

Ideas to enhance early growth and development

Hooray for Me!

When an infant or young child sees the connection between her action and the effect it has, she is more likely to smile, laugh, vocalize, and repeat the behavior.

What **YOU** can do to help your child see that what she does can **make something fun happen!**

It's important for moms, dads, and other caregivers to take a close look at the kinds of everyday learning opportunities available in a child's home and community environments to be sure the child is learning how her actions make things happen. Pay extra attention to activities your child can do to produce an interesting effect, no matter how small. A good technique is to ask yourself the following three questions:

■ **Does my child have access to different toys that give immediate feedback?**

Prepare a list of your child's toys. Identify those that provide some form of immediate feedback—a sight, sound, or tactile sensation, for example—that she finds pleasing. Make certain these types of toys are readily accessible to your child, and help her interact with each one until she becomes aware of the relationship between her action and the toy's response.

Some familiar playthings that provide immediate responses to a child's actions are mobiles or other hanging toys, various kinds of music-makers, pull toys, roly-polies, squeeze toys, and "busy-boxes" with an array of action-response pairs like small doors that a child slides open to reveal a colorful picture or a dial she can spin to hear an interesting sound.

■ **Do the adults in my child's life respond immediately and appropriately to my child's behavior?**

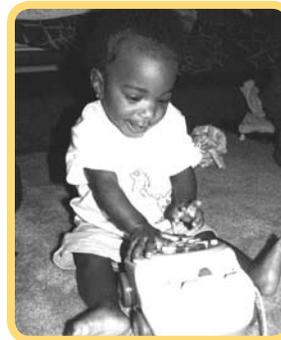
Quick and pleasing responses by a parent or other adult to a child's efforts to communicate, or to any other child behavior a parent or teacher might want to encourage, can be extremely rewarding. So, in setting up situations that allow your child's actions to make something pleasant happen, don't neglect the power of interactions with other people—social rewards.



No one's better than my mom at giving me instant "feedback." Every time I reach up, she holds my hands and sings our funny song! I love it!



Making music on a washtub is great fun, and it's even more rewarding when Mom joins in.



Whenever I push the buttons on my toy telephone, I can hear all sorts of interesting things—bells, whistles, and happy music! What fun!

An important consideration in using social rewards is making sure they're delivered quickly following the child's action. Desirable social rewards can include smiles, animated facial expressions, tummy tickles, singing, gentle blowing, brushing the skin with a feather or furry object, funny noises, touches, movements, lifting or rocking the child, hugs, kisses, and much more. Use your imagination!

■ **Is it easy for my child to recognize that she is the one making something interesting happen?**

Smiling, laughing, vocalizing, and excitement are more likely to happen when the relationship between what a child does and what happens is clear and easy for her to understand. Toys that produce a simple response are better than toys that make lots of different sounds and movements. Social rewards work best when they are soft and simple, and occur after a child produces a behavior directed toward you.

More opportunities ...

Parents and caregivers can help strengthen the infant or young child's understanding of the relationship between his behavior and something fun or interesting that happens next by providing a combination of rewarding responses, some from people (social responses) and some from the toys or objects with which the child is interacting (nonsocial responses).

Mobile Magic!

Even if you're "all thumbs" with crafts, making toys that please little ones with consistent, interesting, rewarding results is within your grasp—and it's fun! Mobiles can be wonderfully motivating playthings. They reward eager small hands with eye-catching movement and pleasing sounds. Even the slightest touch sets them swaying and noisemaking time after time—just the kinds of dependable responses that encourage and delight young children. Try these easy ideas:

Favorite Toys. Gather three or four of baby's favorite small toys—colorful rattles, teething toys, squeaky animals—and attach them with short lengths of narrow elastic tape tied or stitched to a wooden dowel or to the bottom of a sturdy coat hanger.

Kitchen Klackers. Your kitchen probably holds a treasure trove of mobile materials. Sort through your odds-and-ends drawers for sets of aluminum or plastic measuring spoons, abandoned key rings, and any other child-safe items that can be suspended from a long-handled wooden spoon or stout chopstick. Another nice and click-clackingly noisy kitchen-theme mobile can be made entirely of old metal teaspoons dangling in a row.

Try hanging these mobiles over your child's crib, reclining seat, or high chair, within easy touching distance. Another good spot is from an overhead kitchen light fixture, where you can stop and let your child touch it as you carry him by during the day.

Tempting Toys!

Certain kinds of toys and play materials make the cause-and-effect connection between a young child's interaction with them and what happens next especially clear to the child. The way the toy responds helps the child realize that he is the one who is making something interesting happen.

Such toys include squeeze toys, push toys, busy boxes, and many others that produce immediate, interesting responses when a child explores and plays with them.

Cupboard rhythm band. If you don't have access to commercial versions of such toys, or if your little one loses interest in them, use pie pans to bang together, upturned soup-kettle drums, and other household "rhythm instruments" to serve as handy playthings that allow a child to see how what he does can make something pleasing and fun (and noisy!) happen.

Lap 'em up!

Children's Lap Games. Whether they're traditional favorites like "Pat-a-cake" or "Peek-a-boo," or rhyming finger plays invented on the spur of the moment, lap games are delightful, socially rewarding ways for little ones to learn very clearly *that their actions can make you do fun and interesting things.*

A number of illustrated collections of finger plays and other lap games for young children can be found in your public library or book store. These will remind you of lap games from your own early years ("This Little Piggy," "There Was a Little Turtle," "Where Is Thumbkin?") and introduce you to brand new ones. They all share an emphasis on pleasant adult-child interaction, with predictable, rewarding responses for child participation.

Other playful, socially stimulating actions that help a child see the relationship between something he does and the welcome effect it has can include things like tummy tickles or blowing raspberries on the child's cheek.

Stop 'n' Go Vocal Play. For some spontaneous fun, begin singing a favorite song to your child. Pause suddenly, then guide your child's hand to pat your arm, touch your nose, or make some other gesture as a sign for you to begin singing again. Repeat until he realizes that his action is what makes you continue singing time after time.



Lap games charm young children with light-hearted, immediate rewards.

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