

Playful Parenting with Children who Have Experienced Trauma

Attachment Play Resource Guide





Home Theraplay Activities for Young Children

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Lullaby: Parent cradles child in arms in such a way that eye contact is fully maintained. Parent sings lullaby to child, inserting, wherever possible, child's name and descriptions of his or her features. Example: "Twinkle, twinkle little star, what a lovely boy you are. Nice brown hair and soft, soft cheeks. Big brown eyes from which you peek. Twinkle, twinkle little star. What a lovely boy you are."

Peek-a-boo with hands, feet, towel, blanket, hood of coat, behind pillow or door.

This little piggy went to market.

What will happen when I push this button: Parent gently presses nose, ear, toe and "beeps," "honks," etc.

"Pop" cheeks: Parent fills own cheeks with air and guides child's hands to push gently on parent's cheeks with fingers to pop out the air, encourage child to fill up cheeks and parent pops. Toes can also be used to pop cheeks.

Patty-cake: can be played with feet too!

Any song or rhyme paired with movement, such as dancing, bouncing, rocking, moving limbs, finger plays. Personalized wording, as in Twinkle above, is preferred. Examples:



Rock a bye baby, Patty cake, Itsy bitsy spider, Ride a horsie, The wheels on the bus, Rub a dub dub, I'm gonna get you.

Various experiences with touch and textures: Lotioning, making hand or foot prints in powder, pressing hands or feet into play dough or shaving cream, baby oil for back rub with the child facing you. Be aware of possible sensitivities to odors.

Activities promoting eye contact: parent puts sticker on own nose and helps child pull it off: parent puts cotton ball on nose with a dab of lotion, child blows it off. Blow bubbles in front of child and help him pop with fingers or toes.

Lotion pass: parent puts lotion on nose, passes to child's cheek, helps child pass it back to parent's forehead, rubs lotion on child.

Comb hair with child facing you, commenting on special color, texture, etc.

Tower of hands: Put lotion on parent's and child's hands and make a hand stack, alternating slippery hands. Move from bottom to top and top to bottom.

Pushing over: Parent and child are face to face with child lying on back cradled between parent's legs; parent and child put hands together or child puts feet on parent's shoulders; child pushes parent over (gently) while parent comments on strength. Note: pushes can also be with fingertips, noses, elbows, etc.

Blowing over: blowing mightily, parent "blows over child" encourage child to do same.

Games for 2 adults



Back and forth: child runs, hops, somersaults between 2 adults with encouragement and happy greetings upon arriving at each adult.

Hiding and finding: one parent hides with the child by covering both with a blanket or pillows, other parent joyfully finds and uncovers the treasure.

Catch: parents gently cradle child, swing and carefully "toss" to the other parent.

Shoe and sock race: both parents race to put kisses on feet, then cover with shoes and socks.

Blanket swing: place child in blanket and give a gentle swing, can be done while singing to child. Lyrics might be: "My (name) lies over the ocean..."

Wiggle in and out: Child wiggles out of and back into parent's encircling arms.



Power Reversal Games

- Knock Me Over with a Feather: This is a great activity for young children. Give the child a craft feather, Get on your knees and pretend to be really, really strong, saying "nobody will ever be able to push ME over!" Then let your child use the feather push you over, and make a big deal about how strong she is. Adjust how hard or easy it is to push you over based on your child's age, strength, and temperament.
- Chase Reversal: Run around and have your child try to catch you. You can use the catch as an opportunity to be physically close to your child by hugging or kissing him while you're on the ground. Adjust how hard or easy it is to catch you based on your child's age, strength, and temperament.

Regression Games

- Feed the Bird- have the child sit in your lap or across from you with your knees touching. Pretend to be the mommy bird and feed your baby bird bites of Cherios cereal or gummy worms. Touch the food to the "baby bird's" nose of chin asking, "Is this how we feed the bird?" allow the child to enjoy the treat while maintaining eye contact and a smile.
- Burrito Game-Child lays in the middle of a blanket on the floor, the blanket is the burrito wrap. Pretend to sprinkle various toppings (tomato, salsa, lettuce, sour cream, etc.) on the burrito, making silly sounds for each, then wrap the blanket, swaddle style around the "kid burrito". Gently press on the length of the child's body with palms flat for extra sensory input, then pretend to eat the burrito!



