

A child's interests are

Windows of Opportunity

to fun and enjoyable learning

Play with dolls
is a powerful
learning activity
for many young children



Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AT HOME**

In a family room, living room, or play room

- Set up a basic doll house or make one of your own from a heavy-weight cardboard box, a bookshelf, or a wooden storage cube. Add a few simple furnishings (bed, table, chairs) made from wooden blocks or cardboard and fabric scraps. A group of dolls can represent members of a doll-house family. Place the doll house on the floor or a low table or shelf so your child can see and reach into it easily.

Outdoors

- Provide a pan of soapy water in which your 2-year-old can wash doll clothes and a pan of clear water for rinsing. Show him how to drape the wet clothes over the sides of a laundry basket to let them dry.
- Suggest that your child take along and "chat" with a doll or stuffed-animal friend as she plays outside. Babies and toddlers often develop an attachment to simple, soft dolls and use them as comfort objects and cuddly companions during active play and at bed times.



In the kitchen

- Join your young child in caregiving play with dolls. In the kitchen, such play might naturally involve pretending to cook food and feed a doll.
- Provide play materials that can be used to "feed" dolls such as toy bottles, toy food, doll dishes, or items that can be used to represent these things. Talk about what your child is doing with dolls, offering praise for the different ways he cares for his "baby."

- Expand or add to the richness of your child's play. If she's pretending to feed a doll, for example, you might ask about the food, how your child "cooked it," whether the doll likes it, if there's enough left for you to have a taste, etc. Use "I wonder..." statements to extend play. For instance, you might say, "I wonder what you could use for a little bathtub so your doll can have a bath after supper just like you? Let's see what we can find!"

Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AWAY FROM HOME**

Out and about on everyday errands

- Let your child take on a parenting role in preparing a doll to accompany him on an everyday outing. Use questions to encourage him to think imaginatively about the doll: "Brrr! It's snowy outside today. Do you think Billy Doll needs to wear something warm in the car? What will you put on him?"
- When your ordinary shopping needs take you to stores that sell dolls, allow time to spend with your young child looking at, talking about, and "visiting" the dolls on display. You could help your child make comparisons among the dolls or between the store's dolls and her own doll(s): "What nice dolls! Do you see one that has the same color hair as your doll, Rosie?" "I see you're looking at the doll with big pink shoes. Does your doll have shoes like that, too?" "Look what happy smiles those dolls have! Which one do you think has the happiest face?" "What kind of doll do you think this one is—a baby doll or a big-girl doll?" "Is there a doll here who looks like Mommy?" "Let's see if we can find a doll who looks like you." Praise your child for her responses. Help her say "bye-bye" to the dolls and reassure her that you'll come visit them again.
- When you meet other young children carrying dolls or stuffed animals, help your child interact with them. You might encourage your child to show the other child his doll and say its name. Express interest in the other child's doll by describing it and asking questions about it.

At a public library

- Discover and share some of the many children's storybooks that have been written about dolls. Librarians at your local library can recommend and help you find stories your young doll fan will love. A couple of examples are author/illustrator Johnny Gruelle's books about "Raggedy Ann" and "Raggedy Andy" and *Elizabeth's Doll* by Stuve-Bodeen and Hale. Enjoy reading and talking about storybook dolls with your child.

Visiting friends and family

- Visits to friends and family might offer your young child pleasant opportunities to look at, touch, and play with a variety of dolls, doll clothes and furniture, and toy figures other than those she's familiar with from her toy box at home. Her interest in your hosts' dolls can provide common ground for play and conversation.
- As you drive in the car on your way to visit family and friends, make up and tell exciting once-upon-a-time stories starring your child and his favorite doll. As he rides in his car seat, hugging



his doll, he'll enjoy hearing tales of make-believe adventures and fun they share. "Once upon a time, Daniel and Baby Tommy decided to go for a ride in an airplane, just like the one we see flying overhead. 'Wheee! I've always wanted to fly like a bird!' said Baby Tommy. 'This is your lucky day,' said Daniel, 'because I happen to be very good at flying airplanes!' So the two friends put on their parachutes and set off for the airport...."

- Plan a "special event" involving dolls as part of a play date at a young friend's house. Offer to bring along the makings (snacks and dishes) for a dolls' tea party, for example. It can be an enjoyable "ice-breaker" for young playmates.

