

Bond with your baby through play

When you think of playing with young children, images might come to mind of kicking a ball back and forth, playing with dolls, driving toy trucks or having a tea party. However, play is important long before a child can talk, run or make believe.

Your baby needs play and interaction to learn about themselves and to develop important basic skills that they will build on as they grow. It is through play that your child bonds with you and the other important people in their life. Play works their brain and body to prepare them for all the important milestones that will come during the first few years of life.

During the earliest stages of your child's life, play is how

Shawna Munro
PARENTING POINTS

Shawna Munro works at the Elspeth Reid Family Resource Centre, a facility of Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba that offers parenting information and support.
» 204-726-6280

you get to know one another. When you hold your baby close, when you look into their eyes, smile and talk or sing to them, they respond by making sounds or movements. Your child learns that you are there to make them feel safe and comfortable. You learn to recognize their cues as they show you what they like and don't like.

Talk and sing to your baby often as you go through your

day. Even though they cannot talk back, you are providing them with the words that they will need when the time comes.

At bath time, or while dressing your baby, talk about their nose, feet, hands and other body parts. Describe the colours, shapes and textures of the toys they touch. Sing the same songs repeatedly so that they become both familiar and comforting.

When your baby starts to babble, you can begin to have "conversations" with them. When they make noises, respond with a few words, then wait for them to reply with more sounds or a smile.

Read to your baby every day and look at picture books together. Choose books that have bright, simple pictures

and talk about what you see. Books that have different textures are fun for babies to touch. Sturdy board books are easy for your child to grasp, to chew on, to pull open and shut, and to turn the pages of.

Hold objects for your baby to look at and track with their eyes. Let them grab a toy from your hand. Eventually, they will learn to move a toy to their mouth to chew and pass it from one hand to the other. When they start to become mobile, set a toy just far enough away

on the floor to make them reach for it.

Play peek-a-boo to help your child understand that someone or something can go out of their sight and then return. This early experience helps prepare your child for the difficult adjustment of being separated from you during those times when you need to leave them in the care of someone else. Hide your face behind your hands and emerge with a smile, or place a light receiving blanket or cloth

over baby and then pull it back.

The first years of your child's life are full of learning and discoveries. As you play with your baby, you are helping them prepare for the many developmental milestones ahead. You are also helping them gain confidence, both in knowing that they are a capable person, and in knowing that you are there to help them succeed.