

# Play Activities for Birth to 12 Months



Whether you're looking for games to build your baby's language skills, or games to keep the young ones busy, here are some great play ideas for your infant.

## Action-Oriented Activities

### Wind at Your Back

Place your baby on her tummy on a soft blanket. Billow a light scarf in the air above her and say, *Feel the wind!* Let the scarf gently fall on her back and then slowly pull it off her. Wave it in front of her and see if she follows it with her eyes. This activity gives your baby some fun “tummy time” with you. Spending time on her belly is important for building upper body strength.

### On Your Feet

Gather several pieces of material with different textures—such as a tea towel, fake fur, felt, a silky scarf. Holding your baby upright (with hands under baby's arms), let her feet touch one of the fabrics. (Or allow crawling babies to crawl on and over the fabric.) Try a few different fabrics to see which textures your child seems to prefer. Games like this enhance a baby's sensory and body awareness.

## Quiet Play Activities

### Shadow Sharing

Babies have limited vision in their first few months but they are tuned in to contrasts between light and dark. At bedtime or naptime, slowly move a flashlight beam across the wall or ceiling of your baby's room. See if she can follow it with her eyes. As she grows, she will get better and better at following the moving beam—this skill is called “visual tracking.”

## **Make your own “aquarium”**

Cut some fish shapes out of clean kitchen sponges and slip them into a gallon-sized resealable plastic bag filled with about a cup of water. For extra fun, squeeze a few drops of blue food coloring into the water and add some glitter or shells. Seal the bag and cover the edge with duct tape to be sure it stays closed. Let your baby squeeze the fish and pat the bag while he is seated in his high chair or on the floor with you.

## **Activities That Build Thinking Skills**

### **Baby in the Mirror**

Hold your baby in your arms in front of the mirror. Talk about and point to his body parts—eyes, nose, mouth, arms, etc. Then step away from the mirror and ask, “Where did baby go?” Move back in front of the mirror and say, “There’s the baby!” Hide-and-seek games enhance babies’ growing sense of body awareness—the knowledge that they are separate from you.

### **Putting It Together**

Between 6 and 12 months, babies begin to understand how different objects work together—what they can do in relationship to the other. To practice this skill, offer your child some small, easy-to-grasp blocks and show him how he can drop them into a bucket, plastic cup, or bowl. Combining the block and the cup shows an early understanding about how things go together.

## **Activities That Build the Senses**

### **Listen Up!**

Show baby a bell and then gently ring it so he can hear. Wait until he focuses on the bell and then slowly bring it behind your back or place a washcloth over it. Then ask, *Where did it go?* Take it out and ring it from a different location. Wait until your baby has found the bell again with his eyes. This activity enriches your baby’s auditory awareness.

### **Take a Whiff**

Give your baby (6 months old and up) an opportunity to use her sense of smell. When you cut an orange, hold it gently under her nose so she can have a sniff. When you take out the cinnamon or cloves for a recipe, do the same thing. You might say, *Smell this. We smell with our nose.* Then you can point to your nose. Keep in mind, all children process sensory information differently. Some may love it and others may not enjoy it at all. Activities like this help your grandchild connect sensory information to her everyday experiences.

# Activities That Build Language Skills

## **Get Out Your Umbrella!**

Sing “It’s Raining, It’s Pouring” to your baby. At the end of the song, drop a handful or two of soft, colorful pompoms over her belly and chest. How does she like this sensation? If she looks interested—widening her eyes, smiling, kicking arms and legs, do it again. If your baby cries, try it again another time. Babies’ preferences can change quickly. Singing to your baby is a great way to build language skills. This game also encourages babies’ awareness of themselves as an individual, separate from you.

## **Finger Plays**

Sing songs with your child that have hand motions that go along with the lyrics. For example, songs and rhymes like “Patty Cake,” “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star,” “Wheels on the Bus,” and “Where Is Thumbkin” all have hand and finger motions to do as you sing. When your child is able to use his hands and fingers, he will start to copy your gestures and—before you know it—he will be singing along!