

Make your own

early learning resources for babies and toddlers



Babies are born ready to learn

Playing games with babies and toddlers is a great way for them to learn new words and ideas. Their little brains grow when we communicate with them in loving ways and participate in fun activities together. As parents and carers of young children there is so much we can do to lay important foundations for reading and writing, giving our children the chance to do well later when they go to school.

The activities in this book are designed to develop babies' and toddlers' language and make learning fun. The resources are inexpensive and easy to make and mostly use recycled materials.

At Wordworks, we want all children's lives to be enriched and for them to grow to their full potential.

Join us in this learning journey!

We thank the Wordworks team and our partners for contributing towards the development of these resources which are based on ideas from our Every Word Counts Programme.

Please visit our website for more information about early literacy and language development and our programmes for babies and young children up to the age of 8 years. You can also download free resources, games and stories to promote early learning.

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1

Matching shapes

Children live in a world of shapes, and learning to identify shapes is one of the first maths concepts that your toddler can learn. Playing the matching shapes game will help her notice, categorise and learn the names of the different shapes. She will learn about size and colour whilst at the same time developing her small muscles.



You will need:



sharp knife or scissors



glue

four plastic lids in different colours, sizes and shapes



How to make matching shapes:

1

Cut two pieces of cardboard exactly the same size, making sure the four lids fit onto the board.

2

Place the four lids onto one of the sheets of cardboard and trace around the lids.

3

Cut out the shapes you have traced, using the knife.

4

Glue the two sheets of cardboard together, and place the lids into the correct size shape.

2 Single picture cards

Babies and toddlers love to look at pictures of things that they know, like people's faces, animals, cars and food. You can talk together about the picture and give the word for the object you are looking at or ask your toddler to point to something in the picture, e.g. 'Where is the dog's nose?' It is fun to talk about or act out what the person in the picture is doing (for instance jumping, sleeping, reading, dancing). When pointing to an animal, have fun imitating the sounds the animal makes.



You will need:



How to make single picture cards:

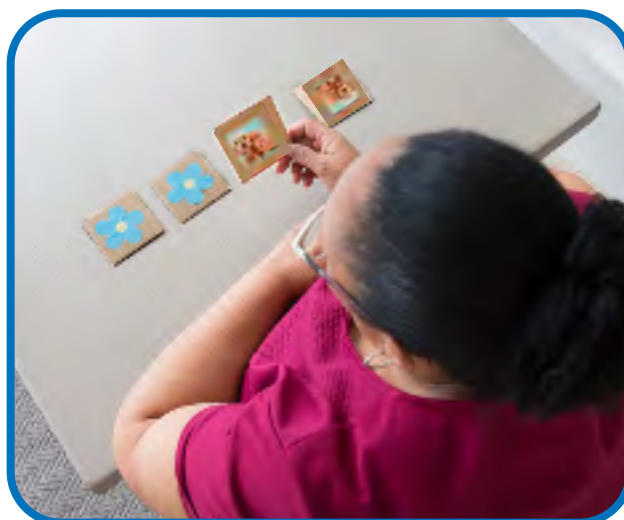
- 1 Select and cut out pictures.
- 2 Measure and cut the board to fit your pictures.
- 3 Paste the pictures onto the board.

3

Matching picture cards

Simple matching games will help your toddler to notice detail and develop her listening and language skills, and can be played from about two years of age. Here are some tips for playing a matching game:

- Place one picture face up on the mat, and hold the matching picture in your hand without showing the picture to your toddler.
- Talk about the picture on the mat for example 'That's a pretty yellow flower'.
- Then describe the matching picture in your hand using the same words.
- Put the picture you are holding next to the picture on the mat and say: 'Look they're the same!' This may sound very simple, but your toddler is learning how to compare and match.
- When she is familiar with this picture, you can show her another two matching pictures, and then a third pair of matching pictures, following the same steps.
- Then place one of each picture face up on the mat.
- Hold one of the three pictures in your hand, and describe the picture. Ask your toddler to point to the matching picture on the mat.



