

So Much More Than Just “Child’s Play”

Professor Matt Sanders

It may not seem like it, but “baby play” is an essential part of your child’s development. From around 8 months babies start to develop the foundation for later learning, thinking ability and academic achievement. You can help lay these solid foundations with some simple games.

Games like peek-a-boo teach children that things still exist when you cannot see them.

To teach children about size, play with different sized plastic containers that fit inside one another.

Activities involving pouring, emptying and filling, help children learn concepts such as empty and full. Try games like tipping pegs out of a bucket and putting them back in, or pouring water from one container to another in the bath. This also helps develop coordination.

Counting games or rhymes, such as “On-two-buckle my shoe”, teach children about numbers. Others like “This little piggy” are favourites, as they combine attention and physical affection. Rhymes and folk songs can also

teach children about rhythm, rhyming words and cultural heritage.

Clapping games like “Pat-a-cake” can help with rhythm and improve coordination.

Language skills can be taught through playing games such as, “Where is your nose? Your mouth?”

Shape sorters help children learn to recognize shapes and colours, even if they cannot say them. They also help develop coordination.

Push and pull toys help children practice walking.

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Building blocks are popular from about 10 - 11 months and help with stacking skills and eye-hand coordination. They also help with concepts such as high and low,

big and small, over and under and tall and short.

Any toys or games that involve parts to be pressed, turned, flipped or twisted help your child’s coordination and physical development. Try songs and games that coordinate words and actions, like “Twinkle, twinkle little star”.

Children often enjoy games involving copying or following the leader. This helps develop watching skills and coordination.

Paper and coloured crayons can be used from 9 – 10 months onwards to help develop creativity.

Musical toys help children learn about rhythm and melody. You can start with something like a wooden spoon on a box or plastic container, or some rice or pasta in an empty plastic bottle.

Encourage your child to take an interest in books or magazines with pictures. This will help their imagination and concentration, and get them ready to learn to read.

Activities involving pretend play also help develop imagination, such as dressing up in hats or adults shoes, or playing with tea sets, kitchen equipment, toy telephones or tools (from about 12 months onwards.)

As you can see child's play is so much more than "child's play". It's a vital part of your child's development, laying the skills and foundations for a life-time of learning.

Find more parenting tips at: manitoba.ca/triplep or call 945-4777 in Winnipeg or toll-free 1-877-945-4777.

Professor Matt Sanders is founder of the Triple P - Positive Parenting Program.