

Learning through Play – A Developmental Guide*

When choosing a toy for a child. It is most important to observe what a child is now capable of doing and what he/she is beginning to master rather than using strict age appropriate guidelines. This chart is intended for use as a guide for choosing an appropriate play activity according to each child's level of development.

When a child is able to:	Provide:	To Encourage:
<p>0-3 months Follow objects with eyes</p> <p>Respond to sound by turning head or by general body movements</p> <p>Grasp objects when put in hand</p>	<p>Mobiles (musical or silent), mirror</p> <p>Musical mobiles, radio, rattles</p> <p>Small handled rattles</p>	<p>Eye movements/attention to movements</p> <p>Listening, following sounds</p> <p>Grasping/body awareness</p>
<p>4-5 months Lift head when on stomach, propping on arms</p> <p>Smile when looking at self</p> <p>Place objects in mouth</p> <p>Kick legs</p> <p>Reach out to objects</p>	<p>Mobiles placed within view on stomach, radio, movable windups</p> <p>Mirrors</p> <p>Brightly colored rattles with small grasp</p> <p>Soft balls, foam bricks</p> <p>Hanging toys, rattles, crib gyms</p>	<p>Strength of neck & back muscles</p> <p>Social behaviors</p> <p>Oral stimulation, hand-to-mouth motions, body awareness</p> <p>Awareness of body</p> <p>Aiming and grasping, visual, auditory, kinesthetic awareness</p>
<p>6 months Prop self on arms when on stomach/reaching with one hand</p> <p>Sit supported</p> <p>Squeeze objects</p> <p>Bang toys in play</p>	<p>Toys that move when touched</p> <p>Activity centers, balls</p> <p>Squeeze toys</p> <p>Blocks</p>	<p>Movement (rolling, weight shifting, pre-crawling)</p> <p>Exploration using two hands</p> <p>Gross grasp, association of movement with effect (sound producing)</p> <p>Play at midline, eye-hand coordination</p>
<p>7-8 months Push up onto hands and knees</p> <p>Sit momentarily unsupported</p> <p>Transfer hand-hand</p>	<p>Push toys that move easily</p> <p>Toys that move easily, toys with suction base</p> <p>Blocks, rattles</p>	<p>Ability to move self/pre-crawling skills</p> <p>Balance sitting, eye-hand coordination</p> <p>Practice grasping and releasing, midline play</p>

When a child is able to:	Provide:	To encourage:
7-8 months (cont'd) Pull string adaptively Manipulate bells, play with noisemaking toys Makes sounds	Hanging toys Bells, noisy toys Baby mirror, telephone, radios	Realization of effect of grasping movement Auditory discrimination, provide stimulation Simple imitation in social context
9 months Sit unsupported Begin crawling Pull to standing Poke and Probe Pull peg out of pegboard	Swings, supported rocking horse, activity centers, balls, toys using two hands Push toys Furniture in environment Pop-up toys, objects that will produce a response when poked Pegboards, peg men toys, blocks	Balance sitting, protective responses Locomotion, increase mobility Coordination of gross motor movement. Confidence and independence Increased isolated use of index finger Use of opposed grasp
10 months Hit objects with something else Put objects in/out of container Oppose thumb-finger Look for objects upon visual/auditory stimulation	Drums, first xylophone, pots & pans Pails, sorting boxes, cups blocks Pegboards, peg men toys, blocks Pop-up toys	Increased eye-hand coordination Beginning space perception skills, eye-hand coordination Increase higher level hand coordination Search for objects even when hidden
11 months Cruise (take steps while supporting self, moving to side) Imitate scribble on paper	Furniture, large immovable toys Large crayons, paper	Balance standing, lateral movement, confidence Lateral pincer grasp, refinement of eye-hand coordination
1 year Walk with support Walk without support momentarily	Babywalkers, push toys on wheels	Refinement of balance skills, coordination of large body movements