You will need:

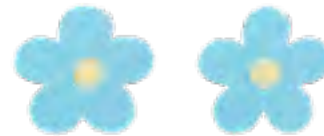
ruler



cardboard



identical pictures from old magazines or leaflets



glue



scissors



pencil

How to make matching picture cards:

- 1 Select and cut out two identical pictures to make a pair of cards.
- 2 Measure and cut out two pieces of board exactly the same size to fit your pictures. Toddlers can comfortably handle a 60 cm x 90 cm card.
- 3 Paste the pictures onto the board.

Tip:

Follow the suggestions for choosing pictures for board books. A set of five or six pairs of pictures is a good start, but add to these as your toddler becomes familiar with the cards you have.

4

Board books

Babies can be encouraged to start handling board books from a very young age. Here are some tips to help babies get to know books:

- Follow your baby's lead and let her look for things that interest her, even if she goes backwards and forwards or skips pages.
- Help her to turn the pages.
- Give her the word for the picture she is pointing at. If possible, link the picture in the book with the real thing.
- When pointing to an animal, have fun imitating the sounds the animal makes.
- Stop when she is tired or loses interest!

Home-made board books are cheap to make, so never get cross if your baby drops the book or damages it.



You will need:



How to make a board book:

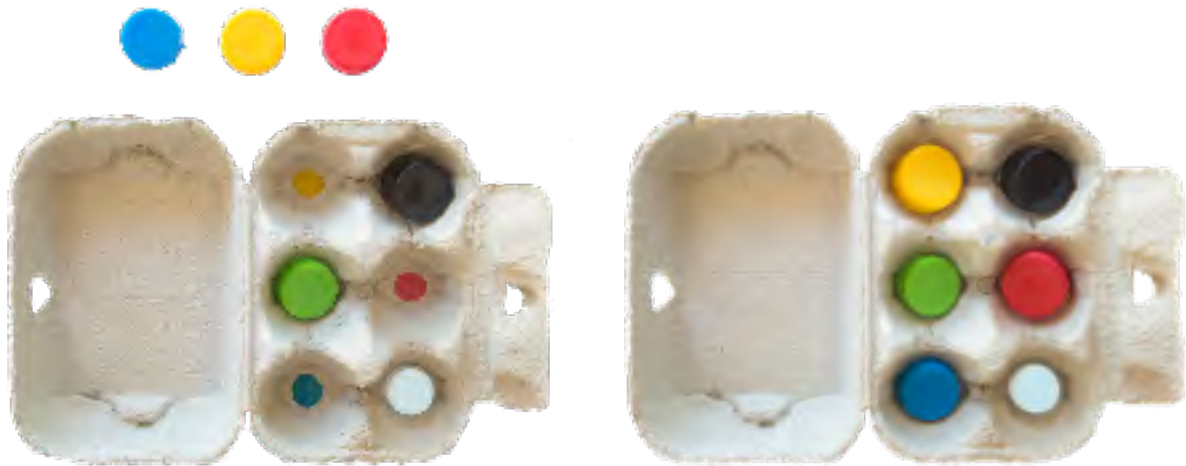
- 1 Decide on a theme e.g. shapes, colours, people, animals, faces, the five senses. Choose big, simple pictures with bright colours. Use no words or very few words.
- 2 Cut the board and tape single pages together on one edge to make up a book of four to six pages. A comfortable size for babies to hold is 15 cm x 20 cm. You can also fold a single sheet of cardboard in half.
- 3 Paste your pictures onto both sides of the page. It is best to have the pictures positioned in the same direction.

When making a sensory book choose material or pictures that show differences in the five sense, e.g. (**touch**: rough and smooth; **sight**: bright/shiny and dark; **smell**: flowers and spices; **hearing**: things that make scratching sounds or knocking sounds; **taste**: savoury and sweet foods).

5

Egg boxes with colours

Use your egg boxes to make a fun matching and sorting game. Your toddler will soon be able to recognise and sort different colours. He will develop his fine motor skills and language as he names the different colours!



