

# Play and toys for young children

PLAY  
IDEAS 4

ABOUT  
CHILD  
PLAY

3 - 5 years



Play promotes learning, development, growth and health. Movement skills, thinking skills, language, social interaction and emotional development all happen best when your child is actively involved in an activity - when they are having fun - when they are playing! As a parent you are their first teacher and best playmate. You can help choose toys and activities that motivate your child to play, explore and learn about themselves and their environment. But most importantly take time to play and learn with them.



## CHILD PLAY AND DEVELOPMENT



### Social and emotional

As children grow and mature, their ability to "sit still", concentrate on an activity and play with friends improves. They can enjoy simple table games (cards, board games) that have a few rules and require turn taking, memory and thinking skills. You will need to play with them to help them learn the game and settle disputes if they arise.



### Communication

Conversational skills improve as young children are able to listen to and tell long stories and begin to enjoy jokes. They are able to join complex ideas and sequence events, using words like "because; but; so; when; if; then". They love asking questions: Why? When? How? They can tell you their name, age and address.



### Physical skills

Young children have high energy levels. By age 5 they are able to run smoothly avoiding obstacles. They can stand and hop on each foot, can grip strongly with either hand, can climb, slide, swing and dance well. They can hold a pencil well in their preferred hand and their drawings are becoming more recognizable (people, houses). They are starting to use a knife and fork skilfully, and can manage large buttons and zips. Laces are tricky and this skill comes later.



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## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Be available!** Find frequent, small amounts of time each day to be available to your child. This usually occurs when they want to show you or tell you something. Get down to their level, show interest, be affectionate, and have fun together.

When buying toys, think about:

the toys your child already enjoys. Can you add something to them?

the different ways a toy can be used. Is it fun? Does it suit your child's special abilities, interests, and physical skills? Can other children join in the play?

safety and durability; consider your child's age, size and strength. Will the toy hold up to lots of use, some of it rough? Will it still be appealing over time?

Join a toy library. Toy libraries are a great source of new toys and games. Also consider swap meets/markets, op shops, garage sales and second-hand toy stores for less expensive toys.

Encourage pretend play and imagination. These skills can be developed while drawing, building, and during outdoor and indoor play. Children love to act out everyday events such as shopping, catching a bus, mums and dads. They also pretend to be characters they have heard of, such as a princess, pirate or superhero.

## SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

- Check toys regularly to make sure they are still safe, that they have no sharp or jagged edges and no loose small parts. Be aware of choking hazards, flammable and toxic materials. Remember that supervision is necessary if using real tools or scissors/knives.

## SOME ACTIVITIES TO TRY

**Art and Craft** Provide lots of paper and crayons for drawing, or set up a blackboard or paint easel. Try letting children draw on the path with chalk and then wash it off. Make a monster from old packets and egg cartons held together with tape, string and glue. Kids love hammering large headed nails into scraps of soft wood with a light-weight hammer.

**Playdough** This is always a favourite. Make your own. See the recipe sheet for ideas.

**Sand and water play** You can fill a bucket or old baby bath with sand or water for hours of fun. You can buy a bag of clean, white sand from gardening suppliers for around \$4.

**Theme play sets** can be used for pretend play. eg. put together some fences and animals for a farm or zoo; draw roads on an old box to make a map for racing cars/trucks or combine with a train set. You can set up a play shop with a cash register and shopping trolley or make some pretend tools to fix things around the house. Pretend cooking sets and tea sets are also fun.

**Outdoor active play** Let children build cubbies, or take them to the local park to play on the swings, slides, monkey bars and flying foxes, or practice riding scooters and bikes. Parks are also good for playing with bats and balls, flying kites, playing skittles, throwing frisbees. Set up an obstacle course with planks and old tyres. In summer teach your child to swim.

**Books/puzzles/table games** Read books together. Look out for books with rhymes and repetition; silly/funny stories; books introducing numbers and colours, and sticker books are also fun. Do jigsaw puzzles together, ones with 10-20 pieces are good. Play early board/card games together (picture lotto; dominoes; snap). Supervise play and be ready to settle disputes if young children are playing together.

**Music/tapes/CDs** A sturdy children's tape player is a good play investment.

**Dress-ups** Let your child go wild with your old clothes, bags, shoes, hats, and scarves.

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