



Babies & Young Toddlers

Connection, Sensory Exploration, and Cues

TIP

Follow their lead. If they look away, they might be overstimulated. If they reach out, they want to engage.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Bonding

Play relies on back-and-forth interactions (gazing, smiling), which strengthens attachment.

Non-Verbal Communication

Before speech, babies use play and body language to signal happiness or frustration.

DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

Birth-3: Babies copy facial expressions and movements (like sticking out a tongue).

Birth-3: They find ways to calm themselves (self-soothing) and check back with key people.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Mirror Play

Make funny faces, smile, or frown in a mirror. Watch them mimic you. Builds self-awareness.

Peekaboo

Teach surprise and object permanence. Shows that "people come back."

Messy Play

Slapping water or squishing mud allows them to express joy or release tension physically.

Simple Labeling

Name their feelings as they happen: "You are happy!" or "You are sad."





WHY THIS MATTERS

Managing Impulses

Structured play helps toddlers practice patience and managing big emotions.

Modeling Empathy

They learn empathy by watching how you treat toys or puppets (e.g., hugging a "sad" bear).

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Puppet Play

Act out a "tantrum" with a puppet, then ask the child to help the puppet feel better.

Role-Playing

Pretend to care for a doll (feeding, rocking) to practice nurturing skills.

Expressive Art

Use big crayons to draw "how you feel." Use colors or scribbles to release energy.

Outdoor Release

Run, stomp, or jump to physically release frustration or excitement.

Older Toddlers

Big Feelings, Imitation, and Parallel Play

TIP

Toddlers have big feelings but small vocabularies. Use play to bridge that gap.

DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

Birth-3: Toddlers begin to show "effortful control" (waiting for a turn, resisting grabbing).

Birth-3: They start playing alongside other children (parallel play) and act out emotions.



Social-Emotional Activity Card

3 YEARS - 5 YEARS

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Preschoolers

Social Rules, Vocabulary, and Conflict Resolution

TIP

Encourage them to solve small conflicts with peers before stepping in. Give them the words to use.

WHY THIS MATTERS

School Readiness

Emotional skills help children listen, participate in groups, and manage the stress of a new environment.

Conflict Resolution

Skills like turn-taking help them navigate arguments with peers independently.

DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

3 & 4-Year-Olds: Can talk about feelings using specific words ("worried", "excited", "angry").

Reception: They understand their own feelings and others', and begin to regulate behavior.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Emotion Charades

Act out an emotion (e.g., "angry") without words; let the child guess.

"How Would You Feel?"

Ask hypothetical questions: "How would you feel if your ice cream fell?"

Turn-Taking Games

Play board games or ball games that strictly require waiting for a turn.

Breathing Exercises

Teach calming techniques: "Smell the flower, blow out the candle."

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