

Powerful Social FUN for Little Ones

Making a difference with infant learning games

Researchers who study infant learning have found that active learning games help children who are developmentally very young grasp the important connection between their own actions and interesting and fun things that happen next. When young children understand that *their behavior can cause* an interesting consequence, they've achieved a tremendously meaningful learning milestone. They've become *active learners!*

Everyday parent/child interactions are excellent times for helping the very young child learn the relationship between cause and effect—the powerful understanding that HE or SHE can *make things happen!* Diaper changes, mealtimes, reading a story, riding in the stroller or grocery cart ... all are excellent, naturally occurring opportunities

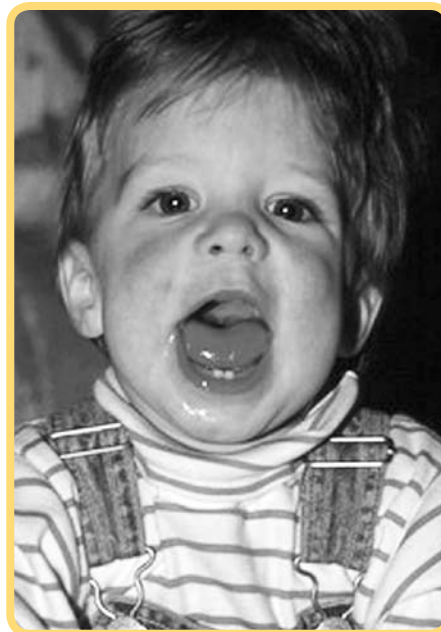


for active learning. And when this learning takes place in the context of playful fun with a caregiver—as part of an active, socially rewarding, parent/child “game”—the learning is even more powerful.

In this issue of *Parents CAN!*, we present (on the reverse side of this page) a handful of the active learning games described in *Ready, Set, Play! Learning Games for Promoting Child Competence*, a forthcoming book to be published by Winterberry Press. The games are best used with children whose abilities range from 2 to about 8 months



The little ones pictured above respond gleefully to the rewarding responses, such as tummy tickles and smiling faces, that their actions prompt during active learning games.



of age. Consider these games as starting points for creating other games that appeal to a child's interests, strengths, and sense of fun. The child will be delighted as he or she experiences increasing control over interesting aspects of the people in his or her life. Just remember to allow plenty of time for your child to realize the connection between his or her action and the enjoyable social response it prompts. Soon your child will be performing the action joyfully, again and again!

More opportunities...

Have fun with your own variations on the following active learning games and others described in *Ready, Set, Play! Learning Games for Promoting Child Competence* (Asheville, NC: forthcoming from Winterberry Press).

Stand By Me

One of the best possible social rewards—a warm hug—awaits the child when she stands up. For this simple game, you'll need a small bench or chair low enough for the child's feet to rest on the floor when she's seated. Sit facing the child. Help the child rise and stand, then give her a hug so that she can see what happens when she stands. **Wait** for the child to move to stand. If she does not stand, call her name. Each time she stands, give her hugs. The child's standing continues the game.

Alley-Oop!

In this game, the adult player swings the child in response to the child's moving his body. To play, place the child on his tummy in your arms. Look for any body movements from the child. Once he moves, swing him forward and back, adding a favorite spoken expression such as "Whee!" or "Alley-Oop!" as you swing. Then stop swinging and **wait** for him to move his body once more. Moving his body is the signal he wants to play again. If he doesn't move, help him by swinging him and then asking if he would like to do it again. This time wait for him to move.

I Feel Good

In this game, each time the child lifts her feet she gets to enjoy having someone rub them. No special materials are needed. Simply relax and kick your shoes off, then place the child on her back so that she can freely move her feet and legs.

To play, gently massage the child's feet or pull her toes in ways she enjoys. After a short while, let go of her feet and watch her reaction. Look at her in anticipation, waiting for her to lift her feet to you. When she moves her feet, tell her: "Oh, you want me to rub your feet again!" as you begin to rub her feet once more. If she needs help to lift her feet, place your hands under her ankles and lift them slightly as you say, "You're telling me to rub your feet."

For a child who likes her bath, you can play this

game in the tub, soaping up her feet. At bedtime or during diaper changes, play by kissing her toes.

Reach Out & Touch Someone

For this game, the child gets you to blow on his hands by touching your face. Place the child on his side, propping him with pillows, if needed. Lie down beside him, facing him, and get close enough that he can touch your face with his hands. (This can also be played with the child seated on your lap, facing you.)

Guide his hand to touch your face, then blow on his hands to show him what happens when he touches your face. Wait for him to touch your face again. If he doesn't, call his name or touch his hand. Each time he touches your face, respond by blowing on his hands.

I'm Gonna Get You!

The social interactions of talking and tickling are this game's rewards each time the child smiles. Place the child on her back on a bed or blanket, or reclining in a baby seat. Look at her with a smile and tickle her, saying: "I'm gonna get you!" Wait for her to smile. If she doesn't smile, call her name and touch her face. Each time she smiles, say "I see that smile! I'm gonna get you!" and tickle her gently. Wait for her to smile again to continue the game.

A variation of this game could be using a favorite stuffed animal to do the tickling in response to each smile. It's important to wait for the child to repeat the smile before continuing the game.

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