The FUNdamental Powers of Play

What Can I Do for My Child?

For Babies to Toddlers (0-2 years)

- Hold, rock, and sing to young babies.
- Take them outside on nice days.
- Explain what you are doing throughout the day when you change or feed them.
- Let young babies lie on a big piece of paper and hear the crunching noise when they move.
- Play different kinds of music on the radio.
- Put bright toys near babies.
- Give them soft toys (like a stuffed animal or a clean sock) to hold and feel.
- Give babies toys they can move and make noise with (like a rattle).
- Hang big pictures of people and animals on the wall at their eye level to look at.
- Hang up toys you make yourself for babies to see and hear. For example, hang aluminum pie plates on a string. Let a breeze blow them, or move them with your hand.
- Have a clean space for babies to crawl. Put bright toys near babies so they can reach out or move toward them. Put a big cardboard box on the floor so the babies can crawl inside and play.
- Put some chair cushions on the floor. Babies can bounce and roll on them.
- Read aloud books that have colorful pictures.
- Have blankets and scarves for infants to hide under.
- Remember that infants put everything in their mouths. Wash toys, and be sure they
 cannot be swallowed.

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Miller, L. (1991). Play activities for children birth to nine years. Family Day Care Facts series. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts.

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What Can I Do for My Child?

For Toddlers (2–4 years)

- Toddlers like to put things inside of other things and dump them out. Cut a hole in the middle of the lid of a clean coffee can or plastic margarine tub. Let the toddlers put clothespins, thread spools, and big hair curlers through the hole.
- Make play dough. Mix 3 cups flour, 1 cup salt, 3 tablespoons oil, and 1 cup water together. Add food coloring for color. Let the toddlers use jar lids, clothespins, and popsicle sticks to cut and shape the play dough.
- Children love to play with water. Fill big buckets or tubs with water. Give the children soap chips, measuring spoons and cups, plastic bottles, butter tubs, and sponges to play with in the water. Put towels or newspaper on the floor so the children will not slip on the wet floor.
- Toddlers like goop. Mix cornstarch and water together. Let toddlers play with it in a bucket or in bowls with cups and spoons. Make the goop thick or thin.
- Ask your local appliance shop for a free, large cardboard box. Cut doors and windows in the box to make a playhouse. Toddlers can draw on it with crayons or "paint" it with water and big brushes or sponges.
- Toddlers like to draw with short, fat, unwrapped crayons. Give them paper bags (you can tear
 them open to make large sheets of brown paper) or large pieces of heavy paper to draw on.
 To help them draw, tape the paper down so it does not move.
- Let toddlers tear old wrapping paper. Then have them paste the pieces to make a collage.
- Have toddlers finger paint with shaving cream mixed with food coloring. They like this mess.
- Toddlers like to jump. Put pillows, cushions, or a mattress on the floor.
- Toddlers can use some swings and low slides at the playground.
- Most toddlers are just learning how to walk and run. Go for lots of walks.
- Let the toddlers practice climbing stairs with your help.
- Toddlers also like to play house with dolls and housekeeping props, such as plastic dishes and spoons.

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What Can I Do for My Child?

For Older Children (4-5 years)

- Preschool children like to jump, ride tricycles, play ball, use crayons, and do puzzles.
- When they play with water or sand, give them toys like eggbeaters, watering cans, squeeze bottles, and funnels.
- Make soap bubbles. Add 3/4 cup of liquid dish soap to two quarts of water. Have the children blow bubbles with small plastic containers that are open at both ends like frozen juice containers. They can also use straws or green plastic berry baskets. You can even let the children wash dishes.
- Poke holes in the bottoms of plastic margarine tubs. Have the children fill them with water and watch it dribble out.
- Let the children play with sand in buckets. Give them scoops, muffin tins, funnels, rolling pins, and salt shakers to use. Almost any containers and utensils are fun to play with in the sand.
- Preschoolers like to pretend. They learn how to share, and pretending helps their imaginations grow. Set up a corner of your room like an ice cream store. You will need a table, clean ice cream containers, ice cream scoops, and cones made from paper. To make a pretend beach, you will need bathing suits, towels, sunglasses, a radio, and beach toys. To make a supermarket, gather empty food boxes and containers, play money, and shopping carts. You can also get ideas from the children for pretend playing.
- Hygiene routines (washing hands and brushing teeth) should be a regular part of each day.
- Preschoolers like to make things with blocks and Legos. Check to make sure that any wood they use is smooth and free of splinters.

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