

## **Infant Play**

Children need few toys during babyhood. Parents' ample love and attention is far more critical for infants' healthy development and well being. In fact, newborns are more captivated by human faces than by inanimate playthings, and infants continue to prefer people to toys. Being gently and playfully cuddled, touched, and talked to contribute to children's earliest impressions that the world is wonderful and safe and can be explored without fear.

Infants need extremely close, almost constant, supervision. They are engaged in the vigorous process of self-discovery, and are becoming acquainted with their new world by looking, listening, chewing, smelling, and grasping. Most of their learning comes through play. Thus, they require safe toys that appeal to all of their senses and stimulate their interest and curiosity.

Babies have extremely short attention spans, so simple, repetitive play and sensitive, appropriate responses from you are best. Play only while your infant seems to enjoy it. Look to your baby for clues for changing a game. For example, if your baby begins to look bored after mastering a game of batting at a dangling toy, vary the play by moving the toy farther away or off to one side.

Your infant needs to feel some control over the new environment. Play experiences that encourage your child to make things happen lead to a solid base of confidence and trust. Your baby learns what to expect when he or she drops a ball or squeezes a squeak toy. Your little one also delights in causing you to do something over and over like picking up a toy that has been dropped again--and again.

By the end of your child's first birthday, a strong preference will probably develop for some toys over others.

### **Teaching Independent Play Skills**

- Look for times when your infant is playing quietly by herself.
- Try to find an activity that you can do while you are also providing your infant with brief, physical contact. For example, you might read the paper or a magazine or do paper work from the office.
- Over time, perhaps 2 to 4 weeks gradually begin to touch your infant less often during your activities. The changes in frequency should be very small so that your infant never notices them. Do not stop the touching. Just decrease it to more normal levels.

### **Toys**

Toys need not be expensive or complex. Simple toys can just as easily entertain a child and help her develop new skills and learn more about her world.

Toys given to an infant should be appropriate to her age. They should neither frustrate the child because they are difficult nor bore her by being too simple. Often the same toy can be used at different age levels and in different ways to stimulate a variety of senses. Simple toys are the best--they allow for creativity and develop imagination.

Children don't distinguish between expensive commercial toys and simple items you make at home.

## **Suggested Play Materials**

- Interesting objects hung in view:
  - Brightly colored mobile
  - Crib decals
  - Colorful wall posters
- Sturdy rattle
- Large plastic rings
- Soft toys for throwing
- Colorful balls
- Light plastic blocks
- Cloth cubes
- Music box to listen to
- Teething toys
- Floating bath animals
- Washable squeak toys
- Washable, unbreakable doll
- Washable cuddly toy
- Nests of hollow blocks or cups
- Books:
  - Rough-smooth touching books
  - Washable cloth picture books
  - Sturdy, colorful picture books

## **Safety**

**SAFETY:** Remember that your infant will poke, pull, twist, bang and suck on every toy you give her. Will the toy survive the test? What happens if it comes apart--will there be pieces your baby could swallow or choke on?

- The toy is sanitary
- The toy is washable.
- The toy is not too heavy for your child's strength.
- The toy is well constructed. (A poorly made toy can break or come apart, easily exposing hazards like wires or springs.)
- The toy does not have sharp edges that can cut or scratch.
- There are no small parts or decorations that can become loose and swallowed, inhaled, or stuffed into an ear. (Examples include the eyes on a stuffed animal or the squeaker in a squeak toy.)
- The toy itself is big enough so it cannot be put into your child's nose, mouth, or ears. (Marbles and beads are examples of toys that are too small.)
- All of the toy, including print and decoration, is nonpoisonous.
- The inside of the toy is not filled with a potentially harmful substance like small pellets.
- Old baby furniture and toys have not been painted or repainted with lead-base paint.
- There are no slots or holes that can pinch your child's fingers.
- A plastic toy cannot break thus easily exposing a sharp, jagged edge.
- There are no pointed objects your child can fall on.
- No part of the toy, such as a doll's hairbow, is attached with a straight pin or staple.
- All moving parts are securely attached.

- No string or cord on the toy is long enough (longer than 12 inches) to form a noose.
- A broken toy is repaired or thrown away.
- The toy is not stored in a plastic bag.
- The windup mechanism in a mechanical toy is enclosed to avoid catching hair, fingers, and clothing.
- A stuffed doll or animal is made with strong material and thread and not filled with small, loose pellets.
- Toys made with cloth carry the labels “flame resistant”, “flame retardant”, or nonflammable”.