



Playing with a Toddler

One mother stated, “My husband and I love our kids, but we are often stumped when it comes to having fun with them. We just don’t know where to begin. I wish we could play with our kids and enjoy ourselves instead of feeling it is such a chore.”

Playtime Basics

- **Check the environment.** Is there enough room to play and space to move? You might need to move a few things. This makes the area safe and says to your child, “We’re going to have some fun now.”
- **Simplify the playtime space.** Too many toys in one area can be overwhelming. If you limit toys to a few choices, it will be easier for your child to engage.
- **Follow your child’s lead.** Watch her as she explores a toy and see what she does. Resist telling her how you would do it. There’s no “right” way. Talk to her about what she is doing. “You made the car drive over my shoe.”
- **Go slowly.** Your child has to concentrate more than you to stack blocks or turn over cards. Give just enough help to prevent her frustration.
- **Watch for behavior signals.** Your child will tell you when he’s ready to stop if you watch his facial expressions, sounds and gestures. Moving on to a new activity at the right time will help avoid frustration or boredom.
- **Be prepared to do things over and over.** Children like to repeat actions; that is how they learn to master an activity.

Playtime Ideas

- Play music and dance together. Play a box or pan “drum” with a spoon.
- Drive little cars over ramps made with magazines or books.
- Make a hiding place with a blanket over two chairs or a card table. This can become a house, a garage, a castle, a cave, a tent, a cage at the zoo and so on.