

Powerful FUN with *Responsive Playthings*

Making a difference with infant learning games

Researchers who study infant learning have found that **active learning games** help children who are developmentally very young grasp the important connection between their own actions and interesting and fun things that happen next. When young children understand that *their behavior* can *cause* something they encounter in their environment to respond in an interesting way, they've achieved an extremely significant learning milestone. They've become *active learners!*

Everyday interactions with toys and other baby-safe objects found in a child's ordinary surroundings are excellent times for helping the very young child learn the relationship between cause and effect—the powerful understanding that HE or SHE can *make things happen!* Bath times, meal times, taking rides in a stroller or grocery cart, changing clothes ... all are excellent, naturally occurring opportunities for active learning. And when this learning takes place in the context of playful fun—as part of an active, rewarding, cause-and-response “game”—the learning is even more powerful.

In this issue of *Parents CAN!*, we present (on the reverse side of this page) a handful of such active learning games. The games are best used with children whose abilities range from 2 to about 8 months of age. Consider these games as starting points for creating other games that appeal to a child's interests, strengths, enjoyment, and sense of fun. The child will be delighted as he or she experiences increasing control over interesting aspects of the things encountered in his or her life. Just remember to allow plenty of time for your child to become aware of and figure out the connection between his or her action and the enjoyable response it prompts. Soon your child will be performing the action again and again!



The little one pictured above reacts gleefully as she realizes that her actions—moving a lever, pushing a button, spinning a dial—cause this “busy box” toy to produce the rewarding sounds, pictures, and motions he enjoys.

More opportunities...

Have fun with your own variations on the following active learning games **and similar ones you and your child invent yourselves!**

Gone Fishin’

By splashing water with his arms and hands, the child gets to see floating toys bob and spin. To play, you’ll need a water table or a dishpan filled with water. Float a variety of toys on the surface—rubber ducks, small boats, ping-pong balls, etc. Stand or seat the child beside the water table or other water container. Place his hands in the water. Gently help him splash the water so he can see how this makes the toys move. Wait for him to move his hands again. If he needs help, tap his arms and hands. The bathtub and the kitchen sink are other locations to try this game.

Groovin’

A musical keyboard, especially one with a light and pleasing “touch,” is a great tool for teaching the connection between an action and what happens next. To play this game, make sure the keys are within easy reach and say: “Let’s make some music.” Help the child put her hands on the keys. Wait and see if she presses the keys to make music. If she needs help, gently push her hands on the keys to make them sound. As long as she is pushing the keys to make music, the game continues.

Whole Lotta Shakin’

In this game, the child gets to see pom-pom streamers shake, hear the swishing sound they make when they move back and forth, and feel the gentle brush of the colorful paper or plastic streamers.

Let the child sit on the floor facing you with his hands free to shake back and forth. Place the pom-pom handles in his hands so he’s able to hold on to them. If needed, Velcro can be applied to make an adjustable loop to attach to his hands or wrists. Help him move his hands back and forth so he can see, hear, and feel what happens. Wait for him to shake the pom-poms on his own. If he needs help, call his name or touch his hands so he can enjoy the pom-poms’ action again.

On the Road Again

In this game, the child’s vocalizations result in a fun wagon ride. You’ll need a child’s wagon and materials (blankets, pillows, seating device, etc.) to securely position the child in it. Place the child in the wagon. Look at the child and pull the wagon a short distance. Stop and wait for her to make a sound with her voice. If she doesn’t, gently call her name. Each time the child vocalizes, pull the wagon a short distance and wait for the next vocalization.



Play That Funky Music

In this game, the child enjoys seeing a mobile shake and hearing it make jingling sounds by kicking her leg. You’ll need a mobile that makes a jingling sound when it shakes, a Velcro bracelet that fits around the child’s ankle, and a ribbon long enough to reach from the child’s ankle to the mobile.

To play, lay the child on her back with the mobile suspended above her chest so that she can see and hear it. Attach the Velcro bracelet around one of her ankles. Gently help the child kick her leg to show her what happens. Wait for her to kick her leg. If she doesn’t, tap her leg or gently move it again. Each time she kicks her leg, she’s rewarded by appealing movement and sounds.

If the child needs support in order to kick her leg, place a rolled-up towel under her knees. You can also try placing the mobile low enough for her to reach with her feet, without use of the ribbon.

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