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## Bonus Family Handouts

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# Kids Need Room to Move



By nature's design, kids are born to move. Yet stop and consider all the modern products that, intended or not, contain or constrain children's movements:

Car seats

Strollers

Front packs

Backpacks

Slings

Cribs

Bassinets

Baby carriers

Portable baby chairs

Bouncy seats

High chairs

Baby swings

Play yards

Exercise saucers

Baby jumpers

Baby walkers

If a family owns more than two or three of these products, or if the childcare setting routinely relies on this kind of equipment, chances are the child for whom they are intended is spending many of his or her waking hours in confinement, unable to move at will, separated from the vibrant sensations of life by plastic walls with well-intended padding.

Now, that is *not* to say that all baby equipment should be abolished. Quite the contrary. Car seats, strollers, cribs, play yards, and the like keep children safe in dangerous or uncontrollable environments like moving cars, crowded malls, and darkened night-time rooms.

But often, parents and caregivers *do* control the environment at home and elsewhere. In these circumstances, children deserve the right and the room to move. And for kids, that means the floor. The floor is a child's



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first, best playground—an experimental laboratory for learning, even from the youngest age.

Although they can't get around on their own, even infants need to understand that space comes in different sizes, shapes, and textures. Floor time gives them different perspectives and helps them see how they fit into their world. So get out the vacuum, remove sharp or breakable objects, and do whatever else is necessary to make the space safe. Then lay out a blanket and let baby explore.

Then one day, out of the blue, a child figures out how to get himself from here to there. At last—independent mobility! But of course, that's usually when the portable play yard pops up. And after the play yard comes a series of other well-intended containers to keep kids safe—and sedentary.

Unfortunately, “containers” like play yards and strollers distract, block, or limit a child's ability to follow his or her natural interests. For instance, a toddler in his stroller might be fascinated by a dozen different things he sees. But because he's being pushed from behind, he has no power to do anything but watch those fascinations whiz by.

Curiosity is nature's great motivator. When a child is free to follow what interests him, he's not only learning, he's learning *how* to learn with a confident, self-motivated, and dynamic approach to new ideas.

So when you confront a choice to “contain” your child, ask yourself, “Is this ‘container’ necessary? Is it for his safety and well-being? What will it stop him from doing, learning, or understanding?” Do all you can to give your child freedom to move as much as possible.

# Apple Is for A

All too often, when we talk about *early learning*, adults immediately think about learning letters and numbers. But a young child's brain is concerned with developing the whole child—not just the future student.

Early childhood learning is a process of compiling tangible, physical, real-life, in-the-moment experiences one on top of the next. And the reason is simple. All learning, at any age, stands on the shoulders of prior knowledge—from the known to the unknown. That's how the brain is designed.

For instance, consider the old saying “A is for Apple.” It's shorthand for describing how children learn their letters. But in fact, it's not correct. You see, for little ones, the sentence is backward and meaningless. It starts with the unknown instead of the known.

For kids, “Apple is for A” is what makes sense. It starts with the known (Apple) and relates it to the unknown (A). It moves from the tangible to the intangible, from the concrete to the symbolic. And that's how children learn.

But of course, “Apple is for A” only makes sense if a child has had experience with apples first: personal, sensory experiences with real apples—seeing them, smelling them, holding them, tasting them, hearing them crunch, rolling them around the plate, enjoying them in applesauce, apple juice, apple pie, and so on.

Multiple experiences that engage multiple senses plant information deeply in the brain. And more, they engage the emotions that form opinions and judgments. Judgment poses the important question, “How do I feel about apples?” Whether the answer is love 'em or leave 'em, it's the combination of tangible experiences and the formation of judgment that creates the child's personal reality of apples. And once something is real, the child can then transfer it to related but unknown ideas, such as the letter A.

So when you think about early learning, remember, this. For kids, *everything* is learning!



# Skin-to-Skin: Closeness Counts

Today there is a growing emphasis on skin-to-skin care. And for good reason. Studies have shown remarkable benefits from this most natural practice.

## What Is Skin-to-Skin All About?

As the name suggests, skin-to-skin care is conducted bare chest to bare chest with the baby in an upright position lying against the mother's chest. Almost immediately, this position stimulates sensitive nerves in the chest, which in turn release a cascade of hormones to create a sense of calm, pleasure, and contentment as well as many other physiological benefits for both the child and the mother.

