



# Toys and Games for Babies & Toddlers

Janelle Durham, MSW, LCCE. [TransitionToParenthood.com](http://TransitionToParenthood.com), [GoodDaysWithBabies.wordpress.com](http://GoodDaysWithBabies.wordpress.com), [GoodDaysWithKids.com](http://GoodDaysWithKids.com)

Despite the millions of dollars spent on advertising to convince you otherwise, there are no specific toys or 'scientifically designed' educational products that are "must-have" items for babies and children!

What children really "must have" is: time and opportunity to play, caregivers who value the role of play and take the time to play with them, and a variety of play experiences.

Play time offers our children the chance to explore their world, to figure out how their bodies work, to learn how to use tools to accomplish cool things, to practice interacting with others, to learn the value of trial and error, to learn how to make decisions, to learn about cause and effect and the consequences of their actions. Babies benefit by having a variety of activities to stimulate different kinds of skills and brain development. There is an educational theory about the different kinds of intelligence that we all have, in varying degrees. We used this concept as a starting point for the discussion below. If your child only has 10 toys, it's great if they have one toy from each of these categories! When you play games with your child, try to think of different activities that help to build each of these areas. All the toy suggestions below are for babies under two years, but the categories are useful to keep in mind throughout your child's life.

## Word Play (Linguistic or Verbal Intelligence)

**Toys and Stuff** — Books, Books, and More Books! Story tapes. Alphabet toys. Alphabet blocks.

**Activities** — Read to your baby. Kids' books are great for rhythm & rhymes, but it's fine to read aloud whatever you want to read (NY Times or Sports Illustrated!). Let kids see you reading — often. Go to the library regularly, and get excited about the books you find. Talk to your baby. Label things for him: when he reaches for a ball, say "that's a ball." When she notices a bird flying by, say "see the bird." Expose him to other languages.

## Doing the Numbers (Logical — Mathematical Intelligence)

**Toys and Stuff** — Anything you can count! Anything you can compare. Anything you can sort.

**Activities** — Count out loud. Count how many seconds to change a diaper, how many steps from the kitchen to family room, how many toys are on the floor, etc. Compare amounts of things: there's more things in that pile, there's three dogs over there, here's a few cheerios, this spoon is bigger than that spoon, in five minutes we will put our shoes on. Talk about what order you have to do tasks in: first, we do this, next we do that.

## Putting the Pieces Together (Spatial Intelligence)

**Toys and Stuff** — Nesting cups (measuring cups, mixing bowl sets, and plastic containers are great for this), puzzles, toys that can be taken apart and put back together, shape sorters, duplos and other building toys, blocks to stack (or cans of food, or books, or any items you can stack and balance in a pile).

**Activities** — Putting things in and taking things out. (Plastic dishes in the drawer, paper in the recycling bin, toys in the toy box, clothespins in a jar, etc.) Putting lids on and taking them off. Opening and closing doors.

## Moving and Grooving (Bodily – Kinesthetic Intelligence)

**Toys and Stuff** – Balls! Things to climb on (stairs, couches, playgrounds... always ensuring safety, of course, but also encouraging physical exploration). Swings. Things to step over (broom handle), go under (coffee table), climb into (cardboard box), or go around (anything that's blocking their path!) Jumpers, exersaucers.

**Activities** – Swinging baby side to side, helping baby pull up to stand, moving baby's arms and legs around, "wrestling" with baby, lifting baby up and down, playing together in a swimming pool, holding things where baby can reach toward them. Tummy time for babies.

## Playing Well With Others (Interpersonal Intelligence)

**Toys and Stuff** – Dolls, stuffed animals, toy animals – anything that allows baby to act out interactions and relationships, practice connecting with others, and play different roles.

**Activities** – Interaction! Lots of time with attentive adults – sometimes adults should take the lead and guide the activities, sometimes the adult should let baby lead and follow what she wants to do, sometimes you take turns. Practice saying please, thank you, as well as other manners and sharing (it will be years before they really get this idea!!). Lots of supervised playtime with peers and older kids. Peek-a-Boo!

