

Play – What to expect and when

Taken from "Baby Talk" (2001) by Sally Ward.

Please note that these stages and the ages attached to them are a rough guide and that many children can present with a delay of up to 6 months and still be considered within the expected range for their age.

Age Range	Play Stage	Examples of what your child may be doing and suggestions of what to do
0—6 months	Play is based on adult-baby interaction – physical play Taking turns to make sounds Looking at objects and trying to reach out to them Looking around Enjoying rhymes and songs	Tickle face, pat tummy, Peekaboo! Adult is the toy! Adult can copy baby's sounds Chew/handle/shake bright coloured objects
6—12 months	Physical rhymes and games Exploring shapes, colours, textures and noises Picking up toys – putting them in a box - taking them out again Notices other children Starting to look at books	Repetition and copying Enjoying lots of objects and materials with different sensory parts. Pop up toys Pushing ball/car to an adult Picking up toys and giving them to other children or adults around them.
12—18 months	Investigative play: making marks, stacking, pushing, rolling, opening, unwrapping. Water play, copying adults Interaction play: Nursery rhymes and songs, taking turns building/posting Pretend play: dolly and teddy play	Simple shape sorter. Pull along toys, cars, boxes. Toy broom/mobile phone. Bricks. Tea set, toy bed, cuddles for teddy/dolly



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18—24 months	<p>Investigative: puzzles, towers, scribbling, playdough, water, sand. Ball play, matching, sorting and constructing. Interacting/Pretending: "Helping" adults, re-enacting activities with doll. Model people and animals. Actions songs/rhymes Needs to play without adult at times. Plays alongside other children.</p>	<p>Simple inset jigsaw. Likes to watch others and join in. Pouring, floating, sinking, burying objects. Rolling, throwing and kicking – balls/bricks Simple zoo, garage, doll's house</p>
2-2 ½ years	<p>Investigative: Pedal a trike, jigsaw puzzles, string beads, building towers, drawing, paint, using scissors. Matching and sorting. Pretend: imitating household tasks, with complete sequences.</p>	<p>Toys that fit together e.g.duplo Moving on from inset puzzles, more and more dextrous. Washing up, cooking, ironing, shopping – taking dolly for a walk.</p>
2½ - 3 years	<p>Investigative: Sand/water. Construction – buildings or roads. Arts and crafts continue to develop. Pretending: Making up sequences of events to act out. These may include imaginary people. Uses dolls in more elaborative pretend sequences. Role play with dressing up outfits.</p>	<p>Using objects and model people for pretend play. Child plays mummy and doll becomes child in acting out sequences from everyday activities. Garage, doll's house, farm puppets. E.g. fireman/fairy</p>



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3-3½ years	<p>Investigative: Active outdoor play. Modelling Materials, baking, gardening.</p> <p>Pretending: Can play well now without any props or toys.</p>	<p>Trikes, run, jump, climb, kick. Play dough e.g. food for dolly. Making biscuits, planting seeds. Children use their imagination – may even have imaginary friend.</p>
3½-4 years	<p>Investigative: Junk modelling. Cutting and pasting. More complex puzzles. Simple card games and board games.</p> <p>Pretending: Play will slowly become more sociable – children will role play with others. They may still need help in resolving conflicts – can be cooperative and aggressive.</p>	<p>Snap, lotto, hairdressers, doctors, dragons and monsters.</p> <p>Boxes and other objects can “become” other things in pretend play – e.g. big box – my shop/house or cardboard tubing – my sword.</p> <p>It takes time to develop skills of negotiation and joint play.</p>