## The Benefits to Baby

Research studies have shown direct and lasting benefits for babies. Skin-to-skin contact:

- Encourages breastfeeding and stimulates digestion for better nutrition
- Stabilizes heart rate, breathing, body temperature, and blood sugar
- Results in less crying; the child is more easily soothed when stressed
- Improves quality of sleep
- Enhances the immune system
- Accelerates brain development
- Fosters attachment and bonding with the mother (and with other family members who participate in the practice)

## The Benefits to Mom

Skin-to-skin contact benefits mothers as well. It:

- Fosters attachment and bonding with the child
- Stimulates milk production



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- Speeds up recovery time after baby's birth
- Reduces the risk of postpartum depression
- Promotes psychological well-being

## When to Practice Skin-to-Skin Care

Many parents first learn about skin-to-skin care in the hospital. Indeed, there are more and more reports of hospitals now recommending skin-to-skin contact immediately after birth, the newborn lying on Mom's bare chest for several hours or, in some cases, until baby latches onto the breast for the first feeding.

This jump-start to breastfeeding is really important, of course, but because skin-to-skin contact has so many other benefits, many experts recommend using it for up to three months after birth.

## Skin-to-Skin at Home

Surprisingly, the recommended position for skin-to-skin time is not lying down, but rather sitting up at a 45-degree angle or more. And skin-to-skin care can be done standing or walking around as well, as long as Mom's movements are gentle enough not to jiggle baby out of position. The key to skin-to-skin contact is *sustained* chest-to-chest contact.

To optimize the benefits of skin-to-skin contact, experts suggest doing it for at least 60 minutes two to three times a day for the first three months of life. While that may seem like a lot of time in today's hurry-up world, practitioners have found this is time well spent. And besides, it feels good!

## What About Dad?

Sixty minutes two or three times a day may not be possible for some moms. Happily, nature has taken this time factor into account in its own way. You see, while skin-to-skin care is normally considered a mother-child experience, studies have shown babies can achieve the same benefits with others—including fathers, adoptive parents, grandparents, and other primary caregivers. And like mothers, fathers and other primary family adults enjoy the intimate bonding time with their baby.

Nature knows how much closeness counts for little ones . . . and for the rest of us, for that matter.

# Splinter Skills

As adults, we can make the mistake of applying the “shortest distance” theory to children’s development. For instance, give a child a pencil, show him the correct pencil grip, teach him how to write the letters, and have him go practice. We think, “Job done.” But here’s the thing: Practicing with a pencil is great if all you’re ever going to do with your hand is write. But what about painting? Or the piano? Or sign language, ballet, or baseball?

In early childhood, our focus needs to be on preparing the muscles for everything they may be called on to do (in and out of school). Otherwise, there’s a chance *splinter skills* may form.

Splinter skills are isolated, unrelated, and often unrelatable skills that may give the appearance of full physical competency but actually mask deficiencies. Often they involve muscle memory for specialized high-performance tasks, such as sports or dance. But there’s no need to focus on high performance just yet. In fact, a well-balanced profile of physical capabilities in the early years can make it easier to develop specialized skills for high performance later on.

Offering young children a wide variety of physical experiences is the best way to ensure well-balanced development. But of course, just like us, little ones have their preferences. For instance, if your preschooler loves playing with a soccer ball, that’s great. But encourage her to try other things as well. Introduce her to other fun games such as running, jumping, climbing, or walking along the cracks in the sidewalk.

And if she’s not enjoying a new activity, don’t push it. Go back to the soccer ball and return to the different game another time. But don’t give up! Keep introducing variety into your child’s physical “diet”—you both might be surprised by what she enjoys doing.

Finally, if you’re interested in an early sports program or dance class for your child, look for programs that promote physical and social exploration rather than rigid techniques. Specific skills will come easier if your child has a broad base of physical capabilities to draw on.