## Learning about Myself and How I Feel (Intrapersonal Intelligence)

Intrapersonal intelligence is not about toys or about specific activities. It's about giving your child some downtime and quiet time to reflect on things, play on their own, learn to entertain themselves, and learn to problem solve on their own. Intrapersonal intelligence is about learning emotional intelligence: being able to understand and label the feelings he is having. Help give baby words for how he feels. Also, share words for how you're feeling: "I'm sad because... I was scared when..." For more on this, see the book *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* by John Gottman, or *Parent Effectiveness Training* by Thomas Gordon, which encourages parents to learn skills that encourage their children's personal growth and healthy parent-child relationships.

## Song and Dance Routines (Musical Intelligence)

**Toys and Stuff** – Musical instruments – rattles, drums to bang on, jingle bells you can fasten on them, tapes and cds of all kinds of music. Pots and pans to bang on with a metal spoon. Containers of food that baby can shake to make noise. Keys that jingle. Toys that play music.

**Activities** – Sing to your baby!!!! (It doesn't matter if you don't sing well, it doesn't matter if you forget the words, it doesn't matter whether you sing kids' songs or commercial jingles.) Dance with baby in your arms. Help him move his arms and legs to music. Musical rhythms help children develop mathematical intelligence. Singing familiar songs helps teach cause and effect: she learns to recognize when "mommy sings 'Ring Around the Rosie' we always go round in circles. When she says „ashes, ashes, we're going to pretend to fall down...."

## Fun with Flora and Fauna (Naturalistic Intelligence)

**Toys and Stuff** – Sandboxes, shovels, backyards, pets. Natural materials to play with: rocks, shells, balls made of wool felt, working with real food (holding the carrot you're getting ready to peel). Water. Mud! Snow.

**Activities** – Trips to the park, the beach, the zoo, going for walks, noticing the birds in the parking lot, pointing out slugs on the sidewalk, looking out the window at the moon, talking about the weather, going camping. Going to a farm. Shopping for fruits and veggies together. Letting your child get wet and dirty!

## Expanding Their Horizons (Magic / Imagination / Religion / Cultures)

**Toys and Stuff** — Dress-up clothes. Puppets (made from paper bags and old socks). Story books about worlds that are different than theirs. Stories and movies about people who are different than the people they know.

**Activities** — Make observations about similarities and differences. Play imagination games. Make up puppet shows. Go to library story times that focus on diversity, go to plays, concerts in the park. Traditions and rituals. Prayers at bedtime. Talk about ways of understanding the world: where we come from, what our purpose is.

## All the Pretty Colors (Artistic Skills and Appreciation)

**Toys and Stuff** - Finger-painting, scribbling with crayons or markers, painting with bingo-dot-markers, colored soap to paint with in the bathtub. Ziplock bags full of pudding to squish back and forth. Shakers: fill a water bottle with water, vegetable oil, food coloring and sparkles; glue the lid on, and let baby shake and admire.

**Activities** — Blowing bubbles for baby to see. Cut pictures out of magazines and catalogs to tape up next to the changing table. Talk about colors. Show her pretty things. Paint pictures for her and doodle on napkins. Let your child see you creating art yourself (not just helping her create her art). This will show her how important art is!

*Enjoy trying out all these different types of fun and games with your child!*

*This document is property of PEPS and is considered Proprietary. Please do not share it outside of the PEPS experience.*

Since 1983, PEPS has been connecting families in parent peer-support groups and now offers programs for expectant, parents of newborns, infants, or adolescents and teens, plus affinity groups for families sharing identities that intersect with their identity as a parent. With PEPS, parents create strong, healthy families with concrete support, social connections and parenting resources. PEPS is a 501(C)(3) nonprofit organization.

[www.peps.org](http://www.peps.org)