You will need:



grey egg box with six compartments



six different coloured plastic bottle caps (red, white, blue, green, yellow, black are usually easy to find)

koki pens to match the bottle caps



How to make an egg box with colours:

- 1 Choose a clean egg box.
- 2 Colour the bottom of each compartment with a different colour so that you have six different coloured compartments.
- 3 Place the bottle caps in the matching compartments.

6

Rattles

Rattles help babies learn many new skills. At first babies can follow the movement of the rattle with their eyes as it is moved in front of them. Babies listen to the sounds the rattle makes and in time will turn their head towards the sound. By holding the rattle babies develop their fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination, their arm muscles are stimulated and they learn to move with a purpose.



You will need:

plastic water
or cooldrink
bottles



glue



stones,
shells, husks,
buttons,
beads,
beans, rice
etc.

Toddlers and babies can easily choke on small objects so be careful when choosing objects.

How to make rattles:

1

Wash the bottle very well.

2

Place a handfull of stones, shells, or beads into the bottle. Mixing the objects makes it interesting to look at.

3

Glue the lid onto the bottle or tighten the lid.

7

Posting box

Babies have fun with posting boxes and learn how to problem solve at the same time. Picking up and posting objects also helps to develop the small muscles in your baby's hands and develops the connections between his eyes and hands. This helps his brain to grow! You can also talk with your baby about the colours, shapes and sizes of the different objects he is posting. Even if the shapes don't fit the holes exactly he can start learning about big and small, and notice that the bigger objects only fit through the bigger holes.



You will need:



ice cream containers or yoghurt tubs with lids for the posting box



a hard board to cut on

A koki or pen



sharp knife



plastic bottle caps in many shapes, colours and sizes to post into the box

How to make a posting box:

- 1 Group the plastic bottle caps into different sizes.
- 2 Make three or more different size openings on the lid of the posting box by tracing around the caps on the lid and using the knife to cut out the shapes you have traced.
- 3 Make sure all the caps fit through the holes you have made and that there are no sharp edges.

A knitted ball is one of the best toys for babies. Your baby can see and touch it, and crawl towards it. She can roll it and later, she can throw and catch it. Toddlers enjoy the to-and-fro of playing ball with others.

Tips for playing the hide-and-find game with your baby:

- Hide the ball under a small blanket, then show your baby where the ball is.
- Repeat this activity and encourage her to keep trying, and praise her efforts.
- Soon she will be able to find the ball without you showing her where it is. It often takes lots of 'tries' to work something out.



You will need:



Double knitting yarn
Tip: Use up odd bits of wool.



3.5 mm
knitting
needles



wool needle



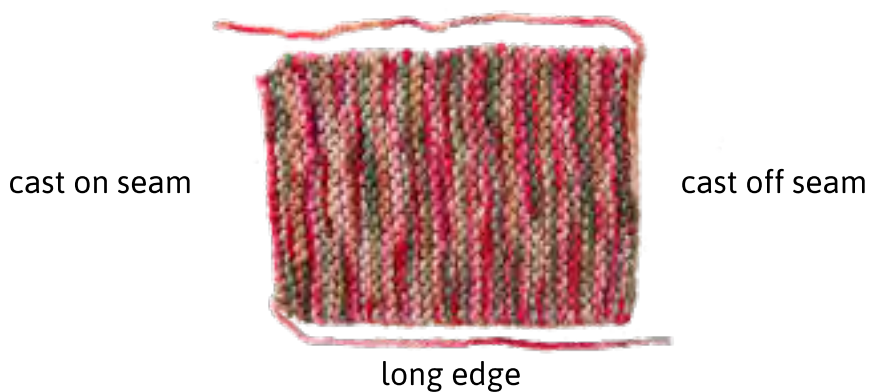
stuffing (an old
pillow will do)



scissors

How to make knitted balls:

- 1 Cast on 17 stitches.
- 2 Knit 48 rows (garter stitch).
- 3 Cast off - leave a long thread for sewing up the ball.
- 4 Thread needle through stitches on one long edge and pull tight - make a double stitch to secure.
- 5 Sew the cast on and cast off seams together.
- 6 Stuff the ball - make it nice and firm.
- 7 Thread needle through stitches on the second long edge and pull tight.
- 8 Secure with a double stitch and thread the wool into the ball.



