



Stages of Play: 24 to 36 Months The World of Imagination

Playing Pretend

Between 2 and 3, your toddler will use his growing thinking skills to play pretend. With props, like a doll and toy bottle, he will act out steps of a familiar routine—feeding, rocking, and putting a doll to sleep. As your toddler learns to use symbols, his imaginary play skills will grow more complex. A round pillow, for example, will become a pizza.

Toys to Explore:

- Stuffed animals and dolls
- Accessories such as baby blanket, bottle for doll, etc.
- Toy dishes, pots and pans, pretend food
- Toy cars, bus, or train, with little people that fit inside
- Blocks

What You Can Do to Help Your Toddler Learn:

- Let your child choose what to play, and then add on to his activity. If he has a toy bus, you might ask where it's going, or if he would like to pick up some people waiting at the bus stop.
- Give your child a block and say, "Do you want a piece of my birthday cake? It's so yummy" (as you pretend to munch on it). Does she understand the block can stand in for something else? If so, have a birthday party using the block as a cake, pretend to blow the candles out, and "cut" a slice to eat.

Solving Problems Through Play

Sorting toys—putting cars in the one basket and balls in another—is just one way that your toddler is solving problems using thinking skills. You may also see her try one puzzle piece in different spaces, or turn it around to see if it fits. Your child is now also using tools (like a stick) to solve problems (how to reach a toy under the couch).

Toys to Explore:

- Chunky puzzles
- Memory-type games
- Stacking cups or ring stacks
- Shape-sorters and bead mazes
- Toys that be activated—like cars that roll forward when you pull them back

What You Can Do to Help Your Toddler Learn:

- Make your own Memory game using photos of family members. Print out two copies of 10 photos, glue each photo to an index card. Place them face up on the floor and see if your child can find the matches.

- Turn cleaning up into a sorting game. Take photos of your child’s different toys and tape them to the basket or box where they belong. Show your child how to sort his toys. Before you know it, he’ll be an expert at the “clean-up game”!

Now You’re Talking!

Toddlers are learning new words by the day! Most are using two-word phrases (“what that”) and by three, some three-word phrases (“Josie want cookie!”). Toddlers can now follow two-step requests such as “Get your hat and put it on.” Two-year-olds can also understand stories. They can now connect the words you say with the illustrations.

Toys to Explore:

- Board books
- Songs and fingerplays
- Dolls
- Child-safe mirror

What You Can Do to Help Your Toddler Learn:

- During bath-time, ask your child to wash his nose and belly. Then ask him to wash his doll’s nose and belly. Look in a mirror together and name the different parts of your faces—eyes, nose, mouth, ears, and more.
- Read together. If your toddler is wiggly, ask her to do the actions on the page—hopping like the frog or dancing like the little mouse. Ask questions too: “What do you see on this page?” or “Do you see a moon?”

Fantastic Fingers

Your toddler is now able to use his hands and fingers to pick up food, small toys, and more. He may be able to hold a crayon using his thumb and pointer finger, instead of his fist. Toddlers are learning to control the strokes they make with crayons and markers.

Toys to Explore:

- Foam or wooden blocks, plastic interlocking blocks, or bristle blocks
- Chunky puzzles
- Pull-toys, stringing beads, and pop-beads
- Washable crayons and markers

What You Can Do to Help Your Toddler Learn:

- Tape paper to your child’s high chair or to the table and give your child a chance to explore with crayons and markers. Let her scribble away! See if she wants to imitate making a line or circles that you draw first.
- Play with play-dough. Practice rolling the dough, poking holes in it, or making little balls of dough and dropping them in a small cup to dump out. This gives your child many chances to use her hands and fingers to explore and create.

