

Watch Me Play!

A short guide for parents and caregivers

Watch Me Play! is a simple way for a parent or caregiver to help their baby or child aged up to eight years old. It can help you to get to know your baby or child and enjoy being together.

Babies and young children need attention to help them grow - like plants need the sun. Having your full attention, even for a short time, helps your child to feel settled.

Play can help your child to feel close to you and to learn and develop. Just by watching your child play, you can find out more about what your child likes and is interested in right now. Talking with your child about their play, helps them to make sense of the world, and tells them that their thoughts and ideas are important to you.

All you need is a few simple toys or materials, your time, and someone to talk with about your child's play. These five steps aim to help you and your child to enjoy spending time together:

- 1 Getting started
- 2 Letting your child take the lead in play
- 3 Watching your child play
- 4 Talking with your child about their play
- 5 Talking with another adult about your child's play

1 Getting started

Find a time when you can give your baby or child your full attention for 5, 10 or 20 minutes. Try a short time to begin with. Even five minutes can be helpful. Choose 5 or 6 toys, books or materials. If your child throws things that could break or hurt, put out soft toys.

Turn off televisions, computers and phones and put away battery-operated or electronic toys during the Watch Me Play! time. Try simple toys that let your child use their imagination:

- Boxes, containers, plastic or wooden spoons
- Baby dolls, teddy bears, soft toys, small wooden dolls
- Toy animals, trains, cars or boats
- A blanket and a cushion
- Soft balls
- Plasticine or playdough
- Toy phone, plastic tea set
- Plain paper, crayons or felt tips,
- Finger paints or paint and brushes
- Picture books or cloth books

If you're not sure what is age appropriate or safe for your child, talk to a health visitor, nursery worker or another professional who knows your child. Sit comfortably with your baby, or on the floor or near your child. Tell your child how long you are going to watch him or her play.

Help your child to be ready for the end of the Watch Me Play! time - sing a song together to help your child move on to a new activity, or talk about what you are going to do next. Show him or her how you keep their toys for the next time.

2 Letting your child take the lead in play

Let your baby or child play freely, making their own choices. Let them explore any of the toys, using them in any way they like, as long as it is safe.

Watch to see when your baby is tired or hungry or needs a break. Give your child time to look around and look at you.

Try not to teach or correct your child during the Watch Me Play! time. Wait for your child to ask you to join in their play. If your child asks you to join in, try to follow their lead rather than bringing in your own ideas. Leave tidying up until the end of the Watch Me Play! time.

3 Watching your child play

During the Watch Me Play! time, give your baby or child your full attention. Get an idea about what your baby wants by waiting to see where her or his eyes go. Seeing what your baby looks at can tell you what he or she is interested in right now. When your baby looks away or starts to cry, they may be tired or need a break.

Show interest in anything your child chooses to do. Looking at your face or touching you, moving toys around or hiding them are all kinds of play that you can talk about with your baby or child. Children often do the same things over and over again in play- see what your child does.

Try not to interrupt your child or use your phone. Watch to see what happens as your child plays. Notice how she or he responds to you.

4 Talking with your child about their play

Talk to your child about what they are doing. Echo the sounds your baby makes, adding new sounds from time to time. Respond to your baby's smiles by smiling or showing pleasure or surprise. Say something about what your baby looks at: 'Do you want to look outside?'

Show your interest by smiling and talking with your baby or child about what he or she is doing. Leave some silences to give your child time to think or just wait for the next idea.

5 Talking with another adult about your child's play

Children's play can be fun, but sometimes it can be hard to watch. Talking about your baby or child's play with another adult can help you enjoy more about your child's play and also share any worries or concerns. This could be a family member or a friend, or a health visitor, GP, nursery worker or other professional who knows your child.

If you have worries about your child, try to see what happens when they play and how they respond when you take an interest. What you notice can help to work out if your child could benefit from some extra support. Talking and thinking about how it feels for you when you watch your child play could also help to understand what may be going on for your child.

KEY POINTS

- Watching your child play can help with bonding
- Playing freely helps your child to develop and learn
- Showing you are interested helps your baby or child to focus
- Adults thinking together helps a child to feel secure

WHAT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS SAY:

'I can go home and do it today.'

'It took a while to make a difference but now I see a lot of changes.'

'I'm getting to see when my baby is ready to play and when he needs a break or a cuddle.'

'He's calmer when we play like this.'

'She's looking more and making more sounds.'

'I understand why it's important just to be with her.'

'I feel more confident.'

'My daughter is smiling more.'

This resource may be stored and shared by parents and practitioners for their own use.

For more materials, and translations, please go to <https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/watch-me-play>

To discuss translating this resource for your service, please contact:
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