



Playing Together

The magical thing about play is that it's not only fun, it's how children learn. Through play they discover how the world works, how to make things happen, and how good it feels to interact with others.

If your baby could talk:

There's no one I'd rather play with than you! I like you better than any of my toys. That's why I beam at you, and squeal with delight when I see you come near! I can already show you when I like something and "tell" you with my expressions and gestures, "Peek-a-boo . . . one more time please!" When I shake a rattle and it makes a noise, I learn that I can make things happen. I love to get my hands on things and use my mouth to explore them. When you hold toys for me and cheer me on as I reach out and grasp something, I'm thrilled, because I'm learning that I can make my body work to get what I want. You're a great partner.

What your baby is learning:

When you play with your baby, you're letting him know that he's fun to be with and that he's important. This builds his self-esteem. And the joy of having fun with you helps him develop positive relationships as he grows.

You are your baby's first and most important teacher. You help him become the master of his world. Offering him objects with different appearances, sounds and textures will help him learn many important skills and concepts. When your baby uses his facial expressions and gestures to entice you to play peek-a-boo, for example, he is learning about cause and effect and boosting his confidence that he can make things happen. The same goes for shaking a rattle: "I move my arm, this toy makes a noise. Mmmm, let's try that again!" As you share the pleasure of play, your baby's curiosity and interest in taking on new challenges will grow.

What you can do:

- Coach your baby as he works to master a skill such as reaching for a toy. Bring an object closer until he can get it on his own. Doing it himself builds his self-confidence.
- Play lots of back-and-forth games. For example, bat the toy he just swung at. These interactions form the foundation of later communication skills and are his first lessons about taking turns.

Reading your baby's cues

	What to expect	What you can do
<i>I'm in Control</i>	Your baby has greater control over her body. She may be able to roll both ways, become better at reaching and grasping, and will begin to sit with assistance. She will also be able to use both hands to explore.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place your baby in different positions--on her back, stomach and sitting with support. Each gives a different perspective on the world and a chance to develop different skills such as rolling, creeping and crawling, and using both hands while sitting. • Play reaching and grasping games. Hold enticing toys just within her reach and encourage her to grab them
<i>I can do it!</i>	Your baby learns how things work and that he can make things happen. He uses his new motor skills to pick up and explore objects in new ways. He will watch you to learn what to do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give him a variety of toys with different textures, shapes, weights and functions. Join in his exploration of them. • Show him different ways to use things: switching objects from one hand to another, shaking, banging, pushing and dropping
<i>What's next?</i>	Your baby loves to anticipate what will happen next. She will look to you with excitement, letting you know she wants to do it again. It gives her a sense of control when she knows what to expect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak to her while getting ready to feed her, whether it's by breast or bottle. This lets her know comfort is near and helps her learn to wait. • Play peek-a-boo; pause briefly after you've "disappeared" to give her time to think about what will happen next. • Establish routines. As much as possible, keep everyday routines in the same sequence; for example: dinner, bath, stories, lullabies, sleep.
<i>All by myself</i>	Your baby will want to explore his food and help feed himself. Touching and tasting different foods is an important part of his learning. Feeding himself builds his self-confidence..	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place your baby in different positions--on her back, stomach and sitting with support. Each gives a different perspective on the world and a chance to develop different skills such as rolling, creeping and crawling, and using both hands while sitting. • Play reaching and grasping games. Hold enticing toys just within her reach and encourage her to grab them.

<i>It's all in the mouth</i>	At 4 months, your baby is eager to explore every aspect of the world around him. He learns through his senses. Mouthing objects is just another way to "know" an object. It often has less to do with hunger or teething.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make certain that any object your baby gets his hands on is clean and safe for mouthing. That means it must be big enough not to fit entirely into his mouth, and smooth enough not to scratch or irritate. • Offer toys with lots of variation in shape and texture. Bumpy, smooth, round and square are all distinctions that can be made by mouth.
<i>Hand it over</i>	Four-month-olds still aren't using their thumb to grasp things; and, as they shift from two-handed to one-handed play, they will hold things by pressing their fingers against their palms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer your baby toys that are easily grasped, with lots of handles. And make sure they're light enough in weight for your baby to hang on to and big enough not to fit into her mouth. • Keep in mind that while your baby can hold onto a toy and even reach for it, she can't yet purposefully open up her hand and let it go. When a 4-month-old drops a toy, it isn't because she meant to drop it!
<i>I'm a person</i>	By 4 months you have a good idea of how your baby is different or similar to other babies his age. During the next few months he will become very good at letting you know his likes and dislikes, as well as his interests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When your baby turns away, arches his back, or starts to cry during play or at other times, don't take it personally; it may be his way of saying that he needs a break from this intense interaction. It might be the perfect time for a refreshing pause, like holding him close and singing a soothing melody. • Think about your baby's personality. Does he like noisy environments or prefer quiet? Is he a jump-right-in kid, or a let-me-wait-and-see kid? There is no single right way to be. You just need to understand and respect who he is.

Excerpted from "The Magic of Everyday Moments" by Zero to Three and the Johnson & Johnson Pediatric Institute; <http://www.zerotothree.org/magic/index.html>