The symbol means 'Warning, do not give this toy to children under 3 years old, nor allow them to play with it'.

## WHAT YOUR BABY CAN DO

### NEWBORN

- Babies can recognise their parent's voices and communicate with their own voice.
- Babies can see movement and will be starting to try to focus their eyes on people and moving objects.

### OLDER BABY

- Older babies begin to enjoy playing on their own and alongside others.
- Babies will begin to develop hand-eye coordination and may try to grasp or shake objects or toys.
- At around 6 months, your baby may be able to sit and balance, and use their hands to explore and drop objects, much to their delight.

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## WHAT YOU CAN DO

### NEWBORN

- Your baby loves the familiar sound of your voice. Talk to your baby about what you are doing, sing to them or tell them a story.
- Make time to enjoy one-to-one play. This could be lying on the floor talking about a soft toy, building with some blocks, or reading a story together.

### OLDER BABY

- Your voice is still likely to be your baby's favourite sound. Talking, singing and reading stories are all great ways to connect with your baby.
- Be patient and give your baby plenty of time to play.
- Don't spend too long on any one game, babies get tired easily.

## SUITABLE ACTIVITIES

### NEWBORN

- Peek-a-boo.
- Sing songs or lullabies to your baby.
- Talk to your baby frequently, tell them what you are doing as you go about your day together.
- Make funny faces for your baby to watch – they may try to copy you.
- Hold your baby and dance to music.

### OLDER BABY

- Turn on some music and sing, dance and clap together.
- Roll a ball back and forth with your baby.
- Build a tower of soft blocks for your baby to knock over.
- Spend time outside so your baby can watch trees and birds and enjoy sounds such as cars and dogs.



## SUITABLE TOYS

### NEWBORN

- An activity mat to allow your baby to explore colours and textures.
- Mobiles above a cot or change mat (be sure to keep these well out of baby's reach).
- Toys that are brightly coloured or make interesting noises.
- Books with big bright pictures, shapes or faces for your baby to look at.

### OLDER BABY

- Cuddly toys or soft balls.
- Household objects like wooden spoons, mixing bowls, pots and pans.
- Toys that are suitable for teething and chewing – many babies will explore new things with their mouth.
- Stacking blocks or connecting rings that your baby can pick up, stack or join up and pull apart again.

## SUMMARY

- Babies have short attention spans and can only engage in play for short periods of time.
- Babies need supervision and adult support to safely enjoy play.
- You are your baby's favourite playmate.
- Remember all babies develop at their own pace.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

### Australian Toy Association

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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.

The full set of *Value of Play* leaflets are available for download at [www.valueofplay.com.au](http://www.valueofplay.com.au)



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