3 SIMPLE *TOYS* that support infant development

(You probably already have them all!)

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Simple, Classic Toys

THAT SUPPORT INFANT DEVELOPMENT

In the first years of life, your baby's brain grows faster than it ever will again. Over 100,000 billion brain cells become connected from repeated experiences. Eighty-five percent of brain growth happens from birth to three!

How do you make the most of this time of rapid neural growth? Here are some things to remember as you play with your baby...

- **Laughter, fun and hugs activate the highest functioning areas of your baby's brain.** And guess what? It's good for you too, relieving stress and energizing you especially after a sleepless night or two.
- **Take cues from your child.** They'll let you know when they're done with an activity. This is the beginning of language development.
- **Repetition is how young children learn.** They won't get bored by an activity done over and over. You might, but they will not :)
- **Loving, positive play experiences reinforce strong connections.** The developing emotional areas of the brain are primed for attachment, which supports future relationships with others.
- **Babies learn better when they are on the floor.** They'll be able to move, roll, balance and gain strength, which enhances physical and brain development. This won't happen as readily in a

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YOUR BABY WILL ENJOY PLAYING WITH THESE TOYS FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS! LET'S DISCOVER HOW THEY SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT AS HE GROWS AND HOW YOU CAN PLAY WITH YOUR BABY USING EACH ONE

Scarves

Colorful, sheer, lightweight scarves can be used in many ways. You can find scarves made especially for babies and you can also find them in your grandmother's dresser drawer or at garage sales!

They're easily laundered, inexpensive and provide lots of opportunity for learning.

0-6 mos

- Drape colorful scarves around the room to catch their eye, hang it in front of a window or fan where it can catch a gentle breeze and move in the wind.
- Drape a scarf across their belly or legs as you talk to them and see if they'll reach out to grab it.
- Hang a couple of scarves above the changing table and blow them as you change their diaper.
- Place scarves on the floor just out of reach to encourage movement towards it during tummy time.
- Hold scarf in front of baby, moving back and forth to encourage visual tracking.

6-12 mos

- Drape the scarf over baby's head and let them pull it off. Drape it over your head and let them pull it off.
- Dance or sway to music, moving scarves in rhythm.
- Tie a few scarves together and play a gentle game of tug of war.
- Play toss with scarves. Watch them float through the air.
- Play peek-a-boo. Baby's favorite game!

12+ mos

- Scarves are great for pretending. They can wrap up a baby doll, become a superhero's cape, a royal robe or a face mask. Pretend play indicates cognitive development.
- Practice listening skills by dancing to music with scarves, using musical cues to change movements.
- Tie scarves together to make patterns - red, blue, red, blue. Early math!!
- Lay scarves on top of each other and hold them to the light - do they make a new color? Early science!!

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Mirrors

Unbreakable mirrors of all sizes can be used in many ways. Large mirrors on the wall, small mirrors that are mounted in different places, handheld mirrors that children can hold and manipulate provide lots of opportunities for self-discovery. It takes a while for your baby to recognize the reflection as themselves - it's an important part of cognitive and social development!

0-6 mos

- Mount a mirror near the diaper changing table so they can see themselves as they lay down, mount a mirror on the car seat, crib or on the wall.
- Hold baby up to the mirror and talk to him. Let him see your reflection. After a moment, turn away, then turn back to the mirror and say 'peek-a-boo'.
- Make exaggerated facial expressions as you hold baby up to mirror.
- Lay baby down on his tummy in front of a mirror, and when he lifts his head he get to see himself (great motivation for doing all that hard work!)
- Talk to baby as he looks in mirror, this enhances his receptive vocabulary (the words he hears and understands)

6-12 mos

- Place a mirror on the wall with a pull up bar. As he begins to pull up to standing he'll get the surprise and delight of his reflection. Watching his own movement encourages mobility.
- Hold baby at mirror and ask, "Where's your nose?" "Where's my nose?" See if they point to the mirror or turn to touch yours. You'll see this change as the brain makes more complex connections.
- Play follow the leader, imitating babies' movements and expressions as you look in the mirror together.
- Play with hats in front of the mirror.
- Hang mirrors outdoors so baby can see reflections of trees, flowers, etc.

12+ mos

- Instead of paper, use unbreakable mirrors for drawing with markers, finger painting with pudding, shaving cream or painting with brushes.
- Use with dress up clothes and encourage pretend play with your interactions..
- Stack lightweight blocks on a mirror and watch the tower grow in both directions.
- Play imitation games and dance in front of the mirror.

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Balls

Soft, smallish, brightly colored balls with different textures are great! Throughout the first two years ball play will look different, as your baby becomes mobile. Have a variety of different weights of balls (but nothing too heavy!) because each will react differently to his actions. Ball play helps develop large and small muscle coordination, thinking skills and supports social development.

All balls should be large enough that they're not a choking hazard.

0-6 mos

- Hang a soft ball in a place where baby can swipe at it or kick with his legs and watch it swing.
- Encourage baby to hold a ball by handing it to him and then asking for it back.
- Encourage baby to push and roll it by placing the ball nearby on the floor.
- Hang balls on the car seat so he can bat at them and watch the movement.

6-12 mos

- Roll a ball towards him and invite him to play with you by rolling it back.
- Explore balls with different textures, sizes and weights.
- As baby begins to crawl, place ball right in front of him to encourage him to follow it.
- Provide small ramps, like a piece of cardboard and show baby how to roll the ball on it.

12+ mos

- Begin to throw balls - the process of learning to release at the right time takes practice! This will encourage playing catch together, enhancing physical and social development.
- Kick the ball - use those big leg muscles and practice balancing and eye foot coordination.
- Sit on larger ball to balance. Core work!
- Use another toy like a car or paper towel tube, to push/roll a ball. Model how to do this and give your child a goal, like rolling the ball into a box that's laying down on its side. This kind of cause and effect play helps your baby's thinking skills.
- Rolls small balls through a tube. "Where did it go? There it is!"

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So there you go! A basket of these simple toys, along with some interesting books to look at and you are set for lots of fun and learning with your baby.

Through play he'll practice using those big and small muscles, make brain connections, learn to communicate and have the satisfaction of mastering new skills, which supports a strong sense of self.

And these playful interactions will strengthen the attachment between you and your baby - which is absolutely essential for his emotional well-being throughout childhood and adolescence!

When you play together, you're giving your baby a great start on learning about the world plus you're building a strong foundation of trust and attachment.

Have fun!

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