

Making Useful Choices

Let's go for a walk. Do you want a hat or a towel?



Let your baby choose between two things during an everyday task, one that is useful and one that is not.

Your baby will have a chance to make choices and learn from the results.



It's time to eat. Would you like a spoon or a lid?



Why this is important

Choosing between two objects on the basis of their usefulness is an early step in the process of learning how to evaluate. Adding a few safe choices to his day opens up new possibilities for him to have some control. Making these choices helps him to understand what an object can do and what is needed for a particular task. With practice he can choose the right tool for each job.

What you do

- Give your child two choices of objects to use when he needs to complete a task. For example, if he is ready to drink, let him choose between an empty cup and a full one. When he is ready to eat, offer him the choice of a spoon or a plastic lid. When it is time to wash hands, show him a block and a bar of soap. When it is time to take a walk, offer him a hat or a towel. Let him choose which item he wants.
- Let your child play with the item, even if he chooses the less useful option. Laugh with him as he enjoys the silliness of washing his hands with a block, for example.
- Show him the two choices again and give him a chance to choose more appropriately. *Do you want water? Which cup has the water?* At first, he may choose the less useful object, but with experience he will intentionally choose the more useful one.

Another idea

Add as many choices to his day as you can. Let him feel in control when there is no harm in either option. *Would you like to play with your truck or your fire engine?*

Let's read together!

Wibbly Pig Likes Bananas
by Mick Inkpen

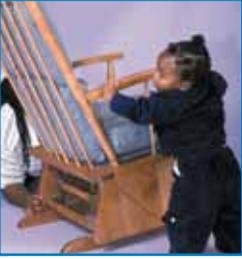
Hide-and-Seek

Oh! You found me!

Move partly out of sight and let your child find you.

Hide-and-seek encourages your child to move around and rely on her own ability to find something that is hidden.





Why this is important

Learning to look for objects she cannot see gives your child a new tool for problem solving. Playing hide-and-seek helps her independently find something out of sight and introduces her to a simple game that she will be able to play later on with other children.

What you do

- Tell your toddler you are going to hide, and then duck down behind a chair or move to another part of the room so that you are almost out of sight. Let her see you go.
- Call, *Can you find me? Where am I?* Offer positive feedback when she finds you and give her a big hug. *You are so smart! You found me!*
- Play together for as long as she is interested. Hide in new places to keep her attention.
- Offer her a chance to hide, and ask loudly, *Where's Carla? Where did she go?* She may hide in the same place you hid. When you find her, act surprised and hug her close.

Ready to move on?

When she is a little older, try playing the game by hiding a stuffed animal in another room. Do not let her see you hide it, but place the toy where she will easily see it. Go back to her and ask, *Where is teddy? Can you help me find him?* Point or give any help your child needs. Show surprise when she finds the toy. *Wow! You found him in the kitchen!*

Let's read together!

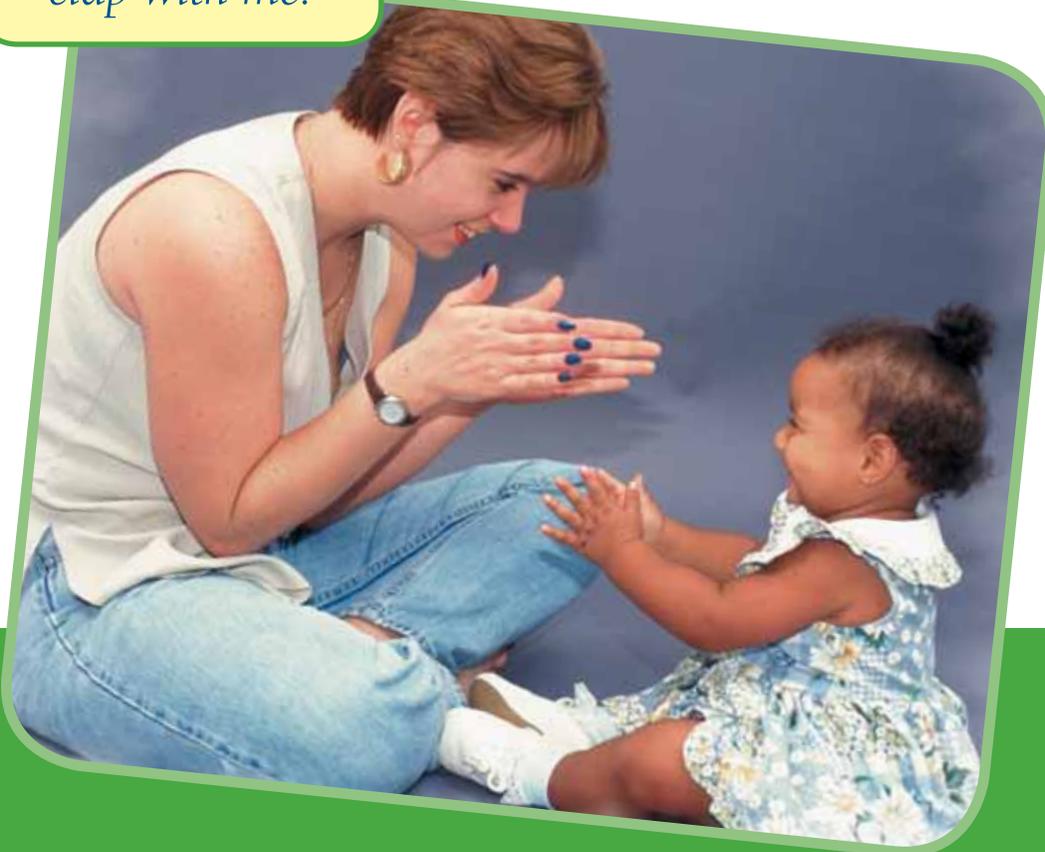
Open the Barn Door, Find a Cow
by Christopher Santoro

