



Tots Play's Top 10 Tips for Making Play Times Count

Simple ways to boost your child's development while having fun together!



1) Make Time for Play

When you are at home with your little one it's very easy to get distracted by all the things that need to get done and making time to focus on nothing but play, despite the good intentions you might have for this, can get put the bottom of the list.

To make sure it doesn't get squeezed out of your busy day try scheduling time just for play and doing your best to stick to it. This could be just at home in between nap times and meals or it could be a particular time to go out to enjoy play time together.

Going to a regular class which offers structured play activities, such as Tots Play, can also be a great way to make sure you get this time together without distractions, and can also give you inspiration for what to do during your play times at home too.

Scheduling your play times also means that you can get all those other things done while knowing that you and your child have had the benefit of that focused play time for the day – one less thing to give yourself a hard time about!



2) Get Up Close and Personal

The best gift you can give your little one is your undivided attention! To let them know they have it, hold your newborn facing you on your lap or in your arms so they can easily see your face, get down on your tummy, face to face, during tummy time play with your growing baby, or crouched or crawling with your child once they are mobile.

Eye contact, lots of smiles and talking or singing during play time will all help build the bond between you and your baby or toddler as well as helping them to feel secure and confident, to explore their world and develop their own unique personality.



3) Expand Their Experience (and repeat their favourites)

Every time your baby or toddler experiences something new connections are made between cells in the brain creating a pathway. The more of these pathways there are the more the brain develops and allow your child to be able to do. These pathways become the building blocks for all future learning.

In fact a baby's brain has the capacity to develop so fast that by age two a child who is developing normally, and is exposed to a wide range of experiences, has the same number of connection as an adult. By age three, this number has doubled.

You have a big part to play in what your baby or toddler experiences and therefore the way and the rate at which their brain develops, so making sure they have a wide range of play experiences is a great way to do this, both at home and out and about. Not sure what to do? At Tots Play we aim to give you lots of inspiration for these play times both at classes and through our play guides and resources – so keep reading!

To strengthen those pathways though these experiences need to be repeated frequently, so when you are singing their favourite song or playing the same game of drop the toy and pick it up for the 50th time today, there is lots of important learning going on there too!



4) Use What You Have

You don't need to go out and buy lots of expensive toys for your little one to enjoy play time. For babies and toddlers all sorts of things you already have at home can provide great opportunities for exploration and new discoveries.

Make your child a treasure basket of household items with different sensory experiences. You could include things like a sponge from the bathroom, wooden spoon from the kitchen, scarf from your wardrobe and an orange from the fruit bowl giving your little one the opportunity to learn about textures, colours, shapes, sizes and lots more.

How about a treasure hunt around the house finding something of a particular colour in each room, or a different colour in each room, or introducing your little one to opposites by turning the lights on and off or showing them how the cupboard door can be open or closed?

Get lots more simple ideas like these with the Tots Play Activity Guides and Play at Home Packs.



5) Get Back to Nature

There is no better way to stimulate all the senses and provide lots of new experiences for your little one than getting outside with them.

The textures you find will be quite different to those of their usual toys, like the bark of a tree or the grass in the park. What sounds can you pick out, perhaps birds or animals if you are in the countryside, or traffic and people in the city, all can help hone your child's listening skills. What can you discover using the other

senses that will increase the awareness your baby or toddler has of the world?

You may want to collect or use things you find out and about for play time too. Pine cones, sticks, stones, shells, leaves or flowers are all great for some play time fun. Depending on your child's age you could use these things for anything from a treasure collection to explore with their senses (see tips 4 and 8) to things to paint on or with, sorting games or even imaginary play for older toddlers.

Just getting out for some fresh air and a change of scenery every day by going for a walk, no matter what the weather is also a wonderful way to boost your mood and get everyone some exercise at the same time!



6) Sing Songs and Rhymes

Singing is the only activity that actively uses both sides of the brain, boosting the activity that goes on within it and helping it to grow. Songs and rhymes also help to develop language and memory, creativity and imagination, co-ordination and rhythm, and build listening and concentration, which are fundamental to learning. Best of all singing simple songs is fun and everyone can join in.

