

Everyday Connection and Play

Choose one idea that fits the moment. The age groups are browsing guides, not a checklist of skills a child must demonstrate. Use safe materials, supervise the activity and adapt it to the child's abilities and needs.

With a baby

A pause in a familiar routine

During a calm care moment, describe what you are doing in a few words. Pause for a sound, expression or movement. Respond gently and stop when the baby appears to need a break or another kind of care.

A book together

Choose a suitable baby book and look at a picture together. Name something the baby appears interested in. Turning one page or looking at one picture can be enough.

Notice: What caught the baby's attention? What suggested continuing or pausing?

With a toddler

A small helping task

Invite the child to put a safe item in a basket or help with another manageable task. Use a short direction and offer help. Keep hazards and small choking-risk objects out of reach.

Words during play

Describe an action without turning it into a quiz. If the child adds a word or gesture, respond and wait. Let the exchange follow the child's interest.

Notice: Was the task within reach? Did fewer words or a demonstration help?

With a preschooler

Pretend together

Ask whether you can join the child's pretend activity. Let the child explain your role. Add an idea when invited rather than directing the whole story.

Build, draw or arrange

Offer safe, age-appropriate materials the child can use in different ways. Ask an occasional question or describe what you notice. Leave room for repetition, a change in direction or an unfinished result.

Notice: What idea did the child return to? What happened when you waited before helping?

Adapt the invitation

- Move materials within reach or use a more stable surface.
- Offer fewer items if a large selection feels overwhelming.
- Use the family's language, gestures or preferred communication supports.
- Change the position, sound level or duration to support participation.
- Ask the child's educator, therapist or clinician how to adapt an activity when needed.

A short reflection

What we tried:

What interested the child:

What we would change:

An idea to return to:

Keep play from becoming a test

This guide is not a developmental assessment and does not assign a score. If you are concerned about a child's development, discuss specific observations with their clinician.

For background, read NAEYC's [play and learning resource](#) and Harvard's [responsive interaction explanation](#). The activities above are examples for everyday care and play.

Activity cards: choose one and stop when it no longer fits

These original activity examples use everyday interactions. An adult stays present, checks materials and adjusts the invitation to the child. Age labels help you browse; they do not establish a required skill.

Baby: a sound and a pause

You need: A calm awake moment; no equipment.

Try: Sit where the baby can comfortably attend to you. Respond gently to a sound, movement or expression, then wait. Follow one more exchange if the baby remains interested. Pause when the baby turns away, becomes unsettled or needs care.

Adapt: Use the family's familiar voice, gestures or communication methods. Reduce background noise or change position if that supports comfort.

Baby: one picture together

You need: An intact board book appropriate for a baby.

Try: Share one picture, name what draws attention and wait. Allow looking or a sound to be a response. Close the book when the baby needs a break; finishing it is not the task.

Check: Keep loose or damaged pieces out of reach. Put the book away from the infant sleep area afterward.

Toddler: carry, place and return

You need: Two clean washcloths and a stable, open basket on the floor.

Try: Show the child putting one cloth in the basket. Invite them to add the next or take it out again. Describe one action and let them repeat it or change direction.

Adapt: Bring the basket closer, demonstrate slowly or take turns. Avoid replacing the invitation with a test of colors or counting.

Toddler: a familiar song with a pause

You need: A short song your family knows.

Try: Sing or gesture together. Leave a pause for the child to add a sound, word or action if they want. Continue without demanding the missing word. Stop or switch activities when interest changes.

Adapt: Use signs, movement, a quieter voice or the child's preferred communication support. Sound does not have to be part of the activity.

Preschooler: a pretend delivery

You need: A small open basket and a few large, intact play objects suitable for the child; no small parts.

Try: Ask where a delivery should go and which role you can take. Let the child choose what happens. Follow the pretend instructions and add a question only when it helps the story continue.

Check: Keep the route clear. Leave bags with drawstrings, plastic bags, cords and small objects out of the game.

Preschooler: build and change

You need: Large, age-appropriate building pieces and a clear floor space.

Try: Let the child arrange the pieces. Ask whether they want you to join. If something falls, wait before fixing it; they may want to rebuild differently. Help when asked without deciding what the finished construction must be.

Adapt: Use a stable surface within reach or let the child direct placement through their preferred communication method.

Keep one idea for next time

The activity we chose:

What caught the child's interest:

A change that would make participation easier:

Whether the child wants to return to it:

No score is needed. Save an idea because the child enjoyed it, not because it produced a photograph or a particular answer.

Related resources

[Read Learning Through Play](#) · [Save this guide as text](#)

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