

PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE KIT

Sharing Early Learning Resources

For conversations about everyday play, reading and connection with babies and young children. Choose activities that fit the child and setting, then invite caregivers to notice what interests the child.

In this kit

1. [Talking and reading together](#)
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Using the materials

Choose the pages that fit your conversation. Keep blank worksheets for individual use, and distinguish fictional practice examples from a family's own circumstances. Families do not need to return completed worksheets to NPF.

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Print edition: October 2026. National Parenting Foundation.

Talking and reading together

[Read Talking and reading together online](#)

A conversation with a young child does not need a special setting. It can begin with something the child notices, a sound they make or a picture they return to in a book.

Leave time for your child to respond. You do not have to keep talking, finish every page or turn every question into a lesson.

Start with what has the child's attention

Notice an object, action or expression and offer a few words. Then pause. A baby's response may be a sound or movement; an older child may add a word, gesture or question.

Harvard's [serve and return explanation](#) describes the role of responsive exchanges in early development. At home, that can be as ordinary as responding to a child's interest during care or play.

Let a book become a conversation

A young child may want to look at one picture, turn several pages at once or return to a familiar book. Follow the interest while keeping the book use safe and age appropriate. You can describe a picture or connect it with something the child knows.

ZERO TO THREE's [guide to introducing books](#) emphasizes positive shared experiences. You can enjoy a book together without finishing the story.

Use questions sparingly

An occasional open question can invite an idea: "What do you think is happening here?" But a series of questions with right answers can make the interaction feel like a test. Add a comment, wait and see what the child wants to contribute.

For example, while looking at a picture of rain, you might say, "That person is carrying a big umbrella." If the child points to something else, follow that contribution rather than returning immediately to your original point.

Use the language of your family

Talk, sing and read in the languages that are meaningful and comfortable for your household. Share familiar words and stories with other caregivers when useful. Bring questions about language development, hearing or communication to your child's health care team.

NAEYC's [early literacy resource](#) offers examples of connecting talk, books and everyday writing. Choose ideas that fit your child's interest and access needs.

Find a manageable moment

Keep an appropriate book where you can reach it during a calm part of the day. A short shared moment may be enough. If a child is tired, distressed or wants to move, you can stop and return another time.

Libraries may offer books and family activities, but check local details directly. You do not need a large collection or expensive learning materials to begin with conversation.

Notice what your child enjoys

Consider what interested your child and whether the exchange felt comfortable. Do not count vocabulary, compare reading progress or infer a diagnosis from one activity. Bring questions about communication or development to your child's clinician and describe specific observations.

Share what you notice with a relative or educator. Tell them which book, song or topic has caught the child's attention. Ask what the child enjoys with them. A familiar book or song can give another caregiver a way to join in.

Let the same book work in different ways

With a baby, hold an appropriate book where it is comfortable to look at together. Name one picture, make a gentle sound or respond to the baby's interest. A baby can take part through looking, movement or sound; there is no need to expect a word.

With a toddler, leave room for pointing, page turning and repeated favorites. If the child says “dog,” you could add, “The dog is running,” then wait. You have extended the conversation without asking the child to repeat you.

With a preschooler, follow an idea beyond the picture. The child might connect a story with something that happened at the park or invent a different ending. You can wonder aloud, listen and return to the story when the child wants to.

These examples describe ways to share attention, not age tests. The American Academy of Pediatrics explains the broader role of shared reading in its [family reading overview](#).

When the child wants the same page again

Repetition gives you a familiar place to begin. You can read the same words, notice a different detail or let the child supply an action or sound. You do not need to replace a favorite book with a harder one simply because it is familiar.

If reading every printed word is uncomfortable for you, talk about the pictures, tell a familiar story or sing a song together. A family member can use the language they know best. Shared time does not require an adult to perform like a professional storyteller.

