



# Welcome Words ON PLAY

## PLAYING WITH YOUR BABY

It's through play that a baby learns. Your infant is playing when she uses her senses to explore the world around her. She tastes, smells, touches, watches and hears everything in which she comes into contact.

As Dr. Miriam Stoppard puts it in her book, *Complete Baby and Child Care Guide*, "Learning to think... results from observing and interacting with the world."

Babies vary in the amount of stimulation they like, and no baby needs constant stimulation. Watch your baby for cues that she's had enough playtime or conversation: she may look away or become fussy.

While the most important thing you can do to help your baby learn is give her a safe and loving environment, there are some specific activities you may want to try.

- Call softly to her from behind when she's on her back or tummy, so she looks for you.
- If you're not sure how to talk to your baby, try doing a running commentary: "Now it's time for a diaper change, and then we're going to have lunch." You can also ask her questions, even though you don't expect an answer. "Isn't it a beautiful day?" or "What should we have for dinner tonight?" After a thoughtful pause, chime in with an answer, "Let's have chicken and rice."
- It's not too soon to read aloud to her, even though the words have no meaning yet. She'll enjoy the rhythm of nursery rhymes and simple stories, as well as looking at the pictures.
- To give her a changing view of her world, put a safe metal mirror in her crib or play area.
- Place a mobile between 12 to 15 inches above her face, and to one side, rather than directly above her.
- Tasting, or putting things to her mouth (such as her hands), is one of her primary ways of exploring her world, and will continue to be, for many months to come. Resist the temptation to discourage this behavior. However, it's not too early to get in the habit of moving an object that's small enough to cause choking out of reach.
- Let her feel different textures. Put her down on the carpet, a terry towel, a cotton quilt, a wool blanket, and other clean, safe surfaces. Gently touch her palm with toys that are smooth and firm, such as a rattle, or a soft and furry stuffed toy.
- Change her position often during the day — let her lie on her back and her stomach, sit with support, or hold her high on your shoulder. These activities not only gives her different world views, but encourage the use of different muscles.
- Remember, babies develop at different rates. Your baby will have her own timetable. Meanwhile, the important thing is to take time to be playful with her. You'll both enjoy the exchange.

**Hello New Parent!** We hope you will think of Welcome Baby Family Resource Center as your partner in parenting as you meet the wonder and challenges ahead. During the next twelve months, you will receive an edition of Welcome Words covering 6 special topics and including other resources you may find helpful. In addition to Welcome Words, Welcome Baby offers other services and classes that are described in our quarterly newsletter and website:

**www.welcomebaby.org.** You are also invited to call us at 919-560-7341 if you have questions or concerns. Welcome Baby is a program of Durham County and Durham County Cooperative Extension. We receive support from Durham's Partnership for Children - a Smart Start Initiative and NCHHS-Department of Community Programs.

## GAMES WITH BABY

Simple games can be fun for both you and your baby. Enjoying them together will help her feel safe, secure and loved, as well as support her mental development.

### Who's There?

Position a mirror so that you're sure she can see herself. Point at her reflection and say her name. Use her name frequently.

### Peek-a-boo

Hide your face in your hands or with a towel, then peek out, saying "Peek-a-boo!"

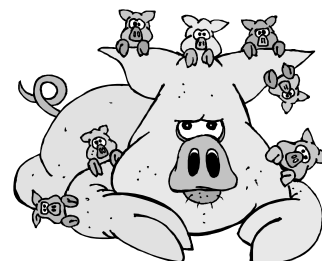
### Rhyming

Recite nursery rhymes as you use two fingers to "walk" from baby's feet to neck and then neck to feet. A good rhyme is "Hickory Dickory Dock."

