



PLAY. Play is a key way a child learns, and parents are their children's favorite toy. What parents and children play isn't as important as a parent following a child's lead during play time and having fun together.

"Love. Talk. Play." has teamed up with researchers at the University of Washington's Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences (I-LABS) to look at the science behind why love, talk and play are important to the development of babies and toddlers.

IMITATION IS A TURN-TAKING WAY TO PLAY THAT HELPS CHILDREN LEARN

Children love to copy other people's actions and love to have their own actions copied. Even before babies can talk, they tell us a lot about what they know through imitation.

- One-year-olds can remember and imitate new actions up to four weeks after they first see an action demonstrated.*¹
- By 1.5 years of age, children begin to imitate what someone meant (but failed) to do, showing us they understand our goals and intentions, not just the end results.*²

try this!

Peek-a-boo always works for me! As I get older, try making funny faces and body movements, and encourage me to imitate you.

try this!

Work with me to categorize items around the house by size, shape or use. Ask me to sort by "hard things" and "soft things," or something personal, such as "things that were gifts" or "things I found."

PARENTS ARE THE BEST TOY IN THE ROOM

The best interactions have much more to do with how parents use toys and objects in their child's environment, not what the toys or objects are.

- Young children imitate less from television compared to imitation from live, face-to-face interactions.*^{3,4}
- Young children copy the actions of someone who interacts with them but not the actions of someone who is nonresponsive.⁵

try this!

Enter an imaginary world with me. Let's be farm animals, or characters from my favorite book. Practice gestures, noises and voices, then ask me what happens next.

**FOR HAPPY, HEALTHY
BABIES AND TODDLERS**

LoveTalkPlay.org

PLAY IS EDUCATIONAL

Play encourages learning through hands-on exploration and observation. Children are like little scientists, running experiments as they discover the relationships between objects and people, learn new concepts, and problem-solve through play.

- By age 2, children learn about cause and effect through their own hands-on experience with objects as well as watching the actions of others.*⁶
- Parents and children talk more about spatial concepts (e.g., location, dimensions and orientation of objects) when they play together with blocks. Spatial skills are important for learning math and science.⁷

try this!

Give me different size cups and allow me to fill and dump water. Use the words "more," "less" and "equal to" to help me learn about measurement.

try this!

Help me stack blocks until they fall down or divide up a snack among my stuffed animals. I am designing and testing solutions to math problems in a playful way.

FOLLOW A CHILD'S LEAD DURING PLAY

Babies and toddlers have favorite activities and toys. Children learn more during play when parents follow their child's lead, provide support, and elaborate on what the child is doing rather than directing it.

- Parents who are sensitive to their child's behaviors and give positive feedback during play have children with higher language ability.⁸
- Toddlers engage in more pretend play when their mothers participate in their play compared with when they play alone.⁹
- Between 9 and 15 months of age, babies understand and say more words when their parents talk about what they are looking at during play.^{10,*11}

try this!

Ask me questions that I can answer, or that you can help me solve. "What color is your room? What is in this kitchen drawer?" Make predictions with me, then we'll investigate together.

* Indicates research from the Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences (I-LABS)

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*3. Meltzoff, A. N. (1988). Imitation of televised models by infants. *Child Development*, 59, 1221-1229.

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*5. Nielsen, M. (2006). Copying actions and copying outcomes: social learning through the second year. *Developmental Psychology*, 42, 555-565.

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