When a child is able to:	Provide:	To encourage:
<p>1 year (cont'd) Release ball/push ball</p> <p>Remove lids off objects Remove stacking discs</p> <p>Put in large pegs</p> <p>Enjoy rhythms</p>	<p>Large balls</p> <p>Large jars/containers Donut shaped stacking toys</p> <p>Pegboard/toys using pegman</p> <p>Musical toys</p>	<p>Coordination of two sides of body, coordination of grasp release</p> <p>Coordination of two hands</p> <p>Eye-hand coordination development</p> <p>Eye-hand coordination, space perception</p> <p>Simple imitation of sounds, body movements to music</p>
<p>15 months Walk independently</p> <p>Throw objects Make tower of two</p> <p>Put objects in/out of container in a related manner Place circle in formboard Maintain sitting balance with movement in different directions</p>	<p>Baby walkers, push toys, pull toys</p> <p>Balls Blocks, stacking toy</p> <p>Cups, blocks, posting boxes, cardboard boxes Simple formboards Large rocking toys</p>	<p>Better standing balance and independence walking</p> <p>Bilateral coordination</p> <p>Refined release of grasp, space perception</p> <p>Shape discrimination (simple), eye-hand coordination</p> <p>Shape discrimination trial and error</p> <p>Refined equilibrium</p>
<p>18 months Walk fast, seldom falling Standing balance good Sit self in chair Carry objects while walking</p> <p>Stack several blocks into a tower</p> <p>Imitate a stroke on paper</p> <p>Play with smaller pegs (1 1/2") Enjoy simple books and pictures</p> <p>Put two forms in board</p> <p>Handle large beads</p> <p>Enjoy sounds, whistles, rhythms</p>	<p>Large climbing toys, toys to challenge balance Child size chair Boxes, pails</p> <p>Blocks, stacking toys</p> <p>Fat crayons, paper</p> <p>Pegboard, pegman toys First books, simple lift out puzzles, inset puzzles Simple formboards</p> <p>Pop-beads, large wood beads</p> <p>Records, radios, music boxes, soundmakers</p>	<p>Refine standing balance</p> <p>Independence, climbing</p> <p>Coordination of body while maintaining balance</p> <p>Eye-hand coordination, simple constructional activity</p> <p>Pre-writing and copying skills, improved hand coordination</p> <p>Refinement of pincer grasp</p> <p>Language development</p> <p>Shape discrimination, form & space perception</p> <p>Eye-hand coordination, space perception</p> <p>Coordination of body movements to rhythms, language stimulation</p>
<p>2 years Move self on wheeled toy Kick ball</p> <p>Turn pages one at a time</p>	<p>Large toys/trucks with wheels Large ball</p> <p>Books</p>	<p>Coordination of legs to move self</p> <p>Balance while standing on one foot momentarily</p> <p>Finer hand coordination, tactile awareness</p>