Sing Together

Sing songs with your child, especially ones that she can clap to or that have her name in them.

Singing provides a fun and interesting way to teach your child words and sound patterns.

*Clap, clap,
clap with me!*





Why this is important

Your child will become familiar with words, especially rhyming words, through the rhythm and repetition of singing. By hearing the repeated sounds in songs like “Row, Row, Row Your Boat,” she will become familiar with the patterns of sounds that occur in language. Singing crosses all language barriers, and when done in a group, singing provides your child with social experiences.

What you do

- Sing with your child when feeding, dressing, walking, or riding. Sometimes use traditional songs and sometimes make up your own. Remember that your child does not care if you sing well. She will enjoy hearing your voice in songs about her and her activities.
- Clap and invite your child to clap with you. Choose a simple, repetitious tune that your child can sing with you and clap to the rhythm. *Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream. Merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream.* Your child will first listen, and then begin to imitate the sounds she hears. She may clap and move to the tune before she tries to sing.
- Make up a song with your child’s name in it. *Lucy, Lucy, Lucy Ann. I really love you. Lucy, Lucy, Lucy Ann. I really love you* (sung to the tune of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”).
- Try to remember songs your parents sang to you and share them with your child. If your family speaks more than one language, this can be a great way to pass on family traditions.

Another idea

Look for picture books at the library that are based on the words to your child’s favorite songs. Sing the song and then read the book together.

Let’s read together!

Skip To My Lou
by Nadine Bernard Westcott

Restore the Circle



Cut a large paper circle into two pieces and let your child fit the two pieces together to form the circle again.

Your child will see that things can be divided and restored.

You're making it into a circle.



Why this is important

Being able to visualize the whole from its parts is necessary for many tasks your child will want to do. She will learn to recognize that actions such as dividing a circle can be reversed. Letters and numbers are typically made from parts such as lines and circles, so this game helps her get ready to recognize number and letter symbols.

What you do

- Cut out a few large paper circles. Invite your child to play a new game with you.
- Show her one of the circles and talk about what makes it a circle: *This is a circle. Look at its round shape.*
- Hold the circle and let her trace her finger around the edge. Place the circle on the table and, with her hand on top of your hand, trace the entire edge of the circle.
- Think of words such as *plate*, *pie*, and *circle* to describe the shape.
- Use scissors to cut the paper in half. Show her each curved piece.
- Ask her to put the circle back together.
- Trace the finished circle again and tell her, *You made it a circle again!*
- Try cutting the circle into several pieces to make the game a little harder. Make sure you keep the game short and stop when she loses interest.

Ready to move on?

Other shapes, such as triangles and squares, are harder to restore. Move on to these shapes when your child is immediately successful with the circle. Adjust the difficulty of the game by changing the number of pieces you create when cutting the shape.

Let's read together!

I Spy Shapes In Art
by Lucy Micklethwait

The Knee Star

*Here's a star for
your knee.*

Put a star sticker or some other marker on a part of your child's body and talk about that part throughout the day.

Your child will learn to locate body parts and recognize their names.





Why this is important

Knowing the words for body parts helps your child understand when other people talk about them. You can give your child markers that help locate body parts and connect them with their names. Knowing words that refer to his own body helps him build a better understanding of himself.

What you do

- Begin by playing a quick review game to find out which body parts your child already knows. Say, *Touch your neck. Touch your elbow. Touch your ankle.*
- Choose a body part your child is not aware of. Then, make it clear where that body part is by marking it. For example, if you choose *knee*, make it clear where his knee is by putting a star sticker on it.
- Remind him during the day about where to find his knee: *I see that you're bending your knees. Your knees are under the table when you sit in that chair.*
- Think about body parts that are not used every day such as shin, knuckle, and sole. Find an interesting way to mark each one you teach.
- Invite your child to go back and rename each part as he adds to his list of words.

