

Encouraging toddlers' creative and artistic development

Creative play is very important for toddlers' development. Encourage your toddler by allowing plenty of time for free-flowing creative activities. It's also good to give positive attention and praise your toddler's creativity.

How to encourage your toddler's creative play

It's important for toddlers to feel they can do their own thing when it comes to creative play. With creative play, there's no right and wrong in creating, building, singing, acting and so on. For toddlers, the process of creating is the most important thing.

You can support this process by giving your toddler as much time as needed for creative activity. Some days, your toddler might want five minutes. Other days, it could be all morning, moving from one activity to another.

Giving your child enough time for creative activities means that your child can come up with lots of ideas and responses during creative play. Some of these ideas will produce results your child is happy with, and others won't. That's fine.

In fact, the ability to learn through trial and error like this is an important life skill. So give your child lots of [praise and encouragement](#) whatever the outcome. Your child will enjoy exploring and playing with playdough and other materials but might not make anything. There's no need to worry as this is normal at this age. The activities below are designed to help you encourage your toddler's creative and artistic development. But they should also be lots of fun!

Ideas for making things

You don't always need to give your child brand new play materials. Using everyday objects, and making it up as you go along, is a great way to encourage creative development. Your child might need some help with cutting, pasting and gluing. Being creative can be a great way to help your child learn these skills.



Keep a 'busy box' of useful objects or materials for creative play. A busy box could contain things like coloured paper, empty food containers and plastic cups.

- Use empty toilet rolls or small plastic juice bottles to make a family. Draw on faces, stick on paper clothes, and use cotton wool for hair. When you've finished making the family, your child could use these new toys to make up stories.



- In autumn, collect fallen leaves for your child to draw, paste onto paper, or dip into paint.
- Use small plastic lids, patty pan cases and other 'threadables' with your child to make jewellery.

Home-made doll's house

- Get a very large cardboard box – about the size that a new TV or computer comes in.
- Cut out some windows and doors.
- Let your toddler draw on bricks, window frames and doors. Your child could also stick on other decorations (you might need to help).

Home-made binoculars

- Glue or tape two toilet rolls together.
- Use a hole punch to attach a strap.
- Head out to the park or back yard and look for birds!

Read more ideas for [creative play](#) and [home-made toys and games](#).

Movement and dance

- Start with a warm-up.
- Put on some music that will get your child moving. It doesn't have to be special music for children – though modern jazz probably won't fit the bill!
- Get down on the ground with your toddler and start crawling, seat-sliding, rolling and toddling together. This activity involves the whole body and prepares your child (and you) for some movement and music games.
- Join your toddler and jump, run, gallop and skip around the room together.
- Go at your child's speed.
- While you're moving, you can sing along, or beat a box with a wooden spoon, play a toy ukulele or xylophone – whatever your child enjoys.

Dramatic play

Toddlers love dramatic play. They often enjoy games about very familiar things they see as part of everyday life. You could try patting the 'baby' off to sleep, playing dress-ups, and getting your handbags ready to 'go shopping'.

Music play

Music, drama and dance can all be combined in music play. As with all creative and artistic activities at this age, the process is what counts. It's also important to keep things simple.



You don't have to make special time for a lot of music play. You could make it part of other routines. For example, you can sing simple nursery rhymes or silly made-up songs while you're changing nappies, looking after children in the bath, pouring out the breakfast cereal, and so on.

Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Let your child play, make noise and create music with home-made and bought instruments. Choose rattles and bells that are safe and comfortable for your child to play. Too many sounds can be confusing.
- Try to match your child's pitch when singing songs. Your child probably won't sing in tune – or time – with you, but that's OK. Music and melody skills develop slowly.
- Provide your child with simple props such as scarves, hankies, hats, puppets and instruments to use in musical activities.
- Introduce humorous, active songs for your child to enjoy– for example, 'Heads and Shoulders, Knees and Toes', 'Dr Knickerbocker' and 'This Old Man'.
- A simple, repeated, rhythmical action such as clapping, patting, pointing or swinging encourages and supports singing. Or you can try songs that involve clapping, such as 'Pat-a-cake' and 'If You're happy and You Know It'.
- Sing songs about animals, events, stories or people to your child – for example, 'Five Little Ducks', 'Michael Finnegan', 'Train is a-Coming'.
- Name the instruments you're using and talk about the differences in sound and how they are played.
- Encourage your child to listen to your singing or what's going on the music. This helps develop skills in imitating voices and sounds (animals, birds, machines and so on).
- Toddlers are not too young to try some 'art appreciation'. Whether it's music or pictures, you can encourage them to talk about what they like and which is their favourite part.



Can't remember the words or the tune to favourite songs and nursery rhymes? Refresh your memory and sing with your child using our [Baby Karaoke](#).



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- ▶ Toddler creative and artistic development: what to expect
- ▶ Toddler play and learning: in a nutshell
- ▶ Toddlers at play
- ▶ Why play is important
- ▶ Encouraging kids to be active

Web links

- ▶ ABC-TV Playschool – Make and Do
- ▶ The Creativity Institute – Creative Play Helps Children Grow

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