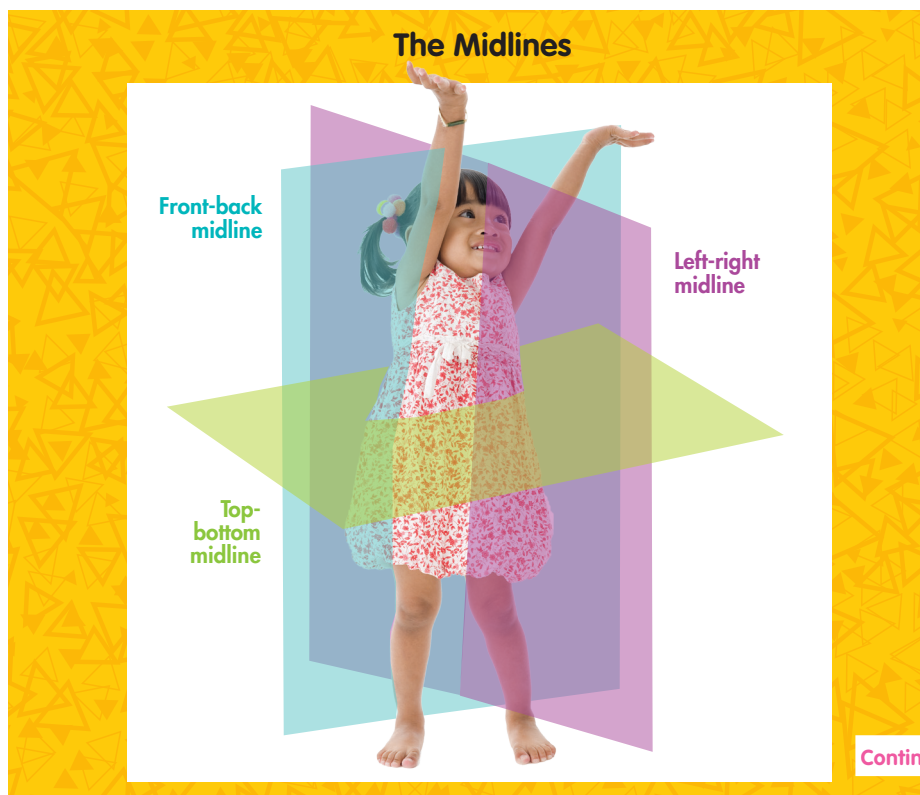


# Meet the Midlines

By and large, it's accepted that young children aren't as well coordinated as adults. In fact, some kids appear downright clumsy! This is quite natural, and it's all a part of learning to control the biggest learning tool they have—their own bodies.

Coordination is the ability to move different parts of the body independently or together, at will (and automatically). Mastering coordination is about more than physical advancement. In fact, as the body and brain learn to coordinate movement, the brain itself is being fine-tuned for the highest levels of thinking, reasoning, and creativity. In other words, coordinated movement develops the brain for learning.

Coordination develops over many years through a kind of “bio-geometry” known as the *midlines*. The midlines are invisible to the eye, yet easy to understand once you know what to look for.





Imagine the body divided by three lines. One line separates left from right. Another separates top from bottom. The third separates front from back. The midlines serve as the central pivot points for the body's most sophisticated movement patterns like crawling, walking, running, and skipping.

As the midlines develop, they help children isolate individual body parts for independent movement, then work to coordinate movements involving multiple parts of the body. And while all of that is going on, the brain is feverishly building neural pathways to keep up—and to create and strengthen the pathways that cross the midline of the brain (the corpus callosum). These pathways or “superhighways” facilitate communication between the right and left hemispheres of the brain. This, in turn, determines the speed, flexibility, adaptability, and depth of the brain. Think of it as doubling up on the brain's processing speed and power as it draws on the strengths of both its left and right sides to create “whole-brain” thinking.

There's no rushing midline development in the early years. It's a slow, natural process that unfolds from birth to about the ages of seven to nine (or even beyond that). For midline development, all that children generally need are fun-filled days of active movement, the freedom to explore what they can do on their own, and a little help and encouragement from you to try things just outside their comfort zone.

# Music and Movement



## Music Rocks!

Studies have shown that music has huge, positive effects on early childhood development. Exposure to music—listening, singing, dancing, or playing—fosters many essential early learning capabilities, including:

- Speech development
- Listening skills
- Patterning and sequencing (early math skills)
- Rhythm, beat, and timing
- Social skills
- Emotional development
- Memory
- Physical coordination

## The Elements of Music

Each aspect of music contributes in many ways to a child's fundamental development. For instance . . .

**Beat** serves as the master timekeeper for all music, while engaging listeners in a common experience. When you rock or dance to the beat together, the music gives your child a sense of being in sync with you and the world around him.

**Rhythm** maps the timing of each note in a song. We each have a unique sense of rhythm that influences our style of moving, communicating—and even thinking.

