

Playing with babies

Did you ever watch how a baby's face lights up when someone he knows talks with him? Research has shown that an important time for children's learning is between birth and age three. Babies need adults to talk with them, sing to them, read to them, hold and cuddle them, and play with them. That's how babies learn.

Here are two good games to play if baby is sitting in the high chair:



Tap, Tap, Tap

You'll need:

- A wooden block or large wooden or plastic spoon

Take the block or spoon and gently tap it on the high chair tray. Let the baby try banging the block or spoon on the tray. Respond to baby as she tries to do it.

Once the baby gets the idea, sing a song along with her. "Mary Had a Little Lamb" "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," or "The Farmer in the Dell" work well, or try another song you know.

Toys in the pan game

You'll need:

- A muffin or cupcake pan
- Small toys* that will fit into the cups of the pan

Place the muffin pan on the high chair tray. Put a toy in one of the cups of the muffin pan. Show the baby how to take the toy out of the cup and put it back in. Let the baby try taking it out and putting it back in.

Put a toy in a second cup and let the baby take it out and put it back in. Keep adding toys, one at a time, until all the muffin cups are filled.

*Make sure the toys are too large for a baby to put in his mouth and swallow. A good way to check the size of toys for safety is to use a roll of toilet paper. Drop the toy into the cardboard tube in the center of the roll. If the toy falls through the tube, it is small enough for a child to place in his mouth and choke.

Do not give small toys to children under three years of age.

This Little Train

Move your fingers up and down along the baby's arm as you say this rhyme.

This little train ran up the track,

Toot, toot, toot.

This little train ran up the track

And then it came toot-tooting back,

Toot, toot. (make your voice sound like a train whistle)

Try repeating the rhyme, moving the baby's fingers up and down your arm as you say the words.

Where's the music?

You'll need:

- A music box or toy that plays music

Wind up the music box or toy and hide it somewhere in the room. Say to the baby, "Where's the music? Let's go find it." Crawl with the baby. Stop now and then and say, "Is it here?" After a few stops, go to the place where the box is hidden. Show the box to the baby and say, "Look, we found it!"

Hide the music box in the same place and play the game again with the baby. Keep playing the game with the same hiding place until baby knows where to go to find the box.

Now try a new hiding place and see if the baby can find it herself.

Scarf game

You'll need:

- Scarves, diapers, pieces of cloth or anything soft that you can throw in the air and it will come down slowly

Sit on the floor with the baby. Throw a scarf in the air. As it floats back down, reach out your arm to catch it.

Throw the scarf in the air again and tell the baby to catch it. You may want to hold out her arms so the scarf falls into them. You may want to try other soft things to throw in the air and catch. Older children may want to join in this game too.

Try playing these games while you are changing baby's diaper:

Kick, Kick, Kick

Move baby's legs back and forth while you say the rhyme.

You kick and you kick and you kick and STOP.

You kick and you kick and you kick and STOP.

Kick fast,

Kick slow,

You kick and you kick and you kick and STOP.

Little Mouse

Use your finger to draw a circle on the baby's foot as you say the first line. As you say the second line, walk your finger up the baby's leg to her tummy.

Little mouse, little mouse goes around.

Little mouse, little mouse goes to town.

You can say the same rhyme, drawing a circle on the palm of the baby's hand. Walk your finger up her arm as you say the second line. End by tickling her under the chin.