

5 Games to Play with Babies (9 months)

Why is play important for babies? It helps develop sturdy brain architecture, the foundations of lifelong health, and the building blocks of resilience.

Playful interactions with adults also help babies build **executive function skills**. Imitation, hiding, and conversation games, like the ones below, teach them to focus attention, use working memory, and practice basic self-control.

When you play with a baby, **follow their lead!** Play games they show an interest in and, whenever possible, let *them* determine how long to play and when to move on to something else.

1



“Dickory Dean”

Sit on the edge of a chair or couch and hold baby on your lap. Bounce baby up and down as you chant, “What’s the matter with Dickory Dean?” Then lift baby up high and say, “He jumped right into the washing machine!” Bring baby back down to your lap and swish them side to side while saying, “Chug, chug, chug, chug” two times. Then, bounce baby and chant, “Nothing’s the matter with Dickory Dean.” Now, slowly say, “He dove in dirty...” and drop baby down between your knees. Finally, exclaim, “And he jumped out clean!” and lift baby up high again. Babies will learn to remember the game and anticipate the thrill of the movements!

2



Baby See, Baby Do!

Make simple gestures in front of a baby—wave your hand, stick out your tongue, or blow a kiss. Babies love to copy adults by watching them, remembering what they do, waiting their turn, and then trying to imitate. Later, if the baby makes the gesture first, copy them back!

3



Where Is It?

Find a safe object that makes noise—like a set of keys that jingle or a toy that makes music. Make the sound to get baby interested, then hide the object behind your back or under a blanket. Encourage baby to look for it, saying, “Where are the keys?” When baby finds the object, be enthusiastic and say, “You found it!” Try different hiding spots or different objects and repeat the game until baby loses interest.

4



Boom!

Take turns dropping a small toy into a container. When the toy hits the bottom, say, “Boom!” This might make the baby laugh or clap in excitement. After a few times, drop the toy in the container, but don’t say anything. The baby might try to say, “Boom!” or make another noise. If they do, respond by saying it back. Next, encourage baby to drop the toys in the bucket and say “Boom!” with you.

5



Grocery Store Explore

At the market, point out and tell baby about the different foods you see. Or talk about what baby is pointing at or noticing. What type of food is it? What color is it? What does it taste or smell like? “I see red and green apples. I wonder if they taste sweet?” If baby makes sounds in response, listen attentively and keep the discussion going. Even though babies at this age can’t respond in words, they still learn language skills by listening to you.



To see more brain-building play ideas for kids of all ages, visit:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/brainbuildingthroughplay>

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