

A child's interests are

Windows of Opportunity

to fun and enjoyable learning

Play with **balls**
is a powerful
learning activity
for many young children



Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AT HOME**

In the yard

- Let your child play freely on the grass with balls of all sorts, pushing, holding, rolling, dropping, and kicking them. If you don't have a ball, crumple paper into a ball shape and wrap wide tape around it a few times. This makes a fun, light-weight ball that's easy for little fingers to grasp and small muscles to carry.
- Play together with balls, starting with a simple game in which you roll a ball gently back and forth while you and your child are seated face to face or lying tummy-down on the ground.

In the kitchen

- Attach balls and ball-shaped toys to baby's seat or high chair with 8- to 10-inch lengths of flat elastic. As you work in the kitchen, she can play with the toys. When they roll off the tray, you or she can find and return them easily.
- Show your child how to hide a favorite ball in a covered cooking pot. When he pulls off the lid—surprise!—he's found the ball! Add to the fun with three pots and matching lids. Cover your eyes and let him hide the ball in one pot. Can you find it? Take turns hiding and finding the ball.
- Stand plastic cups on the floor to form different shapes. Let your child toss or roll her favorite ball to try to knock them down!

In the bath tub

- Roll a soft ball down the side of the tub for her to pick up after it splashes into the water.
- Let him rub and scrub with a ball-shaped sponge. Show him how to push it under to soak up water and how to use both hands to squeeze the water out again.

In your child's bed room or play room

- A child (2 years or older) who likes balls may enjoy stringing big (1¾ inches or larger) round wooden beads on a shoestring with a knot at one end.
- Attach elastic in various lengths up to 12 inches to several different balls (around 5 inches across). You might want to include balls of various materials and textures such as foam rubber (Nerf), hollow plastic, stuffed/plush, solid rubber, wiggly rubber strings (Koosh), bright yarn, etc. Hang these like a homemade mobile where baby can reach for them, bat them with her hands and feet, and grab and squeeze them when she's lying on her back. It's especially fun for baby if some balls make noise when she touches or squeezes them.
- Read age-appropriate books about balls to your child. Check your local library's children's department for books like *Balls!* by John E. Barrett or *Sam's Ball* by Barbro Lindgren.

Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AWAY FROM HOME**

Taking a walk

- Point out and talk to your little one about things you see along the way that are ball-shaped, like outdoor lights or decorative woodwork.
- Stop to watch and cheer for activities involving balls such as teens playing basketball on an outdoor court or driveway, a high-school soccer team practicing on a school field, or a group of children playing whiffle ball in a park.
- Are you taking your pet dog along on your walk? Stop in a park where pets are allowed off their leashes and play “catch” with an old tennis ball. Your toddler will love tossing the ball and having a happy dog return it to her again and again.

Out and about on errands together

- Young children who love to play with balls may say the word “ball” as one of their first spoken words. Make up a funny song or rhyme about a ball that you can sing or say with your child as you ride in the car together. For example:

*Jacob has a big round ball
The ball is shiny and green
It bounces, rolls
It makes him smile
Best ball I've ever seen!*

In a waiting room or other place where you want to play and interact quietly

- Show your baby the American Sign Language sign for “ball.” Make the sign by holding your hands about chest high, palms toward your body, fingers spread and loosely curved, as though you’re holding an imaginary ball about the size of a grapefruit. Bounce your hands toward one another a few times, without letting your fingers touch, and say the word “ball.” Show your baby a ball, and repeat the sign and spoken word. Hold her hands and help her form the sign. Reward your baby’s attempts to make the sign by praising her and giving her the ball. Smile and say, “Ball! Yes! You told me you wanted the ball!” If you use the sign regularly when you and your baby play with balls, she’ll soon be able to ask for a ball or tell you she’s excited about seeing an interesting ball, even before she can say the word!

Shopping at a food market

- Let your child help you spot items shaped like balls in the food market. You might see round fruits and vegetables, soaps, candies, pot scrubbers, and much more! Make a game of seeing who can be first to spot the next “ball.”
- If your young child can handle solid foods, let him choose a ball-shaped food to hold and munch on. How about a nice round apple? A juicy peach or plum? Buy an orange as a handy snack for the ride home: Use a pocket knife to cut around the stem of an orange and pull it out. Show your child how to squeeze the fruit and suck the juice out through the small hole in the orange skin.



When children love balls, other round things might catch their fancy—bubbles or oranges, anyone?

