

A child's interests are

Windows of Opportunity

to fun and enjoyable learning

Playing with toy cars
and pretending to drive
are powerful
learning activities
for many young children



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

Outdoors—yard, driveway, or sidewalk

- Make a two-sided, posterboard sign stapled to a wooden yardstick. On one side draw a red, six-sided STOP sign. On the other side, draw a traffic light with the green light (bottom of three) colored in and the word "GO" printed under it. Use the sign to give your child traffic signals as she rides her trike around the yard, driveway, or sidewalk. This can be especially fun if siblings or neighborhood playmates join in on their riding toys.
- Let your child play with several toy tools and pretend to "work on" his tricycle or wagon "car." Help him set up an imaginary garage or auto repair shop. A discarded cardboard box and a piece of old garden hose can be made into a toddler-size gasoline pump.
- Mount an old steering wheel (purchased inexpensively at a car graveyard or garage sale) on a porch or deck rail where your child can easily reach and turn it. Pull up a couple of seats and pretend to go on road trips together. For extra fun, mount the steering wheel on a board where you can add features like a side-view mirror; a squeeze-bulb-style bicycle horn; a shoebox "glove compartment" filled with maps, sunglasses, and driving gloves; a radio or CD player with your child's favorite tunes; and other auto accessories to enrich make-believe play.

Kitchen and dining room

- Line up kitchen chairs in rows like seats on a bus. Take turns with your child pretending to be the driver or a passenger. Recruit dolls and stuffed animals to fill the seats. Practice boarding the bus, paying the fare, finding an empty seat, and talking about sights outside the "bus windows." Sing "The Wheels on the Bus" together.
- Let your child use a toy truck to load and deliver small items like napkins, plastic cups, and unbreakable salt-and-pepper shakers from kitchen cupboards to the dining table before meals.

In the living room or family room

- Show your little one how to build simple ramps, tunnels, and bridges for her toy cars using building blocks or everyday items found in the room—books and magazines, chair cushions, a coffee table, small stools, etc.
- Sketch a map-like street layout on a large piece of canvas or other sturdy and inexpensive cloth. Let your child help you paint the streets a bright color. Paint the surrounding areas in green for grass, blue for rivers and ponds, gray for parking lots, etc. Your young child can enjoy pushing his cars along the "streets" and creating buildings and houses, trees, and playgrounds using blocks and other building materials.

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

In the family car

- Pay attention to what your young child looks at and what excites her when you're in the car. Talk about those things. "You see the fire engine on the way to a fire. The lights and siren are on!"
- Make simple statements to your child about what you're doing as you drive and he rides along in his car seat. "See the STOP sign? It's time for me to stop and wait to see what's coming." "I'm turning on our squeaky windshield wipers. It's starting to rain. Wipers brush the raindrops away so we can see!"
- Sing aloud or listen to recordings of children's songs as you ride in the car together.

Playground or park

- Bring along a few favorite dump trucks and "diggers" to play with in the playground of a public park. It can be a great opportunity to experience playing with other children, making friends, sharing toys, and saying "please" and "thank you."
- Help your child build tunnels and roads for her toy cars in the playground sandbox.
- Let your child roll his small cars down the slide. Show him how to race two cars down the slide to see which one is faster.
- Help your child interact with other children by asking questions about their riding toys or toy cars and trucks.



Give baby time to "check out" an older child's "wheels"

Visits to friends and family

- Walk along with your young child and a friend as they ride their trikes or "Big Wheels" along a sidewalk to a park, neighborhood store, or other destination.
- Take your child's riding toy along when you visit a friend or relative. He'll have the chance to "drive" on new terrain and see different scenery as he "drives" along their sidewalks paths, and driveway.



Some young children have fun pretending their tricycles are cars.

Other community activities

- Go to an automatic car wash. Hold your child so she can watch through the windows as cars are pulled from one station to the next through sloshing rags, whirling brushes, soap-and-water sprayers, blowers, etc. Talk about the different basic steps in cleaning a car. Let her say hello to the car-wash staff. On another occasion, let her experience a drive-through car wash from the inside of the car. Talk about each step of the washing process as it happens all around you!
- Spend time with your child at a car repair garage. From outside the garage doors, let him watch the workers move cars up and down on a hydraulic lift, rotate or change tires, test cars for safety, etc.
- Make up a game to play together as you take a walk or ride or as you pass a parking lot. See which of you can be first to spot a car of a certain color, a truck for hauling animals, a garbage truck, a fire engine, etc.