Sing simple songs and nursery rhymes with your child every day. Don't worry about what you sound like, your voice is your child's favourite sound in the world.

Show and help them to practice actions to go along with the songs, and they will soon be doing them by themselves.

Try the simple song in this [video](#), a favourite at Tots Play classes, and make it even more fun by adding the actions and movements. Click [HERE](#) to watch video of Twirling all Around

If you need some help remembering the words or tunes to those rhymes you used to know you will find both traditional nursery rhymes and original songs at Tots Play and they are available to download via the website.



7) Get Physical

Any time a child is moving their body their brain is also active and growing. With each movement messages travel around the brain, helping your child to learn and understand more about themselves and the world around them. Gross motor skills, as well as muscle tone in the body, must be developed before fine motor skills, such as those needed for drawing and writing, can be mastered.

Any physical activity is great for your child, but suitable activities will, of course depend on a child's age and stage of development.

Try some of these at home;

With babies, start by stretching and moving their arms and legs, lifting and swinging them up and down and side to side, and rolling them over.

For those who are crawling, set up an obstacle course of cushions or other objects to crawl over, round and through.

Once your child is mobile you can make a more challenging course involving climbing, stepping over things, balancing and lots more.

From around the age of two years children introduce activities that involve jumping, skipping, galloping and even hopping.



The best reason for getting active with your little one though is how much fun you will both have!



8) Use All The Senses

Children learn best when they use their whole body and all their senses, and in fact really make use of all the senses together to make discoveries about the world, much more than we do as adults, where we tend to rely on just one or two of the senses at a time.

The more of the senses that are in use in any interaction with your little one or any activity that they are engaged in the easier it is for them to process and absorb the information they are receiving. When you are playing together or setting up play activities therefore always be thinking of how to engage more of the senses.

This also applies to your everyday activities, at bath time for example make sure to help your little one focus on what he or she can HEAR, like the water running and splashing, and you saying the words bath and splash, FEEL, the water and its temperature, the texture of their bath toys or soap suds, SMELL, their shampoo or soap or any other aromas you might add for bath time, and SEE, such as how the water moves when you splash, the movement of their rubber duck across the surface of their bath water or you using sign language to demonstrate the words for bath, splash, duck or any others you may learn from classes or for yourself.





9) Wait for an Invitation

We often think that young children have a very short attention span as it can sometimes feel like as soon as we give them something to play with they want something else, but in fact even young babies are able to concentrate and focus on something for quite a while when it is something that they have chosen and are interested in.

With certain play activities, such as treasure basket play (see tip 4) or other exploration experiences, try to let your child lead the way in letting you know what they want to play with and how they want to use or examine it. Once you have set up the activity remain with them to support their play but don't interfere with how they are playing or exploring unless they invite you to. This might be with words for an older toddler, holding something out to you, or making eye contact to let you know they want you to play too with younger children.

Not only will they learn much more from each experience in this way, and increase their ability to concentrate, it also lets you learn more about your child and what interests and engages them. You can use this knowledge when planning more play time fun so each play time becomes more and more about your little one and their own unique personality.



10) Make sure it's fun for you too!

The more you enjoy play time with your little one the more you will want to spend time engaged in play with them, so play times should be fun for you as well as them!

Think about which of the play activities you try that you enjoy most and what it is you enjoy about them and try to find those elements in whatever you and your baby or toddler get up to for play time to make it a positive experience for you both.

Children are very quick to pick up on how we feel, so if you want them to be having fun the best way to start is to get involved and having fun yourself!

Bonus Tip!

Your little one will only be little for so long so don't miss out on these precious days where play is their most important work and you are their very favourite play mate! What you do is far less important than just doing something together, so whether at a class like [Tots Play](#) or just spending time at home, enjoy every minute.

Happy Playing!

Helen (Founder of Tots Play)

Tots Play offers a varied programme of activity classes, party sessions and play resources for babies and toddlers to enjoy with a parent or carer. All of our activities are designed to provide, not only age appropriate learning experiences for your child, but also exciting, interactive play sessions, creating special moments for you to enjoy together. Each class and activity is designed to help your child grow through a wide range of physical, musical, creative and sensory play making it every class you need in one!

For more information or to find a class near you visit www.totsplay.co.uk

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