

“Early childhood development ideas”

by Willemien Krüger © March 2012

A number of years ago I had a business where I presented workshops for moms and their under-three year olds to learn to play together and provide age-appropriate stimulation for milestone development in the early years. Areas covered included things like fine motor skills, gross motor skills, intellectual and creative development. It was a good learning experience for both myself and the moms and young ones who came along. I have learnt (as I believe most moms does after the first child) that a lot of intellectual and fine/gross motor stimulation happens daily in the context of normal life, as long as you are just living a life by going places, seeing people, doing things and involving your child in everything. But still we are sometimes unsure as to whether we do enough and what type of playthings and toys our small children need. This article will try and address this question. This might also help in knowing what type of presents to buy for other people's children if you are unsure or have past the stage with your own children.

To learn more about Early Childhood Development Milestones, the internet can be useful. Websites such as the following are valuable :

<http://www.babycenter.com/milestone-charts-birth-to-age-3>

<http://www.baby-milestones.com/>

<http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/early-development/>

On all of the websites there is detail descriptions of what you can expect to develop when. You will see that apart from the gross motor development taking huge leaps in the first year (sitting, crawling, walking), there is also the development of fine motor skills such as the pincher grasp (where thumbnail and forefinger touches), intellectually there is an amazing growth in understanding things in the second year. And from after 2 years old there is the capacity to really try out new things such as being creative, climbing, hopping, drawing and of course talking almost without end.

A very important thing to remember is that none of the ideas in the table presented below is prescriptive i.t.o. your child should be able to do this by that age. ...this article's purpose is to provide ideas for young mothers looking for educational play ideas, it is not a doctor's analysis on your child's developmental milestones. All children develop at different rates, also in different aspects. The more important thing is to have daily one-on-one interaction with your child so he/she can experience **relationship building** time.

Following a table providing ideas for easy-to-make playthings for young ages, divided in groups for every six months of the first three years of a child's life :

During the first year there will be development leaps in gross motor, fine motor and intellectual skills.

0 – 6 months (from newborn to sitting baby, wow !)

Textures of all sorts (satin, ribbon, string (just as is or knotted for a different feel), velvet, felt, sandpaper, curls, etc.) to touch and describe.

Magnets – to be put on and taken off on tins, the fridge or freezer or any other magnet attracting surface. (excellent fine motor skill development!)

Puppets (whether made from carton with places for just 2 fingers to through as in picture for Humpty Dumpty or proper material ones) – great for language development and play



Sensory experiences

– seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting and smelling. All these are part of daily life, but can be extra special if you provide extra variety.

6 – 12 months (now the one year old will be able to take stuff into his/her hands...and put them into his/her mouth)

Little filmboxes filled with rice, pasta and salt provide different sounds when shaken.

Trying to put straws, cotton and even pieces of bathchain through the opening of a cut 2liter bottle will provide fun for hours...(but DO OBSERVE this carefully as the stuff will probably go straight to the mouth for a while still. If you are not comfortable with this, leave it till later stage)

Peg and play where you can put pegs into their spaces on the board, seeing colors and shapes have good educational value.

Have a container where the top has 2 slits, color 2 colors and provide 2 colors cardboard pieces to try and put into box.

Puzzle of the soft type where the child only need to match the basic shape of big sizes are good and can also be used in the bath.



Provide a safe environment

for exploration inside and outside your house and garden. Outside play is very important and healthy.

During the second year the big development is in language and communication skills, and don't underestimate the growth in more complicated gross motor skills that you will probably not even notice anymore...hopping, jumping, running and so on

12 – 18 months (Cute as can be and getting clever by the day)

Matching games – in the picture ranges of mittens to match have been handmade, whereas the matching pairs of butterflies were store bought.

Putting all sorts of pictures into envelopes, and then taking them out and discussing them children enjoy surprisingly...

Grouping cards or physical objects from large to small or otherway round

Homemade fishing game with strings and magnets are the fishing pole tied onto little fingers and the fish, cardboard pieces with paper clip on, has to be caught is good for fine motor stimulation.

