

**10 to 18 months**

Your baby talks with gestures, looks, sounds and a few words. She is always on the go. Here are some ideas for playing with your 10 - 18 month old:

- Try games like hide-and-seek that help her to know that you are close by even when she cannot see you.
- Use her favorite toys to create playful problems that she needs your help to solve. For example, place her toy just a little out of reach and say, "Oh, how are you going to get your teddy bear?" Wait until she figures out what to do. Be careful not to tease her. When she gets frustrated, give her clues or help her so that she can solve the problem.
  - Ask her to repeat single words and simple sentences in books you read to her.
  - Provide lots of safe opportunities for crawling, climbing, walking and running – indoors and outdoors.

**18 to 36 months:**

Follow your child's lead when you play. Keep looking for ways that allow him to make simple choices and solve problems. Speak to him a lot and often.

- Continue to give plenty of safe chances for walking, running and climbing. Watch him closely, but let him go!
- Lay out two or three choices of clothing. Make a guessing game about what colors match. Encourage him to help with his own dressing.
- Let him help you make simple foods.
- Did you know that your child will have more fun creating art if you draw, paint, cut and squeeze play dough along with him?



BE PLAYFUL WITH YOUR CHILD

This brochure is the fourth in an eight-part series on fun and learning with your baby or toddler:

1. Care for Yourself
2. Cuddle, Talk, and Read with Your Child
3. How Your Child Develops
4. Be Playful with Your Child
5. Show Your Child the World
6. Teach Self Control
7. Practice Health and Safety
8. Healthy Eating

"Keys to Great Caregiving" has been adapted for use in Connecticut from "Keys To Great Parenting", University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

To request Keys brochures call 203-207-3267 or visit: [www.thekeys.uconn.edu](http://www.thekeys.uconn.edu)



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University of Connecticut

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Connecticut Department of Social Services,  
Danbury Children First, Inc., EDUCATION CONNECTION,  
New Haven School Readiness Council

## BE PLAYFUL WITH YOUR CHILD

Babies and toddlers love to play with their parents. They also have a wonderful time with other family members, caregivers and friends. Infants show they are eager to play through kicks, squirms, coos, bright eyes, and wide smiles. Toddlers may tug at your pant leg or sleeve to urge you to pay attention.

Even if you have had a long day and are tired, it is hard to resist a child's invitation. Your child's brain grows and works best when she is having fun with people who care about her. Parents and other family members are her most important playmates and teachers.

Play is not only fun, it is how your child learns. It does not have to cost a lot of money. This brochure provides ideas for playing and learning.

Make time for active and quiet play. Young children learn through play. When they use their 5 senses (hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, smelling), they learn all kinds of new things!

Because a baby's brain is growing huge numbers of cells and connecting them in order to learn, her waking mind is very active. Two-year-olds generally have as many brain cell connections as adults. By the third birthday, the typical child has about 1,000 trillion brain connections – 2 1/2 times more than adults.

When you play with your baby, give him your full attention. This is **his** time! Look into his eyes, talk softly and smile. Do not tell him how to play. Instead, offer him interesting playthings and watch how he reacts. Laugh, hug and enjoy yourself!

Babies and toddlers usually have lots of energy and they are learning all of the time.

*Notice your child's signals about when she has had enough activity. Young children need to calm down and rest, mentally and physically.*



## Ages and Play

### Birth to 3 months:

Your baby's brain is working a lot. It is working to control body movements and learn new information. It regulates the body's functions. He needs plenty of calmness, soothing touches and sounds. Give him the experiences he likes as often as you can.

- Talk and sing to him.
- Smile often as you speak to, diaper and feed him.
- Move his arms and legs gently and calmly in a rhythmic motion as you change him.
- Hold him in an upright position. Walk with him around the house or yard. Talk with him about what you see, hear, taste, touch and smell.

### 3 to 6 months:

Notice what activities your baby likes and repeat them. Smile at her, imitate her gurgles and sounds. Use touch and movement. Try these ideas:

- Gently rock or "dance" with her while you sing a nursery rhyme or a simple song.
- Blow gently on her skin, move her arms and legs in new ways, cuddle her feet.
- Place her in warm bath water. Give her gentle splashes. **Be sure to watch her at all times. Babies can drown in one inch of water.**
- Place her on the floor with her tummy down. Get on the floor so she can see you well. Play, talk or sing with her. Praise her, first when she lifts her head and later when she lifts her chest by propping herself up with her arms. She is gaining important muscle strength and coordination that only happens during "tummy time".

### 6 to 10 months:

Your baby is starting to make things happen. Put him on your lap and read to him often. Your baby is still learning through his 5 senses. Toys will go in his mouth. Simple toys like the following are good choices:

- Medium-size, colorful, lightweight balls
- Large plastic rings and rattles for easy grasping and shaking
- Soft, washable stuffed toys (without buttons or other objects that can be pulled off and placed in the mouth)
- Simple, washable books
- **Do not give your child toys or items that could cause choking.**