For access needs, choose a position, format or communication support that lets the child take part. A sturdy book, a stable surface or fewer distractions may help. Ask an educator, therapist or clinician about more specific adaptations when needed; there is no single posture or spoken response that defines successful reading together.

Related resources

[Explore everyday play ideas](#) · [Prepare for a well-child visit](#)

Learning through play

[Read Learning through play online](#)

A child may turn a block into a phone, repeat a building experiment or spend a long time arranging objects. From an adult's perspective, the activity may look unfinished. From the child's perspective, there may be an idea worth trying again.

You can make room for that exploration without planning a formal lesson.

Watch for the child's idea

Pause before directing the activity. What is the child trying to do? What do they return to? You might describe what you see or ask whether they want you to join.

NAEYC's [discussion of play and learning](#) explains how play can involve language, relationships and problem-solving. You can follow the child's interest without setting a learning goal for each activity.

Offer materials with more than one use

Choose safe, age-appropriate materials that a child can use in different ways. Drawing supplies, suitable building pieces or props for pretend play can invite several ideas. Check for choking and other hazards, and supervise the activity.

The right choice depends on the child. A material that works well for one preschooler may not be suitable for a younger sibling or a child with different movement or sensory needs.

Join without taking over

Follow an invitation or ask how you can help. If a child is arranging a pretend meal, you might ask where to sit. If they are building something, you can describe an observation rather than correcting the design.

An example: "That piece keeps sliding. What would you like to try?" Then allow time. If the child asks for help, offer enough to make participation possible without automatically finishing the task yourself.

Make space for repetition and stopping

A child may repeat an action because it remains interesting, not because a more advanced activity is needed. They may also leave a project before you think it is complete. Allow time to repeat an idea or move on, as long as the activity is safe and manageable.

When time is limited, explain the transition and, if possible, decide together what can be saved for later. A photograph may help remember a construction, but ask before photographing a child or sharing an image with others.

Adapt the activity

Move materials within reach, reduce the number of objects or offer a different way to communicate an idea. Ask your child's therapist, educator or clinician how to adapt an activity when needed. Participation can look different across children.

NAEYC's [resource on parent-child interactions](#) offers ideas for following a child's interests. Choose one that fits the moment instead of trying to reproduce an entire activity plan.

Keep adult expectations in perspective

Play does not need to result in a photograph, a finished product or a skill demonstration. Ask yourself whether the child had room to explore and whether you could respond without too much pressure.

If play, interaction or communication raises a developmental concern, discuss your observations with the child's clinician. A play activity is not an assessment.

Try an invitation with room for a child's idea

Choose the invitation for the child, not the other way around. With a baby, a responsive exchange during calm awake care may be the activity. With a toddler, placing and removing large suitable objects can invite repetition. With a preschooler, the same materials may become part of a construction or pretend story. The ideas below are for children who can use the materials safely; the complete baby and toddler cards are in the linked tool.

Build a place. Offer age-appropriate large building pieces and a clear floor area. A child might make a road, a room or a pile. Describe what you notice and let the child decide what it becomes. If they ask you to join, ask where your piece belongs.

Make a pretend errand. With a preschooler, use a few suitable pretend-play objects to act out an everyday trip. The child can choose who is shopping, delivering or helping. Follow the child's story rather than requiring the activity to teach a particular lesson.

Draw together. Place suitable paper and age-appropriate drawing materials on a stable surface. You can draw beside the child without showing a model they must copy. Ask about their marks only if they want to talk about them; the picture does not have to represent anything.

Keep small items, damaged materials and cords out of the activity. Supervision and suitability matter especially when younger children share the space. The [connection and play tool](#) provides complete activity examples.

Help just enough to keep participation possible

If a child asks for help, check what part is difficult. You might stabilize a base, move a material within reach or show one action, then let the child continue. If they ask you to complete everything, offer to work alongside them without making the whole activity yours.

For a child with movement or sensory needs, the same idea can happen with different materials or positioning. A child might choose the next piece through pointing or another communication method while an adult places it. Participation does not require everyone to handle objects in the same way.