**Tempo** is the pace and timing of the music (fast or slow). Tempo gives little ones important clues about big ideas such as order, sequence, and the passage of time.

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**Pitch** tells the story of the song as the notes go up and down, much like words selected and arranged in a sentence to convey an idea. For children, music serves as a gentle guide to understanding the intricacies of language and communication.

**Dynamics** are variations in volume (loud and soft) and intensity. They express emotion (strength, playfulness, sadness) and offer clues about the overarching message of the music. Dynamics offer children the opportunity to explore feelings.

**Melody** brings pitch, beat, rhythm, tempo, and dynamics together to create the tune we hear. Melody aids in memory by compressing multiple bits of information so it's easier to remember. That's why songs like the ABC song work so well (and stay with us for a lifetime).

**Harmony** introduces complexity to the music and mirrors important social skills young children grapple with—skills like conversation, speaking, and listening.

**Intervals** mark the changes in music. An interval is the difference in pitch between two notes. Intervals build anticipation for what's next while giving the listener the time she needs to follow along.

**Lyrics** (words) multiply the language development value of music for young children.

As you can see, music all on its own is a powerful force for learning and growing. But when you add movement to music, from toe tapping to hand clapping to hitting the dance floor, the benefits multiply manyfold. When children use their bodies to explore, they are engaging the entire brain in the experience.

So the next time you've got a few minutes, turn on some music and start moving. It's great learning, and it's a lot of fun, too!



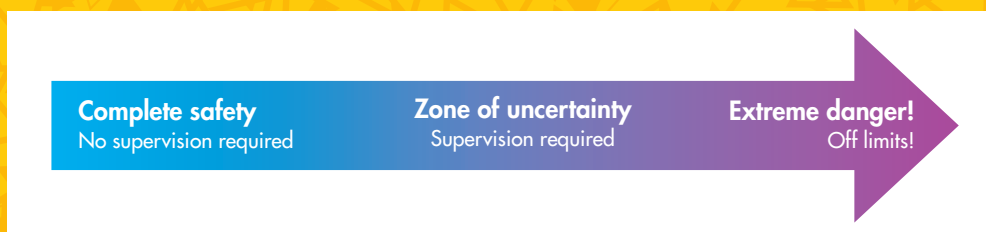
# Play, Safety, and the Zone of Uncertainty

A child at play is constantly pushing at his or her physical boundaries—and undoubtedly that’s going to cause a few tumbles along the way. So there are important matters of physical safety to consider when guiding a child in the early years.

Now, of course, when it comes to safety, the final call must always be yours—hour by hour, day by day, situation by situation. After all, no one knows your child better than you do. And while safety is your primary job, encouraging your child to stretch and grow through play is also an important factor to consider.

Most adults see safety on a straight line continuum:

## The Risk Continuum



Chances are, with young children you spend a part of each day in the “Zone of Uncertainty”—that gray area between what’s obviously safe and what’s obviously dangerous. And it’s an important zone for children because, quite often, it’s where possibilities for new exploration and new learning occur. How you handle these situations is critical not only for your child’s physical safety but also for his or her intellectual and emotional growth.

Which leads to the question: *How do I strike the right balance between the potential risks and learning rewards of play?*

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# The Balance of Play

**Moving and Learning**



**Intriguing and stimulating**

**Big Moves and Big Ideas**



**Complete safety**  
No supervision required

**Zone of uncertainty**  
Supervision required

**Extreme danger!**  
Off limits!



**Quiet Concentration**

**No stimulation**

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The “Balance of Play” diagram illustrates what happens when we evaluate both the physical risk *and* the learning rewards of movement and play. Note how this approach considers two dynamics that both need to be completely off limits to young children: (1) activities that pose extreme physical danger, of course, and (2) those that provide little to no active stimulation.

When children play, they often strike this balance for themselves, from big, broad adventures to quiet concentration and everything in between. Naturally, depending on their current abilities and interests, each child’s balance of play will differ. *The important thing to keep in mind is providing children with safe and stimulating opportunities to play and explore each day.*

# Roughhousing

Roughhousing isn't what it seems. It's rough, sure. But it's not out of control. It's physical, definitely. But it's not about power. It's loud, of course. But it's about unspoken communication. And yes, it's aggressive. But it's all about trust.

Roughhousing *isn't* at all what it seems.

