



Play Ball!

To explore and learn, your child needs to move! Playing with balls gets her moving and helps her strengthen and learn how to control her muscles; builds hand-eye coordination; and gives her all kinds of ideas about movement, size, and shape to test.

- Look for soft fabric balls for your baby, with tags that she can grab and hold. (Be sure there is nothing she can swallow or choke on.)
- Provide your child with balls in many different sizes, colors, and textures. You may want to designate some balls as indoor balls and some balls only for outdoors.
- To your child, any round object, such as an orange, tomato, melon, rolled-up pair of socks, or holiday ornament, might look like a ball that he can roll, bounce, or throw. He will also test other objects to see if they can work like balls, such as dropping a block to see if it will bounce or throwing a stuffed animal to see how it moves through the air. Set appropriate limits, and keep soft balls handy to substitute for objects that aren't safe for throwing.
- Your child will enjoy rolling a ball with you. Sit on the floor facing each other and roll a ball back and forth with your child. You can vary the game by rolling the ball fast or slow or by sitting close together or far apart. Describe what's happening as you play: *We're rolling the ball. I have the ball. Now I'm rolling it to you.* Encourage your child to tell you when she is rolling the ball to you. You can add a countdown: *One, two, three, here comes the ball!* or sing a song as you roll.
- Encourage your child to combine balls with other items.
 - Balls in bowls roll around and around and can be stirred with or balanced on wooden spoons.
 - Balls in bowls or buckets can be dumped into other containers.

- Containers with lids make interesting noises when shaken with balls inside (make sure the lids are secure if you use a ball smaller than 1¼ inches in diameter).
- Rolling a ball into a block tower or other upright object can make it fall down. (Plastic liter bottles make great bowling pins!)
- Most balls float. If you hold them under the water, then let go, they will splash up! Give your child lots of chances to make these kinds of discoveries.
- Let your child make balls. Provide play dough, cookie or bread dough, or masking tape.
- Ramp up the rolling action with inclined surfaces. Try rolling small balls down (and up!) a cookie sheet or a cutting board, or a piece of cardboard. See if your child has ideas for other ramps, such as the slide at the playground or a sofa cushion propped up against the sofa.
- Let your child make ball tracks by rolling a small ball around on a floured cookie sheet or rolling a ball through a puddle.
- While your child is looking, roll a ball under a chair or couch. See if he can figure out where it went and how to retrieve it.
- When your toddler has learned to go up and down stairs safely, let her watch how different balls roll and bounce down the steps. Retrieve them together, climb the stairs, and let her have a turn to roll the balls down.