Put on the carton sheep's missing legs (washing pegs) are not only a fine motor activity but also helps with counting.

Lastly a homemade felt bear where the face, body, legs and arms have been separated and needs to be put into the right place on the base (whole body). If you want to make it extra fun, add a cap, scarf, mittens and socks to put onto head, hands and feet.



Apart from just involving your child in your daily life try and play something with a specific focus once a day. Simply **playing with a ball(s)** can be challenging and fun now.

18 – 24 months (Suddenly the 2 year old can do a lot more...)

For fine motor skills development, provide threading stuff (even homemade plastic containers with holes in will suffice, but not sharp needle and fine thread)

Matching and categorization games will be interesting and intellectually stimulating

All sorts of starting puzzles with pieces of 2 or maybe 4 pieces can be a nice challenge for some children (but not all children enjoy puzzles...)



Now is the time when the home is filled with all sorts of toys, remember that toys are not as necessary as **environment**, loving relationships and the outdoors.

During the third year one will suddenly realize your ‘baby’ has grown up and is now a fullfledged toddler – what an amazing journey (s)he went through...hold on as curiosity in all things will keep you both active when awake

24 – 30 months (Very quickly time passes by and the toddler is now getting interested in more variety of play)

Puppets which you can use for interactive dialogue ‘plays’ are very useful

Threading with matching colors and big shapes

Beanbag games inside or outside are always enjoyed

Basic shapes matching, can also use jumbo sized shapes for reinforcement

Coloring/drawing material – big crayons for drawing on big pieces of paper, chalk for drawing on tiles outside and paint are exciting to do now



As language development is on a roll now, **conversations** with your child is very important. Understanding and obeying instructions will improve now. All sorts of **Art and music activities** will be fun now, but don't expect too much of the product yet...

30 – 36 months (The adorable 3 year old will be entertaining him/herself, and will also love to be entertained especially by you)

Having his/her own books is a treasure for most young children

Coloring books are useful as well as a variety of puzzles (on picture there is a floor puzzle with big pieces also)

Matching cards – color, shapes, part/whole etc. can be played together

Putting shapes on its place on a picture can be a challenge while learning is fun

Threading can now become useful for dressing/undressing paper dolls (if one can still find this...) and provide long hours of play



Don't be tempted to send your child to preschool too early, rather invite friends with children over. **Nothing can replace your role in the child's life.**

All of the above was very useful for me to know as a young mother, and I have learnt to recognize when my babies/toddlers were doing things that are developing either their intellect or fine motor or gross motor or creative skills. I have also learnt that I can relax as I read about development, spoken to other mothers in similar situations, and interacted socially. The most valuable thing I have learnt thought, which I will strongly recommend to every young mother is the following :

TALK to your child continuously and about everything,

use a wide vocabulary and dramatise as often as you can. This talking should include **READING** to your children, not so much for them to be early readers, or even to value books (although they will most probably learn that) but again for the value of building his/her vocabulary. Language is the basis of communication not only in relationships but also for every field of study. The only difference is the type of 'language' used in different fields, but the basis of 'understanding language' should be there. This is something that is 'not learnt in school' ...this is something '**used to learn with**' in school, so if it is not there, how will they learn? Remember that the television or dvd's cannot replace your communication with your child, and never is the same age group the best place to learn new vocabulary (apart from words you most likely won't like them to learn). Andrew Pudewa (the language expert in homeschool circles) regards the input of 'sophisticated language patterns' into a child's brain as critical for brain development in general but also to be able to communicate what you mean and it empowers you to learn any field of knowledge. A 'normal' child today is not automatically exposed to good language – most of his/her time is spent with peer groups, television, media and cellphone talk, not exactly what you deem sophisticated language. Exposure to good vocabulary in adult conversations as well as reading good books to your children (not just until they are older than three....), will help put the language patterns there.

Oh how I long back to those exciting busy baby/toddlers years....enjoy every moment !