Adults often discourage roughhousing because they're worried it will end in tears. And sometimes it does. But that's what happens when you're pushing at new social and emotional boundaries while you're still figuring out your own physical strength. You see, the very point of roughhousing is to come right up to the edge but *not* cross over it. And that level of physical, emotional, and social finesse takes a lot of experience, and yes, sometimes means flirting with the edge. How does roughhousing benefit kids?



## The Benefits of Roughhousing

**Body control.** Roughhousing helps kids understand their own strength and learn to modify and adapt their movements to meet the situation. And because roughhousing is usually a highly charged, fast-moving experience, the body-brain communication is challenged in fast and fun ways.

**Thinking on their feet.** Roughhousing is an adrenaline rush and physical outlet for kids. But that doesn't mean it's a great big "no-thinking" zone. In fact, the improvisational nature of the play demands quick thinking and strategizing.

**Emotional development.** Learning to control your emotions sometimes requires pushing them to the edges to see what they feel like. Roughhousing is a kid-sized taste of big emotions.

**Self-respect.** Contrary to what it appears, roughhousing actually teaches kids to control their aggression while learning to be assertive. The play physicalizes two concepts that impact social interactions at all levels: self-respect and respect for others. First, kids must learn what does and does not feel right to them. This means deciding for themselves their own personal boundaries.

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**Respect for others.** By recognizing their own personal boundaries, children can then begin to understand, accept, and respect other people's boundaries, including when someone doesn't want to play or wants the play to stop. And just that simple act of stopping is often where friendship begins.

In short, roughhousing helps a child learn to control his emotions *and* his actions.

## Be Ready for Roughhousing

**Set ground rules.** By its very nature, you can't schedule roughhousing, but you can be ready for it with a few simple ground rules:

- Together with children, identify safe spaces for roughhousing and agree to limit it to those areas. Make sure children know what's out of bounds (hard surfaces, sharp corners, crowded spaces, and so on) and why.
- Together, create a cue word that means "I want to stop." Be sure everyone—including grown-ups—understands and honors that cue with no teasing.
- Adults get the final say. When they say stop, kids must comply. But don't intervene too soon. That takes the fun (and learning) out of it.

**Be an instigator.** Start a roughhousing session with a well-timed tickle or two!

**Share the lead.** Often when adults play with children, it's best to let the child lead. But the point of roughhousing is shared respect, which means being equals in the play.

**Embody safety and trust.** Use open, playful body language to help the child feel safe enough to let loose and have fun roughhousing with you.

**Suppress your inner referee.** Roughhousing can and often will go too far, and one party will feel aggrieved. But that's part of the play. Real life doesn't come with a referee. Unless you feel serious safety issues arise, curb your instinct to intervene. Children must feel what it's like to go too far—whether they are the aggressor or the aggrieved—in order to learn how to stop themselves or respond when someone else has crossed the line.

Roughhousing's rough, physical, loud, and aggressive nature yields self-control and emotional regulation, the give-and-take of healthy relationships, and a true sense of belonging and safety.

# Infant Play: Providing Stimulation

Infants need lots of contact, a calm and loving environment, nutrition on demand, plenty of rest, clean diapers . . . and play.

*Play* seems too big a word for such a small child. Still, you'll likely find it comes naturally to both of you. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

## Get Close

Babies can't see at a distance, so stay close, make eye contact, and smile. Even at this tender age, babies can sense emotions, and they look to adults for guidance.

## Time Alone

Too much of a good thing isn't good—even if that good thing is you. A baby needs his space, just like everyone else. When he's content, leave him that way for a while. Let him get acquainted with himself. Watch from a distance to see what he does. When he needs you, he'll let you know.

## Open Spaces

Babies need to sense the space around them and move at will—even if they aren't going anywhere yet. Lay baby on a blanket on the floor. Lie next to her and talk to her as she gets a feel for this new place.

## Get on Baby's Level

When you play with a baby, you should be close and at his level. Until he's ready to get up on his own, play lying down. And never prop him in a position he can't get himself out of.



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## **Provide Sensory Experiences**

As you play, gently introduce sensory stimulation such as colors, textures, and sounds. If baby appears to spark to something, let her play with it as long as she likes.

## **Baby Massage and Gentle Stretching**

Help the infant learn more about his body through gentle massage and stretching. Lay baby down and gently massage him from top to toe, talking and singing about all the different parts that make up his little body.

