



## Learning and developing through play

### Why play?

Watch your baby for a moment and see how interesting he/she finds your face, his/her fingers and toes, and in time, anything within grabbing distance such as your glasses and hair. Nothing is safe, so be ready!

Play helps your baby to learn and develop in many ways. For example, by watching your face and listening to your voice, your baby learns about expressions, sounds and words, and how to use these to let you and others know what he/she wants, thinks and feels. By reaching, grasping and banging he/she develops muscles and physical skills; and by dropping and picking up things or pressing buttons to make a noise your baby learns *when I do this, that happens*. So yes, there is a reason for you picking the keys off the floor for the 20th time and giving them back to your baby!

*Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* shows how important play is and gives lots of ideas for playing with your baby. For more information on *Aistear*, visit [www.ncca.ie/earlylearning](http://www.ncca.ie/earlylearning).

**Tip-sheet for  
parents of babies  
(birth—18 months)**



### Playing with your baby

As a parent, you can help your baby learn through play. Here are some tips.

1. Give your baby **time** to play everyday.
2. Provide **safe and interesting things** to play with. Watch out for things he/she might choke on, or things that have sharp edges, and so on.
3. As your baby begins to sit up, crawl and eventually walk, the kinds of play he/she enjoys will change. When your baby is small you are a very important plaything, so **talk, sing and move** about with your baby in your arms. Later on, he/she will show an interest in things as well as people.
4. **Join in** your baby's play and show you are **having fun**. Get down on the floor with your baby, as well as lifting him/her up in your arms or on your knee.
5. Make **space** for play. For example, put a cardboard box in the kitchen to store things your baby likes to play with. Have another box outside.
6. **Tell** your childminder or the staff in the crèche about the things your baby plays with, and the nursery rhymes, books and playful routines he/she enjoys.

Here are some ideas from *Aistear* for what you and your baby might like to play. You can do many of these activities outside as well as inside.

Watch how  
I play, and see  
how you can  
support me.



### Creative play

- Blow bubbles. Encourage your baby to touch and burst them.
- Let your baby paint with his/her hands (with non-toxic paint). Join in.
- Play music and encourage your baby to clap, screech or wave legs and arms.
- Bang a biscuit tin with a spoon to the beat of music.
- Place a mirror near your baby. Make funny faces in the mirror.
- Collect hats, socks and pieces of fabric. Let your baby play with the textures.
- At bath-time, let your baby splash and pour water or squeeze a sponge.



## Games with rules

- Play *Hide and seek* by hiding your baby's favourite toy under a blanket. Encourage your baby to find it and show excitement when it's found.
- Put a small sheet or towel over your baby and ask, *Where's Lucy gone?* Put the sheet or towel over your head and ask, *Where's Mammy/Daddy gone?*
- When your baby can sit up, roll a ball towards him/her and play 'catch'.
- Play together with pop-up toys. Encourage your baby to press the buttons.

I use my hands,  
my ears, my eyes,  
and my body to explore  
my world.

## Language play

- Involve your baby in actions and say rhymes when changing his/her nappy:
  - *This Little Piggy*  
(touching his/her toes)
  - *Incy Wincy Spider*  
(moving your hand up and down along his/her body).
- Talk about what your baby is doing. *You are pressing the button Shane to make the doggie jump up. I can see you are having fun.* Stop and let him/her respond with gurgles, smiles or eye contact.
- Offer chunky, cloth or waterproof books for reading, exploring and chewing. Your young baby might show a particular interest in strong, contrasting colours such as black and white or black and yellow, and in patterns.
- Read to your baby. Invite him/her to touch textures, to lift 'flaps' and to turn pages in books: for example, *I wonder what's under here. Will we look and find out? What will happen if we press this? Let's turn the page together.*
- Sing to your baby. Encourage him/her to join in: for example, *I love your singing. Will we sing it again?*



## Pretend play

- Pretend to be a cat and say 'miaow' or growl like a lion.
- Use a tea set to have a picnic in the garden.
- Drive the toy tractor over the mud in the park.
- Dress Teddy or Molly the Doll in your baby's clothes. Put Teddy to bed.
- Help your baby to feed Molly. Perhaps do this at your baby's mealtimes.

Play is important  
to me, and it is  
important for my learning  
and development.

## Physical play

- Fill a basket with a selection of safe everyday items for your baby to explore – rolling pins, ladles, wash-up brushes, egg cups, bowls, pegs, lids of jars, big shells, oranges, cardboard rolls, and spoons. Sit beside and talk to your baby: for example, *What can we do with this? This feels bumpy, doesn't it? Look, I can bang with this.*
- Help your baby to sort things, for example one fist-sized stone in each section of an egg-carton, and to play with stackable blocks and rings, or nesting cups.
- Build a tower from empty food cartons, shoe boxes or blocks for your baby to knock down. Be prepared to rebuild it again and again!
- Crawl with your baby through cardboard boxes as tunnels, or around the house under tables and chairs or behind a sofa. Say, *I'm going to get you.*
- In time, help your child to use wheelie toys, for example a push-along toy, a play shopping trolley or a buggy.



When your baby is older, you might find the tip-sheet for parents of toddlers useful ([www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit](http://www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit)). Remember that, as well as helping your baby to learn and develop, **play is fun!**