

# How to play with your child (3-6 years)

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## Playing with your child

Play is more than just fun for your child. It is how she learns best, and how she works out who she is, how the world works and where she fits into it.

## Why is play important?

Play is how your child learns, experiments and solves problems. In fact, play is vital for overall development and wellbeing. Preschoolers and school-age children love to play with parents and other children, and playing with others teaches them about social relations, sharing and taking turns.

## Tips to help your child play

All children are unique, so it is important to **follow your child's interests**. Here are some play ideas your child might like:

- **Dramatic and pretend play.** Dress-ups give your child a chance to try out different roles like being a mum or a dad. Put together a dress-up box of old clothes, shoes, handbags and other odds and ends.
- **Messy play.** This includes painting, and water or sand play.
- **Physical play.** This teaches your child about coordination and balance, and how far she can push her physical abilities. Playground equipment is good for physical play.
- **Songs, books, riddles and silly rhymes.** These are great fun to share with your child because you will get to see the funny side of her personality, and they also improve her language and vocabulary.
- **Sorting games.** Sorting blocks, buttons or beads can lay the groundwork for math and numeracy skills.
- **Simple board games.** These give your child a chance to learn about taking turns, following the rules, counting and being a good sport.

## Structured and unstructured play

**Structured** play is more organised and happens at a fixed time or in a set space and is often led by a grown-up. As your child gets older, her day will be more structured to fit around school. She is likely to be involved in plenty of structured play activities too, like playing team sports or games, doing puzzles and jigsaws, playing card and board games, and learning a musical instrument. Helping around the house is another example of a structured activity, for example your child might like to help prepare dinner or sweep the floor with you.

**Unstructured** play is where your child decides for herself what she wants to do and how to do it. It is valuable because it gives your child time to let her thoughts and imagination

roam, explore ideas and think creatively, and run around just for fun. Here are some ideas:

- **outdoor play** like riding bikes or scooters, playing in a tent or going the local playground with you and some friends.
- **simple craft activities** like threading beads and string, making puppets with old socks or paper bags, or painting and making prints with sponges or toothbrushes.
- **dress-up games** and pretend play, which let your child explore and express emotions and try out roles.
- **musical play** activities like jumping and dancing to music, or making and playing simple homemade instruments, which are good for expressing emotions and imagination.

### Screen time

At this age, children can enjoy some screen time. It is OK to let your child play a video game or app or watch a favourite TV show or video for a short time. And if you can be involved in these activities it is even better. But too much time in front of screens like tablets, phones, computers and televisions can lead to poorer language, social and physical development, and sleep problems.



For some suggestions on rhymes, click [here](#) to download a booklet on rhymes!

### **Recommended Reads**

- [Let's play! discover and explore the everyday world with your child](#)
- [Creating beautiful mess: ten essential play experiences for a joyous childhood](#)
- [The smarter pre-schooler: unlocking your child's intellectual potential](#)

Engage your child with simple activities at home! Check out some of these things you can do together:

- [Animal Masks](#)
- [Snakes and Ladders](#)