



EARLY PLAY SKILLS

What is it?

Play is the primary occupation of a child. Early play stimulation helps a child develop cognitive, motor and communication skills, and provides opportunities to:

- Practice social skills
- Build relationships
- Express him/herself
- Problem-solve
- Develop eye-hand coordination

How can I help the child?

Playing with your child is not only fun, it's one of the most important ways you can nurture his/her development. There are few rules when it comes to play, and you don't need fancy toys. In fact, you are your child's favorite toy.

Strategies & activities:

When your child is engaged and having fun, he/she is learning. Play is truly the work of childhood. Try the activities below to help your child develop his/her early play skills:

- Place your child so that he/she can kick or hit at a mobile or rattle. Eventually, he/she will connect the act of kicking with the sounds the mobile makes when struck. This helps your child understand cause-and-effect.
- Make a habit of devoting some quality time during the day to interact with your child. Regular and dependable play time is better than occasional intense play.
- Look at your child and talk to him/her. Imitate the noises and sounds that your child makes.

- Talk, sing, and babble with your child. Face your child when talking to him/her, and make eye contact.
- Talk to your child about what is going on in his/her environment and activities that you are doing with him/her (e.g. "I am washing your face.")
- Allow your child to play on the floor in a variety of positions (tummy, back, lying on side, sitting, and kneeling).
- Practice looking in the mirror with your child.
- Play peek-a-boo, hide and seek, and waving bye-bye.
- Play clapping games to music.
- Play with other children the same age and in different environments outside your home.
- Borrow toys from a lending library and borrow books from the library so your child can learn how to work new toys and read different books.
- Read picture books to your child. Point at the pictures and label what you see.
- Label the actions of your child. For example, when your child puts a toy in a container, say "in". Label actions like "out", "in", "on", and "under".
- Respond to whatever your child is doing. Explore an object that your child reaches for or looks at. Comment on the shape or colour of the object, and show your child what it can do.
- Encourage your child to take turns. If your child is playing with a toy, hold out your hand and see if she/he will give it to you. Play with it briefly, and then hand the toy back to him/her.
- It's great to show your child how a toy works, but try to hold off on "doing it for him/her" every time. You can begin something, such as stacking one block on another, and then encourage him/her to give it a try. Providing just enough help to keep frustration at bay motivates your child to learn new skills.

This sheet was created by the occupational therapists at the George Jeffrey Children's Centre. This sheet is not specific to your child, but provides general information.