## **Eye Tracking**

Use objects baby is attracted to in order to engage her focus. Slowly move the object across her field of vision to encourage eye movement.

## **Talking and Singing**

Talk to baby all the time. Narrate what you're doing. He won't understand the words, but he'll love hearing the sound of your voice. And sing, too! Music has a powerful influence on early learning.

## **Get Outside Often**

When the weather cooperates, take baby outdoors. Fresh air, sunshine, and a change of scenery are good for both of you.

## **Play with Other Children**

Babies don't play *with* one another yet, but playing *near* one another is a first step toward learning to initiate relationships. Give them space to get to know each other without hovering.

## **Cuddling and Rocking**

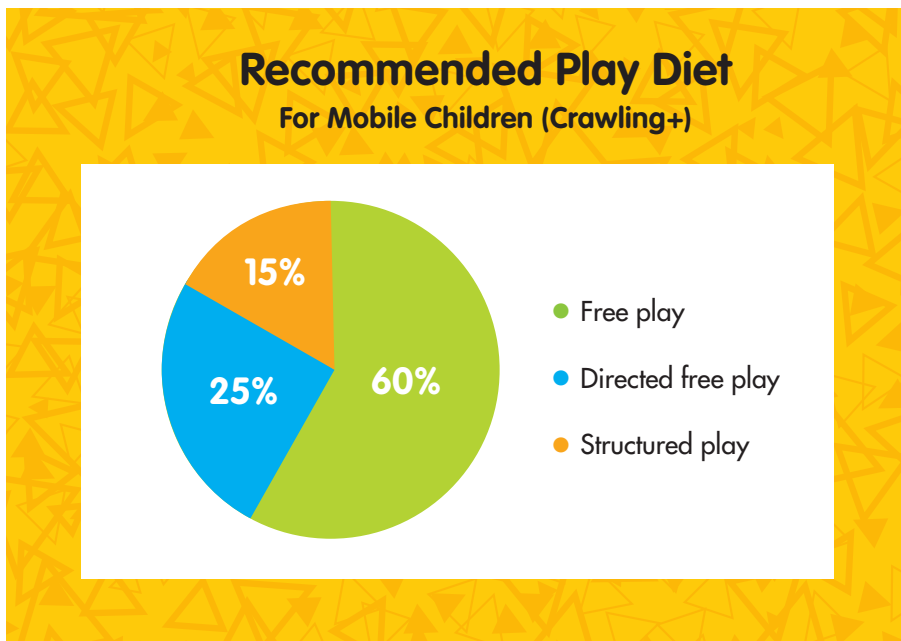
Devote time to cuddling and rocking baby when it's *not* feeding time. Use this time to gently change her orientation and perspective. Sit in different rooms or chairs. Lift her very slowly up and down. Gently tip her so that her feet are above her head for a few moments. Do these movements slowly and gently, while fully supporting her at all times. And be sure to tell her what you're going to do. Not only does this show respect for her, but the sound of your voice will also cue her that these movements are safe and avoid startling her.

## **Play Games**

Play peekaboo and tell stories and rhymes. These activities will give the infant new sensations while associating you with feelings of love, comfort, security, and playfulness.

# Toddler and Preschooler Play: Providing Freedom

Once a child can move independently, he's on the road to richer and more varied play, including free play, directed free play, and structured play.



## Free Play

Free play is by far the most important type of play. It happens alone or with peers. Here children set their own parameters and play out scenarios as they see fit. Free play creates a natural, kid-size environment for creative problem solving, independent decision making, and growing self-sufficiency. During free play, children should feel independent, even if you are just steps away.

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Whether a child is alone or with other children, running with abandon or lying on the grass counting clouds, what's important is that she's in charge. Your role is to stay well out of the experience unless safety becomes an issue or the child invites you in.

### Directed Free Play

Some children love certain types of play and stick to what they love. But all children need variety in play and movement to ensure well-balanced development. With directed free play, you gently prompt different kinds of play to help them expand beyond what they like into new experiences they may like even better.

### Structured Play

Structured play is a prescribed activity with a set outcome, directed by an adult or other authority (such as game rules). Structured activities introduce young children to social concepts such as interpersonal and group dynamics, sharing, teamwork, leadership, respect for others, and respect for rules. That said, be careful not to expose children to competition too early.