Another idea

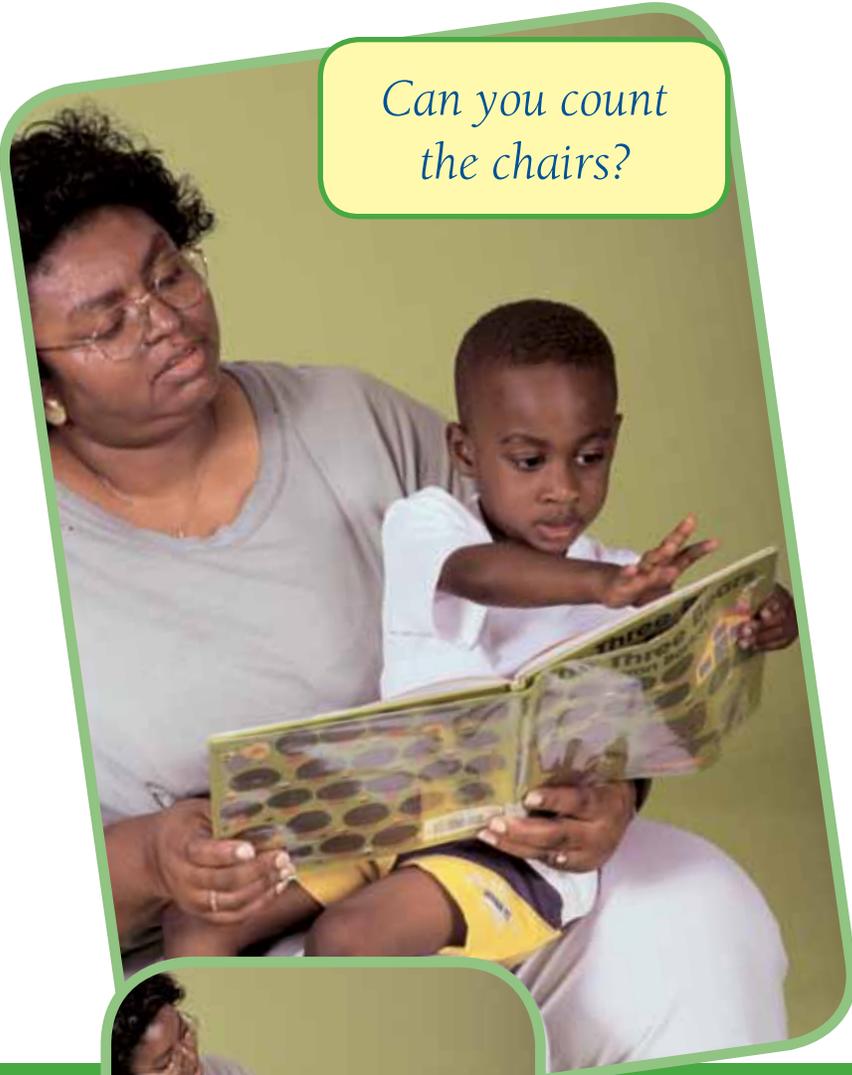
Help your child recognize body parts on others by inviting him to find your shin, ankle, etc. He can also find the parts on a doll as he finds them on his own body.

Let's read together!

Toes, Ears, & Nose!
by Karen Katz

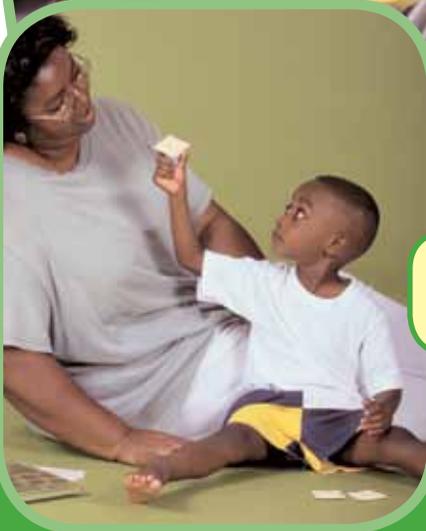
Stories With Three

*Can you count
the chairs?*



When reading books that illustrate the concept of *three*, stop and let your child count items that come in threes.

Your child will gain a fuller understanding of the number *three* by hearing it in stories and by counting.



One for daddy bear...



Why this is important

Now that your child is 3 years old, he may show interest in objects that come in threes. You can strengthen his concept of *three* by telling traditional stories that are built around the number three.

What you do

- Bring the number *three* to your child's attention by telling or reading stories with threes such as *Three Perfect Peaches*, *The Three Bears*, *The Three Little Pigs*, and *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*.
- Emphasize the number *three* in the title: *Let's read the story The Three Bears. Look, here are their pictures: 1, 2, 3. Three bears.*
- Count items in the story that are grouped in threes such as the bowls, chairs, or beds.
- Have your child use objects such as blocks, clothespins, or crackers as counters. Help your child practice handling groups of three: *Count out some crackers to show how many bears there were in the story. Yes! Let's put that group over here. Now can you count out more crackers to show how many bowls there were?*
- Encourage your child to do most of the counting and talking as you move through the story or count objects. Play this game with different books and objects to help your child learn that *three* is a word and a concept used to describe three items.

Another idea

Look for books with three wishes, three tasks, three fairies, etc. You can go to your local library and ask for help in finding stories with a theme of *three*.

Let's read together!

The Three Bears
by Byron Barton