Tips:

- You can make very big or small balls by adjusting the number of stitches and rows, or the size of needles and wool you use.
- To make the ball interesting, knit different patterns, for example:
 - Alternate two, three or four colours.
 - Knit stripes of 2, 4, 6 or 8 rows.
 - Turn knitting inside out when sewing up.
 - Use variegated yarn for no joins.

Playdough can keep young children occupied for a long time. It is easy to make and if kept in a plastic bag it can be used again and again. Playing with playdough is not only a fun, creative activity, it also helps children strengthen their small muscles to be able to draw and write later. It also helps children notice how things look and to make something that 'stands for' the real thing.



You will need:

Equipment:



sieve



wooden spoon



pot

Ingredients:

2 cups flour (You can replace 1 of the cups of flour with a cup of maizena)



2 cups boiling water



2 tbsp oil

2 tbsp cream of tartar



food colouring is optional

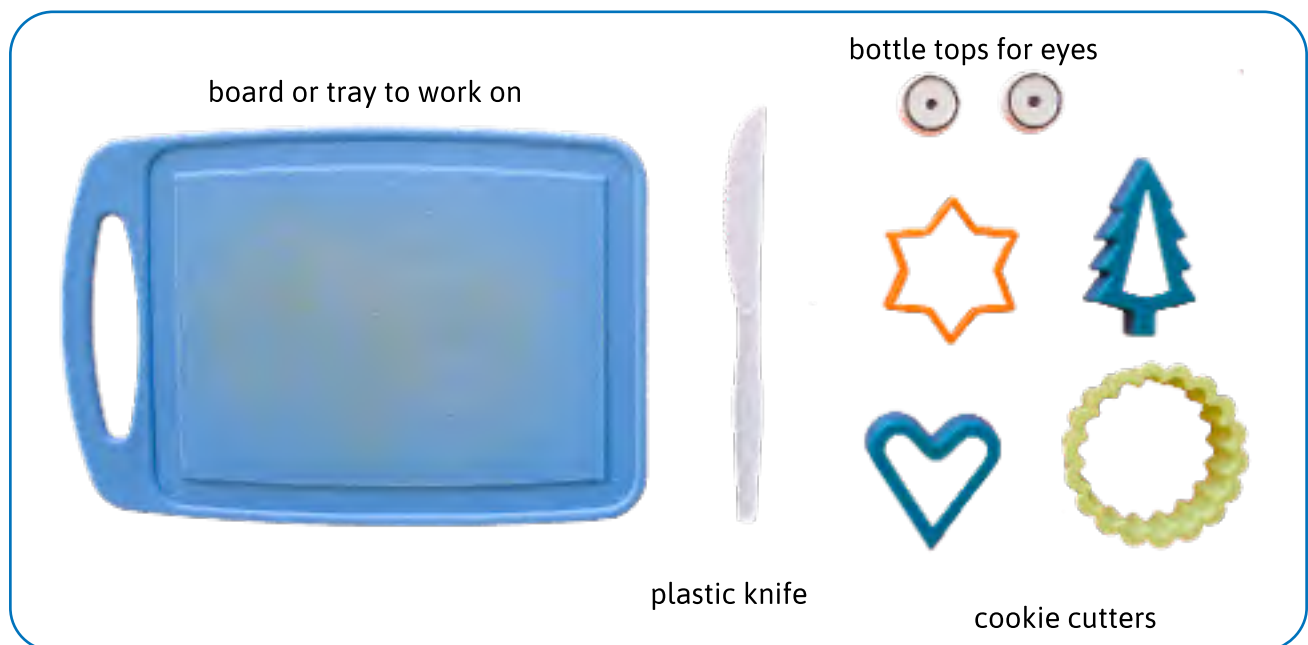


1 cup salt

How to make playdough:

- 1 Boil the water.
- 2 Sieve all the dry ingredients into a big pot and add the boiling water and oil.
- 3 Mix it well with a wooden spoon to form the dough.
- 4 When the dough has cooled knead it with your hands.
- 5 When smooth divide it into equal parts.
- 6 Add food colouring and knead well.
- 7 Store in a sealed plastic bag.

