



# Grandparenting

## Play With Me! Activities That Make Learning Fun Birth to 12 Months

### Action-Oriented Activities

- **So Big!** Hold your grandchild on your lap. Ask: "How big is (child's name)?" Then lift his arms up into the air and say: "Sooooo big!" Babies love this game and will eventually learn to lift their arms in response to your question.
- **Wind at Your Back.** Place your grandbaby on a soft blanket on her tummy. Billow a light scarf in the air above her and say, "Feel the wind!" Let the scarf gently fall on her back and then slowly pull it off her. Wave it in front of her and see if she follows it with her eyes. This activity gives your grandchild some fun "tummy time" with you. Spending time on her belly is important for building upper body strength.
- **Roll and Go.** For grandchildren who are crawling, show them a soft ball or interesting toy. Roll it or place it a few feet away and encourage your baby to get it. If your grandchild is cruising along the couch, you can place the toy farther and farther along the couch to motivate him to keep moving.
- **On Your Feet.** Gather several pieces of material with different textures—such as a tea towel, fake fur, felt, a silky scarf. Holding your grandbaby upright (with hands under baby's arms), let her feet touch one of the fabrics. (Or allow crawling babies to crawl on and over the fabric.) Try a few different fabrics to see which textures your grandchild seems to prefer. Games like this enhance a baby's sensory and body awareness.



### Quiet Play Activities

- **Shadow Sharing:** Babies have limited vision in their first few months but they are tuned in to contrasts between light and dark. At bedtime or naptime, slowly move a flashlight beam across the wall or ceiling of your grandbaby's room. See if she can follow it with her eyes. As she grows, she will get better and better at following the moving beam—this skill is called "visual tracking."
- **Make your own "aquarium":** Cut some fish shapes out of clean kitchen sponges and slip them into a gallon-sized resealable plastic bag filled with about a cup of water. For extra fun, squeeze a few drops of blue food coloring into the water and add some glitter or shells. Seal the bag and cover the edge with duct tape to be sure it stays closed. Let your baby squeeze the fish and pat the bag while he is seated in his high chair or on the floor with you.
- **Create a Leaf "Canopy."** Make a leafy mobile for your grandbaby by placing a few colorful fall leaves between clear contact paper. Cut out the leaf shapes, punch a hole in each, and hang with yarn from a clothes hanger. While your baby is on her back, swing the "mobile" gently to make the leaves flutter. You can even move the mobile gently left, right, and in a slow circle. (Put the mobile out of baby's reach when you are done.) Activities like this enrich your grandbaby's ability to track objects.



- **How Touching!** Make a texture book for your grandbaby by cutting squares of different kinds of fabric with pinking shears and gluing each one to an index card. Punch a hole in the corner of each card and tie together with yarn. Gently bring your grandbaby's hand to each texture and see how he responds. As you read the book together, you can name the color and texture of the fabric.

### Activities That Build Thinking Skills

- **Wrap It Up.** Wrap a ball of waxed paper in a scarf and tie it up. Hold it out for your grandbaby and see if she wants to reach for it, grasp it, squeeze it, or crinkle it. Watch her face to see if she is interested or surprised by the sounds the package makes. You can put into words what you see on her face, "Wow! It crinkles and crackles. What's inside?" Games like this encourage sensory awareness, reaching, grasping, and language development.
- **Baby in the Mirror.** Hold your grandbaby in your arms in front of the mirror. Talk about and point to his body parts—eyes, nose, mouth, arms, etc. Then step away from the mirror and ask, "Where did baby go?" Move back in front of the mirror and say, "There's the baby!" Hide-and-seek games enhance babies' growing sense of body awareness-- the knowledge that they are separate from you.
- **Find It.** As your grandchild approaches her first birthday, she might enjoy playing a "find it" game with you. While she is in her high chair or sitting on the floor, show her one of her favorite rattles or another small toy. Then cover it with a washcloth. Wait a moment to see if she reaches to uncover the toy. If she doesn't, show her where to find it. Games like this build babies' thinking and problem-solving skills.
- **Putting It Together.** Between 6 and 12 months, babies begin to understand how different objects work together—what they can do in relationship to the other. To practice this skill, offer your grandchild some small, easy-to-grasp blocks and show him how he can drop them into a bucket, plastic cup, or bowl. Combining the block and the cup shows an early understanding about how things go together.



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### Activities that Build the Senses

- **Listen Up!** Show baby a bell and then gently ring it so he can hear. Wait until he focuses on the bell and then slowly bring it behind your back or place a washcloth over it. Then ask, "Where did it go?" Take it out and ring it from a different location. Wait until your grandbaby has found the bell again with his eyes. This activity enriches your baby's auditory awareness.
- **Take a Whiff.** Give your grandbaby (6 months old and up) an opportunity to use her sense of smell. When you cut an orange, hold it gently under her nose so she can have a sniff. When you take out the cinnamon or cloves for a recipe, do the same thing. You might say, "Smell this. We *smell* with our *nose*." Then you can point to your nose. Keep in mind, all children process sensory information differently. Some may love it and others may not enjoy it at all. Activities like this help your grandchild connect sensory information to her everyday experiences.



- **Sound It Out.** Gather several different objects that make distinct noises. Jingle, tap, or shake each one for the baby. If he reaches out to grasp one of the instruments, let him hold it and explore it with his hands. Games like this enhance babies' thinking skills and fine (small) muscle development.
- **Try a Massage.** When you get your grandbaby out of the bath, take a moment to gently massage her arms and legs with baby lotion (ask her mom or dad if they have a preferred brand). As you massage, gently bring her legs in and out from her body and gently bring her arms toward her chest and out again. Many babies are soothed and comforted through massage—an activity that helps them learn that touch is soothing and that their bodies are special and belong to them. But of course, follow your grandbaby's cues and stop if it doesn't seem to feel good to her.

### Activities that Build Language Skills

- **Get Out Your Umbrella!** Sing "It's Raining, It's Pouring" to your grandbaby. At the end of the song, drop a handful or two of soft, colorful pompoms over her belly and chest. How does she like this sensation? If she looks interested—widening her eyes, smiling, kicking arms and legs, do it again. If your grandbaby cries, try it again another time. Babies' preferences can change quickly. Singing to your grandbaby is a great way to build language skills. This game also encourages babies' awareness of themselves as an individual, separate from you.
- **Picture Perfect:** Snap photos of friends and family members in your grandbaby's life. Glue each one to an index card and cover with clear contact paper. Show the photos to your little one and name each person. Over time, your grandbaby will begin to point, smile, and maybe reach for the people in the pictures. Activities like this help grow your grandbaby's memory and develop her language skills.
- **Finger Plays:** Sing songs with your grandchild that have hand motions that go along with the lyrics. For example, songs and rhymes like *Patty Cake*, *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*, *Wheels on the Bus*, and *Where Is Thumbkin* all have hand and finger motions to do as you sing. When your grandchild is able to use his hands and fingers, he will start to copy your gestures and—before you know it—he will be singing along!
- **Hi! Bye!** As your grandchild approaches 6 to 9 months, you can start to play peek-a-boo. Most babies really enjoy this game! When you pop out from behind a towel or your hand, say, "HI!" When you are about to disappear, wave and say, "BYE!" By putting words to your actions, over time your grandbaby will begin to understand their meaning. She might even start saying them herself!

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