### Little Piggies

Use this old favorite as you gently wriggle each of baby's toes or fingers. "This little pig went to market; this little pig stayed home; this little pig had roast beef; this little pig had none; and this little pig cried, wee, wee, wee, all the way home." In China, the toes are cows: "This little cow eats grass; this cow eats hay; this cow drinks water; this cow runs away;

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## PLAY TIME IS LEARNING TIME

Your baby is at a wonderful age to enjoy games that combine words with actions. Here are some suggestions for play time, but remember: if your baby looks away, she's probably lost interest. She's giving you a signal that she's had enough of the game and is ready for a break.

**Naming:** You can help your baby begin learning the names for animals and machines. When you see a cat for instance, say, "The cat says 'meow'." Picture books are a good way to extend this naming game to things that you don't often see, such as horse, cow, car, plane, train or fire truck.

You'll also want to be sure you name the items that you give your child so she begins to associate the word with the object, such as "ball" and "block." And don't forget to describe actions as well: "The dog is barking" or "That girl is swinging."

**Making Sounds:** When you hear your baby repeat a sound such as "da" or "la," tell her, "Yes, you're talking," and repeat the sound for her by saying, "la la la." Give her a chance to say it back to you. Encourage one sound at a time. Sounds you're likely to hear are "da," "la," "ma," "bi" and "me." Changing the pitch and tempo of the sounds will keep your baby interested in this game longer.

**Rhythm Games:** Continue all the rhyming games you've played such as "Pat-a-Cake" and "Hickory Dickory Dock." Try adding "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe" as you help get your baby dressed. If you are consistent, your baby will soon begin to associate certain rhymes with routines such as bathing, dressing, eating and naptime/bedtime.

**Problem-Solving:** Hide a small stuffed toy so that it can be partially seen in your pocket. Ask your baby to find it. Hide something in a large paper bag or box with a lid and show her how to make it appear or disappear by closing the lid or bag. Show her how to place one block or small box on top of another for a small tower.

**Cruising:** Move several chairs close together so that your baby can practice cruising by using them for support. Put a small toy on each chair to encourage her to reach for it.

**Which Hand?** Show your baby a small, but safe item (a block or keys on a chain), that will fit in one of your hands. Put your hands together and shake them, saying, "Shake it up, shake it up, shake it up now; shake it up, shake it up, shake it up and how!" Hide the item in one fist and then hold both fists out to baby, asking, "Which hand?"

Exclaim "Yes, you found it!" when she discovers the correct hand. Babies (and older children) will play this game endlessly, and it's a quick diversion while waiting in a grocery store checkout line or doctor's office

## PLAYTHINGS FOR BABIES: HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

With so many baby toys now on the market, it's hard to know what's best. How much is enough? And what about homemade toys?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following for a 4- to 7-month-old baby:

- unbreakable mirror attached to inside of crib or playpen
- soft balls and textured toys, including some that make pleasing sounds (avoid loud noises that could damage baby's hearing).
- toys with fingerholds
- see-through rattles that show the pieces making noise
- musical toys, such as bells or maracas (make sure none of the parts can come loose)
- old magazines with bright pictures you can show him and baby books with board, cloth or vinyl pages.



When choosing toys, be sure they are sturdy and larger than your baby's fist (anything smaller could cause choking). Make sure there are no strings, ribbons or cords longer than 6-inches, which could cause strangulation. Toys that can be washed are best, particularly since your baby will be mouthing them. There are also a number of simple playthings you can make. Here's a simple suggestion from [Learning Games for the First Three Years](#).

**Discovery Box:** Take a sturdy cardboard box and cut a small hole in the top and a larger hole in the side. With your baby sitting on the floor in front of the box, show him how to drop a small object (a rattle or small stuffed toy) into the small hole. Ask, "Where's the toy? Can you find it?" If he tries to reach through the small hole, turn the box on its side so he can see the toy and take it out. You can continue the game with other small toys. Your baby may begin turning the box himself, or, once he's able, he may crawl around to find the larger opening.



**Don't be surprised if your baby wants to play this game until you're exhausted!**