To play, you will need:



Tip:

Babies and young children can't resist eating their playdough, but they usually spit it out as it is salty and tastes bad! If your child does swallow home-made playdough it is not likely to harm him and he probably won't try it again. Eating playdough should be discouraged in a friendly way!

Play baskets can keep your baby busy while you are working. Babies enjoy playing with objects from around the house - you don't have to buy expensive, plastic toys for your baby to play and learn. Follow your baby's lead by describing what she is doing while playing with the things in the basket. For instance when your baby tries to close a jar, you could say: 'Close ... close the jar'. Or when she hugs the doll, you could say: 'Love baby, love baby'.



You will need:



Tips:

- Choose things that are baby-safe and good to suck, feel, shake, look at, open and close, and bang.
- Keep the play basket or box in the same place, and babies will soon know where their toys are kept.
- Make sure that you wash all household items well before adding to the basket.

11 Water play pack

Do not leave very young children alone with water.



You will need:

A variety of objects that can float, sink, squirt, drip

a large
plastic tub



clean water

spray
bottles



scoops and
old bath toys



funnel



corks



spoons



plastic cups and containers



bottle
caps



marbles
and balls



sponges

natural objects such as
stones, sticks, leaves and flowers

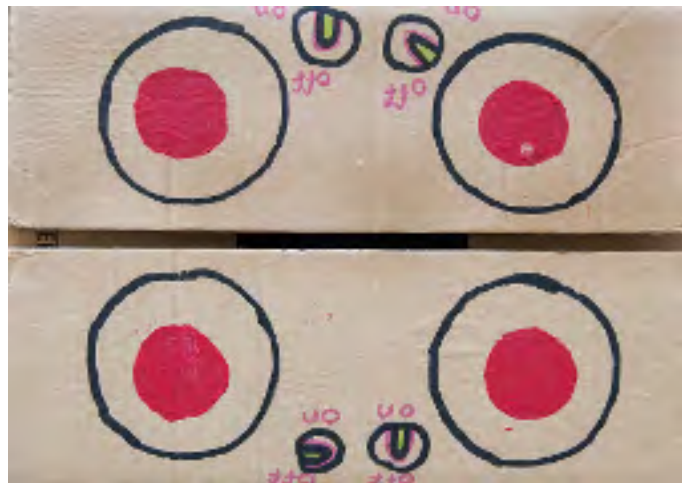


Tips:

- Wash all recycled materials very well.
- Choose safe objects and avoid sharp edges.
- Dry all objects well before storing.

12 Pretend play

Young children love to pretend, and pretend play is a great way to build their language and imagination. You can encourage pretend play with young children by pretending to make food, setting up a shop or being a mother looking after her baby. Follow the children's lead, and don't try to direct their play. Give them time to say what they want to say, and take turns to keep the conversation going. **Listen, wait** and then **build** on what they say.



You will need:

an old box
for a stove



koki pens to draw a stove



empty
plastic
tubs for
pots



empty food packets, tins and bottles



empty
plastic
tubs for
plates
and
bowls



plastic toys



spoons



How to make a stove:

1

Use the bottom of the box for the stove top. Draw four round hot plates and dials.

2

Draw an oven door on the one side of the box.

Other ideas for pretend play:

- **For a shop:** an old box for a counter, empty containers like egg boxes, tea and porridge boxes and soap wrappers. Encourage older children to make play money and a sign with the name of the shop.
- **For a mother:** a doll, a blanket or towel, a baby bottle (any bottle will do) and a plastic tub and spoon.



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