



## Learning and developing through play

### Why play?

Jack, your toddler, is busy in the back yard with Bláthnaid, your older child. They are filling plastic containers with soil and dumping it beside the fence. This continues for ten minutes with Jack absorbed in the play. He then notices Bláthnaid using a jam-jar lid to add water from a puddle to the soil. He copies her and the play goes on.

Jack is learning about how much soil 'fits' in the containers, how heavy they become when filled, and the effect of water on soil. He is developing his muscles, learning to share and take turns, and learning that Bláthnaid has ideas and thoughts that are different to his. Play is one of the ways your toddler learns about everything around him/her. *Aistear*, the new curriculum framework for children from birth to six years shows how important play is for toddlers and gives lots of ideas for playing with your child. For more information on *Aistear*, visit [www.ncca.ie/earlylearning](http://www.ncca.ie/earlylearning).

Tip-sheet for  
parents of toddlers  
(12 months—3 years)



### Playing with your toddler

Below are some tips for helping your toddler to learn and develop through play.

1. Give your toddler **time** to play every day.
2. Have **interesting and safe things** to play with. Items like boxes, spoons, empty food containers, and clothes can be more fun than bought toys, and cost less.
3. **Join in** the play. Get down on the floor, grass and so on, and play together.
4. Make **space** for play. For example, have a place in the kitchen or bedroom, and outside where your toddler can get toys easily and store them away.
5. **Talk** to your child about what he/she is playing: for example, *I had great fun when we played with the garage. What did you like best about it?*
6. **Tell** your childminder or the staff in the crèche about the games, activities, nursery rhymes, and books your toddler enjoys.

Here are some ideas from *Aistear* for how you as a parent can help your child to learn and develop through different types of play both indoors and outdoors.

### Pretend play

- Follow your toddler's lead and pretend to feed the dolls, to be a dog, to make the dinner, or to drive the train.
- Let your toddler help you do things around the house, for example give him/her a brush to sweep or pegs to help you hang clothes or food to help you feed a pet animal.
- Play with small toys like cars, train sets, animals, dinosaurs, and people. Talk about what is happening: *The farmer is milking the cows. The girl is fixing the car in the garage. The dragon is breathing fire.*
- Use a pretend phone to call Granny or to order a pizza.
- Use empty food cartons, old clothes or shoes to make a shop. Play together.
- Make a shopping list – your toddler writes and you help put a picture beside each word so he/she can read the list when you go to the supermarket.
- Put chairs in a row to make a train or even an aeroplane and take off on an adventure to visit Santa at the North Pole or to see the animals in the zoo.



You can help me to  
learn all sorts of things  
when we play together.



### Games with rules

- Play games like *Simon Says*, *I Spy*, *Follow the Leader*, *Row, Row, Row your Boat*, *Musical Cushions* (use cushions instead of chairs), and *Hide and Seek*.
- Agree rules when pretending to be someone else, for example when playing shop the rule is, *You are the shopkeeper and you ask me what I'd like to buy*.
- Play lots of games that involve throwing, kicking and catching a ball.

Play is important for me, and it is important for my learning and development.

### Language play

- Have fun saying and acting out nursery rhymes together, for example *Ring-a-ring a Rosy*, *I'm a Little Teapot*, *5 Fat Sausages*, *London Bridge is Falling Down*, *10 Green Bottles*, *10 in the Bed*, *Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes*.
- Read stories with your toddler. Invite him/her to tell the next part of a story especially of a favourite or well-known one. Use questions to talk about a story: for example, *I wonder where the dog went?* *Why did the pilot do that?*
- Match sounds to pictures, for example the cow says moo, the clock goes tick-tock, the car goes vroom.
- Make a puppet theatre out of a box and make puppets using old socks, paper bags or spoons. Use them for stories your toddler knows well.



When I play, I use my body, my mind, my feelings and my senses.

### Creative play

- Provide chunky crayons, paper and card, old magazines, a blackboard and chalk, non-toxic paint and chunky paintbrushes, play-dough, and safety scissors. Doing an activity together is as important as the finished creation!
- Paint pictures together; make pasta necklaces; stick cuts-outs from magazines onto card to make a collage.
- Make a sand or water tray (an old baby bath) or set your child up at the kitchen sink on a steady, safe chair. Give him/her plastic jugs and bottles, stones, spoons, sieves, a small watering can, funnels, and toy boats. Play together. For example, see what happens water when you put it in a sieve. Have a water fight outside!
- Make musical instruments from everyday objects, for example two biscuit tin lids can be cymbals or two paper plates stuck together with pasta inside can be a tambourine. March while singing songs and nursery rhymes.



### Physical play

- Play outdoors as much as possible. Put on a coat and Wellingtons and splash in puddles or throw snowballs. Walk in the woods and play with fallen leaves.
- Give your toddler items to explore and build with – large and small blocks, stacking toys, shoe boxes, hard hats, trucks, play tools, diggers, wheel-barrows, buckets, and spades. Build and demolish things together.
- Help your toddler to go up steps and slopes, or to go on a climbing frame or fire-pole in the park.
- Build ramps together for toy cars and tractors out of pieces of wood.
- Chase your toddler around the garden and when you catch up tickle him/her.
- Make jigsaws; do simple puzzles; thread large beads.

When your child is older, you might find the tip-sheet for parents of young children useful ([www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit](http://www.ncca.ie/aisteartoolkit)).

Have fun playing with your toddler.