NAEYC's [principles of development and learning](#) discuss play, adult support and individual differences. These examples apply that general approach; they are original NPF activity suggestions, not a prescribed developmental program.

Related resources

[Explore Everyday Connection and Play](#) · [Browse preschool resources](#)

Everyday Connection and Play

[Read Everyday Connection and Play online](#)

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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Play Activity Cards

[Read Play Activity Cards online](#)

Choose an invitation your child can enjoy. Each card gives materials, a starting point and ways to respond. Use suitable materials, supervise as needed and adapt the activity to the child's participation; it is not a test of development.

Babies

A picture conversation

Materials: a sturdy picture book or a few large, safe pictures.

Sit where the baby can see your face and the picture. Name what catches their attention, pause and respond to a look, movement or sound. You can repeat one picture rather than turn every page. Stop or change position when the baby turns away or needs a break.

Copy a sound

Materials: your voice and a comfortable place to interact.

Listen to a sound the baby makes and respond with a similar sound or a short word. Pause for a response. The interaction can be brief; you are taking turns rather than asking the baby to perform.

Toddlers

A pretend shop

Materials: large, safe household objects and a bag or container.

Invite the child to choose a few things for the shop. Ask for one item, name it and exchange roles. Follow a different idea if the child decides the bag is for a trip. Leave small objects or unsuitable containers out of play.

Move and stop

Materials: clear space and a simple signal.

Choose a movement both of you can do: walking, reaching, tapping or moving hands. Use a word or gesture for stop, then begin again. Let the child choose the next movement. Adapt for sitting or mobility support rather than expecting everyone to run.

Preschoolers

Build a place

Materials: suitable blocks, boxes or large construction materials.

Ask what kind of place the child would like to build. Help when invited and describe a choice you notice. If something falls, ask whether to try again or change the idea. The conversation matters more than the finished shape.

Tell a picture story

Materials: a familiar picture book or the child's drawing.

Invite the child to choose a character and say what happens next. Add a small idea if invited. A gesture, drawing or selected picture can be part of the story; an oral answer is not required.

Make an activity fit

What interests the child:

Materials and space available:

One way to adapt participation:

What we noticed and might try next:

[Read about learning through play](#) · [Explore outdoor play](#) · [Try six quick everyday activities](#)

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Talk and Read Together Cards

[Read Talk and Read Together Cards online](#)

Use one prompt at a time during a shared book or ordinary conversation. Respond to your child's interests and communication. You do not have to finish the book or obtain an answer to every question.

Notice together

Point out something the child is looking at: “That dog is running.” Pause. A look, gesture, sound or word can be a response. Follow what they notice next instead of quizzing them on all the pictures.

Add a little

If the child says “truck,” you might add “a big truck” or describe what it is doing. Leave room for them to continue. The aim is a shared conversation, not a correction after every word.

Return to a familiar page

Read a favorite page again. Invite participation in a phrase or action the child recognizes, without making it a requirement. Familiarity can leave more room for noticing a new detail.

Imagine another part

With a preschooler, wonder what a character might do next. “Where do you think they will go?” You can offer your own idea and listen to a different one. A picture choice or drawing can take the place of a spoken answer.

Use the languages you share

Talk in the language or languages that help you connect. You can discuss a picture even if the book's printed language differs. Find professional communication information if you have a concern rather than assuming multilingual experience is the cause.

[Read about speech and more than one language](#)

Three illustrative beginnings

- **Baby:** show one picture, name it and respond to the baby's attention.
- **Toddler:** follow a pointed-to item and add a short description.
- **Preschooler:** choose a familiar character and invent another part of the story together.

Our own invitation

A book, picture or daily activity:

A short opening:

Ways the child can respond:

Borrow a book, use an existing drawing or talk about something outside. Buying a new resource is not necessary to begin.

[Read the full talking and reading guide](#) · [Explore everyday connection](#)

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