



Toddler play: 18 months to 3 years

You are your toddler's first teacher and playmate.

The first years of life are the most important time for your child's brain development.

Toddlers learn best when they are actively involved and having fun with you during everyday activities, so spend time each day playing, learning and having fun with your toddler.

Play is important for your toddler's learning, development, growth and health. Through play, toddlers learn skills like moving, thinking, speaking, socialising, and how to manage emotions.

When it comes to play, toddlers:

- **like playing with 'things'** – push and pull along toys, blocks, hammering, sit and ride toys, early puzzles, putting objects in and out of containers, sand and water
- **enjoy talking about play** – 'all gone', 'more cars', 'big ball'
- **need lots of active play** – climbing, jumping and tumbling
- are **still learning how to share**
- may start to play further away from you, but **still like to be able to see you**
- **love to do everything themselves** – 'me do it!' There will be fewer tantrums if you let them have a go and praise their effort.

What you can do

- **Be available** – find frequent, small amounts of time each day to do fun things together. Be on hand to settle disputes if several toddlers are playing together.
- **Let your toddler make choices** about how to play. Get down to their level, show interest and be positive.
- **Allow time for lots of repetition** and don't rush your toddler.
- **Screen time** – toddlers learn best through doing things with you. For children 2 to 5 years, it is recommended that screen time is limited to less than 1 hour per day. Make the most of playtime – turn off all screens including phones, TVs and computers.
- **Join a playgroup**
Phone: 1800 171 882
Website: www.playgroupwa.com.au
- **Join a toy library**
Phone: 0417 884 687
Website: www.toylibrary.asn.au

Some activities to try

- **Be playful** – you are your toddler's best play thing! Blow raspberries on their tummy, let them climb over you, play peek-a-boo, roll and jump on the grass, look for bugs, let them brush your hair, sing songs and look at picture books together.
- **Include play in everyday activities** – while changing nappies, driving, hanging out the washing, and during mealtime and bath time.



- **Pretend play and dress-ups** – show your toddler how to play with dolls, teddies, tea sets, a toy telephone, cars and trains, farm and zoo animals, and dress ups.
- **Get outdoors and active** – simple outdoor activity is ideal for toddlers. Let your toddler have fun on swings, slides and climbing frames. A soft ball is great to practise catching, throwing and kicking.

Homemade toys for toddlers

Homemade toys are fun, easy to make, cheap, and help to develop your child's creativity. Make toys together – involve your toddler in recycling boxes and containers.

- **Teddy/dolly carry basket** – decorate a box, add some handles through holes inside of the box and use a tea towel to make a bed.
- **Car/bus/fire-engine** – use a strong box large enough for your toddler to sit in. Add some wheels, controls and a steering wheel, using lids and paper plates. Decorate together.
- **Toy stove** – draw or glue hot plates on top of a box – use paper plates. Cut a large flap in one side for an oven door. Attach bottle tops as knobs and make a handle with a short loop of string or shoelace.
- **Posting box** – take an ice-cream container or shoebox and cut the lid to make holes to 'post' different objects like pegs, blocks, and cards.
- **Books** – glue pictures, cards or photos on paper with your toddler, and put inside

plastic sleeves to make a book. Some ideas are 'me and my family', 'favourite things', 'cars and trucks', 'big and little', 'animals'.

- **Threading** – Try stringing pasta, cut up straws, cardboard rolls or ring type breakfast cereals onto thick shoelaces, wool, string or plastic tubing.

Keeping your child safe

- Supervise your child closely at all times, especially around water, play equipment, or when using objects such as scissors, pencils, glue or paint. Avoid flammable or toxic materials.
- Babies, toddlers and young children can choke on small toys and objects.
- Check toys regularly to make sure they are safe. Strings on toys should be less than 20cm long.
- Do a safety check and make sure your home is safe for your toddler to actively explore.

More information

- www.healthywa.gov.au
- www.raisingchildren.net.au
- www.bringingupgreatkids.org

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