



Thinking about your child's play

Being at home with your child for longer amounts of time than usual gives you a chance to understand how they play. You can get into a routine that works for you both. It's also a chance for you to enjoy being playful – and for you to benefit from playing, too.

When children play it isn't always the same. Sometimes your child might like to play alone. Sometimes they might want to play with others. They might like to play online, with other people in your house, or with a pet, doll or teddy bear as their companion.

Your child might sometimes enjoy active, energetic play. At other times they might choose something quieter or creative. These are all natural ways of playing.

Having a chance to pay attention to how your child plays can be a lovely part of spending time together. It helps you:

- get to know your child better
- get ideas about other things they might enjoy doing
- recognise clues about how they're feeling
- get into a routine of being together that is relaxed and enjoyable for you both.

Some tips for responding to play

- **Pause** before you get involved in your child's play.
- **Look and listen** to what is happening. What is your child doing?
- **Think** about how they are playing. What would happen if you suddenly joined in? If your child is safe, do you need to join in?
- **Decide** whether to act. After you've paused, looked, listened and thought, you'll have a better idea of whether your child would like you to join in.
- **Reflect.** Afterwards, you could think about how your involvement changed your child's playing. For example, did it stop them playing? Did it add more fun? Did it reassure them?

Children usually seem to know when another child wants to play or be left alone. Adults might need to remember how to work this out. One way of knowing when you've got it right is to tell your child they can ask you to go away!

Your child might have different ways of showing you they'd like you to come and play with them – not just by saying it. For example, your child might:

- make a funny face at you
- tap you on the shoulder and run away
- cuddle into you
- hang about near you
- do something annoying to get your attention
- bring toys over to show you.

There are different ways you can join in. It could mean playing with your child, but it might also mean:

- making a place to play, which could be as small as a cardboard box or a space on the sofa
- tuning in to the emotion in your child's play and helping them work it out with simple playthings from around the house
- singing a song, playing some music or telling a story
- finding some things to play with – for example, some sheets to make a den, or some pots and pans for a pretend cafe.



The *IPA play in crisis* series is designed to offer straightforward advice and suggestions to help you and your child keep playing through the coronavirus pandemic.