

Babies - Play at Home Ideas

By Dr Lin Day (www.babysensory.com)



If you cannot get to a real-life physical *Baby Sensory* class, the following 'Play at Home Ideas' will provide a wealth of learning opportunities from visual stimulation to speech and language development, curiosity, imagination, hand-eye coordination, problem-solving, and exploratory play with your baby.

They will also encourage rich parent-baby interactions and the element of surprise that your baby loves so much!



Everyday objects

- Plastic bottles filled with dried rice or lentils (screw lids on tightly), a washing up bowl, pots and pans, and large plastic spoons make great musical instruments. If your baby can shake it, bang it, rattle it, and make a noise - it's an instrument!
- Boxes with lids to open and close, plastic containers, and pots and pans to stack and sort encourage an understanding of weight, shape, size, sound, and temperature.
- A cardboard box to crawl through or sit in - or a laundry basket filled with shredded paper or washing offers endless opportunities for creative thinking, learning, exploration, and discovery.

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- An egg box or egg tray filled with toys or objects that your baby can take out and put back in again will help her learn about texture, colour, and composition, and keep her busy and entertained!
 - Share bright colourful pictures from magazines, catalogues, calendars or family photographs with your baby. They will maintain attention and concentration, and enhance your baby's understanding of the world.
 - Objects that vary in texture and sound such as cotton reels tied securely to a play gym will keep your baby entertained while she lies on her play mat.
 - A shallow box or basket filled with interesting household objects such as a plastic spatula, a lemon squeezer, a soft brush, paper cups, a sock with a ball in the toe, and a shiny box will keep your baby busy for hours - definitely worth a try!

Safety: Ensure that each object is safe to mouth or chew, does not contain magnets, batteries or small parts that could present a serious choking hazard.

If the object fits through a kitchen roll cylinder, then it is not safe. Objects with long cords or ribbons should be avoided because they could cause strangulation. Calculators, video games, singing cards, painted second-hand toys, objects with sharp edges and points, plastic wrap, and Styrofoam are not suitable for babies. Always supervise your baby during play.

Hide and seek

- Fill an empty tissue box with brightly coloured fabrics. Your baby will delight in pulling out the contents one-by-one. She will also discover that when you put the materials back in the box, they continue to exist even though they are hidden from view.
- Hide a toy under a cloth or cup. Say “*Where’s the toy?*” If your baby is at the reaching and grasping stage, she will find it - and will want to repeat the activity again and again.
- Cover your face with a scarf or your hands, and play ‘Peek-a-boo’. It’s simple to organise, educational, and lots of fun (also your baby’s favourite game)!
- Hide behind the sofa and call your baby’s name. When your baby discovers your hiding place, she’ll learn that you haven’t just vanished just because you’re out of sight.

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- Put on a puppet show and play hide-and-seek with a sock puppet or soft toy to entertain your baby, and to reinforce the concept that an object does not disappear when hidden from view.
 - Cuddle up with your baby and a book with hide-and-seek pictures. Your baby may turn the pages to find out what's on the other side.

Other play opportunities

- The best opportunities for quality interactions with your baby occur during routine activities such as feeding, nappy changing, dressing, having a bath or preparing for bed time.
- Bouncing, rocking, clapping, patting games, and nursery rhymes, involve eye contact, facial expressions, vocalisations, smiles, and words of encouragement. Your baby will benefit emotionally from direct eye-to-eye contact and face-to-face interactions with you - she will also know that she's loved, and fun to be with!
- If your baby becomes fretful or restless, tired, hungry, breaks eye contact, turns away, cries or simply stops playing, she will need a rest-break.
- A nap, a cuddle or listening to calming music will put your baby in a relaxed and receptive state - perfect for the next 'Play at Home' activity!

If you cannot join a physical *Baby Sensory* class with other parents, tune into our Baby Sensory 'Play @Home' interactive, virtual sessions. They are so much fun! You will gain ideas for home play, plus top tips, how-to videos, articles, and so much more!

And best of all, you can meet other parents who are going through the same problems, highlights, and experiences as you!