Activities with Body Contact

- The Sock Stealing Game is one of our family's favorite attachment games. It's silly, fun and easy to play with kids of all ages and developmental levels. Players simply attempt to pull the socks off their opponent's feet while staying seated and scooting around the floor or while crawling on their hands and knees. It's great for one-on-one play or as a team game- kids against adults is always fun. The Sock Stealing Game provides lots of chances for appropriate, non-threatening physical touch and eye contact and helps children feel powerful and competent when they successfully snatch a sock!
- Engage the Robot- Have child lay on blanket or yoga mat, adult will kneel beside the child. Pretend you are unwrapping a big box that your child is inside saying- "Oh, it's that robot I ordered, I know it needs to be powered up before he can move." Explain that in order for your "kid robot" to become mobile, you need to engage all the robotic systems. Begin at the feet, with gently pressure move feet back and forth, move to knees, place gentle pressure on the child's knees, gently squeeze or press on his tummy, shoulders, elbows, wrists and fingers. With each application of pressure let child know the robot is powering up. When complete give him a big squeeze and let him know he can move about with full power.



Cooperative Board Games

Outfoxed!

Max

Forbidden Island

Forbidden Desert

The Nighttime Animals Save the World

Hoot Owl Hoot

Richard Scarry's Busytown: Eye found it! Game

Pandemic (for older players)

Shadows Over Camelot (for older players)

Special Playtime

Helping children build attachment and heal from trauma is a major role of foster and adoptive parents. Dr. Bruce Perry, child psychologist and trauma expert, says that parents do this well by embodying the 4 P's.

Present: Be present. Spend one-on-one time with your child.

Parallel: We often think connection means looking each other in the eye and sharing our deepest truths. This kind of interaction can be incredibly overwhelming for children with attachment challenges or trust issues. Being side by side, sharing an experience or



completing activities in the same space; offering - not forcing interaction can break down the barriers children who have lived with trauma and neglect have built to protect themselves.

Persistent: Even if your child rebuffs your attempts at playfulness, try and try again. Gentle persistence builds trust and shows your child she is worth the effort.

Patient: Building trust and attachment may be a lengthy process. Patience is the key. Becoming a family is the work of a lifetime.

During this playtime attempt to complete the following:

- Don't take yourself too seriously, make your child laugh.
- Touch your child in a nurturing way. A pat on the back or a touch on the hand can comfort and ground your child.
- Give 2 specific praises. Feeling competent is a major factor in resilience.
- Delight in your child. Find a way to help your child feel seen. We all long to feel acknowledged and understood.

Suggested Special Playtime Toys:

- Dolls
- Bottle
- Doctor Kit
- Play Phone
- Play Money
- Animal Figurines
- Play Dishes/Silverware
- Dress-up Items and Hand Mirror



- Scotch Tape
- Egg Cartons
- Toy Soldiers
- Lone Ranger Mask
- Toy Handcuffs
- Playdough on Tray
- Child Sized Scissors
- Paper/Greeting Card Scraps
- Crayons
- Washable Markers
- Paper

Resources List

150+ Screen-Free Activities for Kids: The Very Best and Easiest Playtime Activities from FunAtHomeWithKids.com! by Asia Citro

Attachment Play: How to Solve Children's behavior Problems with Play, Laughter and Connection by A.J. Solter

I Love Dirt!: 52 Activities to Help You and Your Kids Discover the Wonders of Nature
by Jennifer Ward



The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun, Revised Edition: Activities for Kids with Sensory Processing Disorder by Carol Kranowitz

Parenting with Theraplay®: Understanding Attachment and How to Nurture a Closer Relationship with Your Child by Helen Rodwell

Playful Learning: Develop Your Child's Sense of Joy and Wonder by Mariah Bruehl

Playful Parenting: An Exciting New Approach to Raising Children That Will Help You Nurture Close Connections, Solve Behavior Problems, and Encourage Confidence by Lawrence J. Cohen