



Learning About Our Bodies Through Play

As babies grow toddlers they are gaining so many skills that help them move their bodies around. Play is a fun way to learn about what your body can do and to be motivated to try new things.

Play and Movement

During one of their first few home visits Kayla talks to her home visitor, Diane, about her eight-month-old son Nate. She is concerned because Nate does not sit up well or crawl at all. Diane has noticed this as well and has been hoping for an opportunity to talk to Kayla about it. Diane notices that Kayla keeps Nate in his carseat for socializations. When Diane has gone on home visits Nate is often in a swing or an exersaucer. Diane begins gently by suggesting to Kayla that she give Nate more play time on the floor, at least half an hour a day to start. She shares that he might need more practice with using the muscles he will need in order to sit up or crawl.

In the first three years of life, infants and toddlers go from having little control over their bodies to becoming running, jumping, climbing, pushing, pulling, digging, active little people. That is a huge accomplishment! Babies are very motivated to learn how to use their bodies, and do so through active, physical play.

The National Association for Sports and Physical Education (NASPE)^[12] recommends that infants and toddlers have at least thirty minutes a day of physically active play. NASPE points out that although infants and toddlers are ready to be active, they need the support of the adults in their lives. That means limiting the amount of time babies spend contained in carseats, swings, or bouncy chairs. Make sure that even very young infants have supervised tummy time and opportunities for free movement. Tummy time can be more appealing if it is playful and there is an adult on the floor nearby.

Rough and Tumble Play

Hattie's dad José is the star of the socialization! He began by picking up Hattie and lifting her into the air saying, "You're flying!" Soon other children were begging for a turn to "fly" too. Jose turned some of the older children upside down much to their giggling delight. Many of the children at the socialization really enjoyed and even seemed to crave this sort of exciting play.

Toddlers Kenny and Molly are outside playing a game of chase that ends in catch and wrestle. Their squeals of laughter can be heard throughout the playground! Their caregiver Lisa is keeping a close eye on what they are doing, but she is not stopping their play.



Learning About Our Bodies Through Play (cont.)

The type of play called **rough and tumble play** involves giggling, chasing, wrestling, running, and flying. Teachers or home visitors might have different reactions to this sort of play. Caregivers might wonder if they can keep all of the children safe when there is such active play or wrestling going on. Rough and tumble play does need to be supervised to make sure children are enjoying it. As long as everyone is still smiling and having fun, there is little need for an adult to step in.

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Another benefit of rough and tumble play is that it can appeal to children who aren't as good at joining groups in play. Energetic play can be easier to join than a group already involved in the dramatic play area or building in the block area. Adults can help children keep this play in safe areas such as on a mat or outside, and make sure that everyone who is playing is having fun.

Now that you know more about play, it is time to use what you have learned! As you observe infants and toddlers at play, think what they are learning about the people in their lives and the world around them. How might you build on and expand their learning and exploration? You can share with parents and colleagues all that you have learned about how play supports the healthy development of infants and toddlers. Most important, find some time to play yourself. Playing helps all of us feel better, learn new things, and stay curious about the world around us.

