



Stages of Play: 6-12 Months Babies Discover Connections

During the first year, one of the most important ways your baby learns is by exploring the objects in his world. Read more below about how to support this early development.

Repeating Enjoyable Activities

Babies at this age enjoy repeating actions over and over again. Repetition helps babies learn new skills. Repeating an activity also helps babies understand *cause and effect*, the idea that a specific action leads to a specific response.

Toys to Explore:

- Toys that encourage repetition like rattles, musical instruments, busy-boxes, blocks

What You Can Do to Help Your Baby Learn:

- Give your baby a chance to figure out how a toy works. Let him discover that if he pushes the button, a character will pop out of the busy box. Provide just enough support to help him learn. If he can't press the button hard enough, place your hand on top of his to help, instead of doing it for him.
- Let your baby repeat fun activities. If your baby knocks your block tower down, build another. Keep this back-and-forth play going until your baby loses interest.

Perfecting the Pincer

The “pincer” grasp is the use of the pointer finger and thumb to pick up very small objects, like a piece of cereal. This takes a lot of muscle coordination in the fingers! But it allows babies to begin picking up smaller objects. Babies also begin pointing—which is how they can ask questions (by pointing to a dog to say, “What’s that?”) or request items (by pointing to a bottle).

Toys to Explore:

- Baby-safe, cube-shaped blocks
- Simple puzzles with knobs
- A toy designed to be pulled (such as a rolling toy dog with string to pull)

What You Can Do to Help Your Baby Learn:

- Lay the string for a pull-toy in front of your child and see if he will pick it up using his fingers and thumb. If he doesn't, pull the string yourself and then lay it down again and wait. See if he will try. This game is a chance to practice his pincer grasp.
- Read board books together. Let your child try to turn the pages. Choose some touch-and-feel books that invite exploration with her hands and fingers.

Figuring Out How Things Work

When babies play with a ring stack or shape-sorter, they are learning about the relationships between objects of different sizes and shapes. They are learning which objects go together when they fill-and-dump. They are solving problems through trial and error when they turn the crank and the jack-in-the-box pops up.

Toys to explore:

- Busy box or jack-in-the-box
- Simple shape-sorter
- Wooden or foam blocks and bucket for filling and dumping
- Ring stack or stacking cups

What You Can Do to Help Your Baby Learn:

- Show your baby how to combine objects in her play—like putting blocks in a box or banging two blocks together. This helps her move beyond exploring only the look and feel of objects, and figure out how objects go together.
- Offer your baby a ring stack, stacking cups, or a busy-box to figure out. You may need to model how to use these toys at first. Then watch your child try to “solve the problem” the toy presents.

Using Their Bodies to Explore

During this period, babies roll, sit up, crawl, pull up, cruise along furniture, and sometimes begin to walk. Because these new physical skills are exciting for babies and offer new freedom, active play takes up much of their waking hours. You may even see changes in your baby’s sleeping patterns, such as more night-time wake-ups, while she is working on these new physical skills.

Toys to Explore:

- Toys that can be pushed and pulled—chunky car/truck, toy vacuum, etc.

What You Can Do to Help Your Baby Learn:

- Create a child-safe area in your home where your child can explore safely. Put an interesting toy on a low table or on the sofa as a motivation to pull up and reach it.
- When your baby is cruising along the sofa, place a sturdy chair just a few inches away. Your child will move between them by holding on. When he develops more balance, move the chair a few inches away so he has to let go briefly to reach it.

Having Fun with Sounds and Language

Even before babies can say their first words, they connect with you in back-and-forth “conversation.” So when you talk with your baby, it’s important to give her a turn. She may respond by making a sound, changing her facial expression, or moving her body (such as kicking her legs). Soon she will even begin to squeal, laugh, or babble back at you.

Try:

- Board books, “finger plays”, songs, and rhymes

What You Can Do to Help Your Baby Learn:

- “Translate” your baby’s sounds into the words you think she might mean. If she smiles and waves her arms when you sing *The Eensy Weensy Spider*, say: *You love the spider song! Let’s do it again.* This lets your child know you understand her.
- Make a book that shows photos of your family, pets, home, and your child’s favorite toys. Read the book with your child, naming each photo, to help her learn the names of the people and places in her world.