When a child is able to:	Provide:	To encourage:
<p>2 years (cont'd) Make circular motions on paper String 1" beads</p> <p>Know main body parts</p>	<p>Crayons and paper Beads</p> <p>Dolls, mirrors, pictures, puzzles</p>	<p>Improve copying skills Eye-hand coordination, space perception skills Body awareness</p>
<p>2 ½ - 3 years Push and pull large items, negotiating obstacles Catch a ball</p> <p>Assemble a screw toy</p> <p>Begin to imitate lines, simple figures Manipulate clay</p> <p>Snip with scissors String ½" beads</p> <p>Match pictures</p> <p>Match primary colors Name 1 or 2 Know simple shapes</p> <p>Begin to do simple jigsaws</p> <p>Know "big-little"</p> <p>Lace simple cards Enjoy stories</p> <p>Enjoy water play</p>	<p>Large trucks, play equipment</p> <p>Balls</p> <p>Toys with screwing action</p> <p>Chubby crayons, paper</p> <p>Playdough, clay kits</p> <p>Safety scissors Smaller beads</p> <p>Books, lotto, dominoes</p> <p>Formboards, color puzzles, matching games Formboards, sorting box, matching pictures Simple interlocking puzzles</p> <p>Stacking cubes, pegs, stacking disc, objects in environment of all sizes Lacing cards, shoes Books read to child</p> <p>Water toys, sponges</p>	<p>Awareness of own body in space and relation to another object Coordinating the two sides of the body to midline More advanced coordination of two side of body for more difficult construction activity Copying, form perception, can later introduce tracing activities Isolated motions of fingers, strength of hands Strength and coordination of hands Hand coordination, space perception skills Learn concepts of same and different Learning concepts of same and different colors Shape discrimination</p> <p>Problem solving, shape and color discrimination Size perception and discrimination</p> <p>Eye-hand coordination Language development, attention to details, memory Tactile stimulation, body awareness</p>
<p>3-4 years Hop on one foot Throw, catch and kick ball Show agility climbing Trace and copies shapes Build higher level block structures/uses constructive materials Name colors</p> <p>Play in groups of 2 or 3 Sort/compare materials and pictures</p>	<p>Climbing equipment, ropes swings, balls, etc.</p> <p>Templates, tracing activities Blocks, simple construction sets form and space perception skills</p> <p>Dominoes, games using color naming/discrimination Simple first games Lotto games, sorting materials</p>	<p>Gains in agility and balance, muscular strength</p> <p>Refinement of pre-writing skills Eye-hand coordination, increased form and space perception skills</p> <p>Knowledge of colors</p> <p>Cooperative play, social behaviors Fine eye-hand skills, spatial discrimination, concept development</p>

When a child is able to:	Provide:	To encourage:
3-4 years (cont'd) Complete more complex jigsaws Show awareness of numbers Engage in imaginative play	Increasingly difficult puzzles Number dominoes, simple games with dice Small representational objects, or larger props for domestic play	Problem solving and language development, shape and color discrimination Recognition of quantity, simple games with rules Language development, social skills
4-5 years Plan and build constructively Copy shapes and letters Color inside lines Do more difficult jigsaw puzzles Understand rules of simple games Lace shoes	Layout and creative kits Magnetic letters, letter shapes, chalk blackboard Coloring books, pictures Puzzles of scenes, stories Simple competitive games Shoe lacing toys, lacing cards, large shoes	Practice in planning construction using verbal skills Simple spelling and letter recognition Space perception skills that are needed for academics Completion of puzzle using figures as clues rather than shape of pieces Practice “winning and losing”, strategies, problem solving, attention span Fine motor coordination, independence in personal care activities
5-6 years Enjoy balance activities Bounce a ball Cut, paste, use drawing tools Use large needle, making large stitches Complete 2-3 step models Print letters Define simple words, composition of objects Discriminate between fine sounds	Large play/climbing equipment, skateboard, roller skates, etc. Various sized balls Scissors, glue paint brushes, etc. Lacing toys, sewing kits Construction kits Pencils, paper, blackboard, letter writing toys Simple word games Toys/games requiring using hearing alone	Coordination of 2 sides of body, increased balance Coordinated use of preferred arm, coordination of 2 sides of body Fine coordination of hands, finger opposition Coordination of dominant hand, finger opposition Motor planning, problem solving Copying/writing skills Language development Auditory discrimination
7 years Bat a ball Tap rhythms Use greater fine hand control/finger opposition	Balls, bats Records, instruments Craft kits, construction kits with small pieces	Coordinated use of two sides of body, motor planning skills Motor planning, body awareness Increased coordination of dominant hand

When a child is able to:	Provide:	To encourage:
8 years Perform rhythmic body movements Draw in perspective Complete more difficult design and construction kits	Records musical instruments Paints, crayons, pencils paper Construction kits with instruction, design copying games	Motor planning skills, increased body awareness Imagination, form and space perception skills Space perception, problem solving

* Originally published by **The Able Child, Inc.** 154 Chambers St., New York, NY 10007