

Have a Ball with your Toddler



Children of all ages, even toddlers love playing with balls. Ball games give you many opportunities to interact with your child. The best time to play is when your child shows interest. For example, they may bring you the ball or want to play a game outside. Keep in mind that they do not understand rules, so games are simple and may last only a few minutes. Toddlers like repetition so they can practise their skills, and although sometimes a little tedious for you, it is time well spent as your child is developing lifelong skills.

Positions for play

Children that are very mobile will be able to do more ball skills standing without falling over. If your child is still developing their balance you may have to give them support such as holding their hands to kick, and they may need to sit for catching activities. Children will enjoy games that suit their stage of development.

Where to play

It is easy for toddlers to overbalance so it is good to choose a soft surface to play on like grass. At first they will have little control over the speed or direction of the ball so this may also be a good reason to play outside.

Type of balls

You could try a variety of balls. Your child will soon choose their favourites.

- Light balls around 15cm in diameter are good for rolling, catching and throwing while standing.
- Soft blow up beach balls may be easier for rolling when sitting or for kicking.
- Blow up balloon-type balls, spiky balls or even a soft toy may be caught more easily by little fingers.
- Make your own balls - out of scrunched up newspaper or just roll up a large pair of adult socks.
- Blow bubbles for them to hit or pop by clapping.



Developing ball skills

Catching

Catching is an activity that involves co-ordinating the eyes with the hands so it is important that children learn to watch the ball. Have them show you their eyes, then point to the ball. Stand directly in front of your child and say "look at the ball" each time you gently roll, bounce or throw it to them. Be careful they are not hit in the face as this may discourage them from watching the ball.

- **Sitting games.** Try slowly rolling a ball to your child while they sit with their legs in front and apart to funnel the ball toward their hands. They can catch the ball with their hands or trap it with their legs.
- **Standing games.** Make sure they are watching and then gently bounce or lob the ball into their outstretched arms. In the early stages of catching, toddlers will trap the ball against their body. Tips:
 - Play in a clear area so they do not trip over objects while watching the ball
 - You may need to prompt them to hold their arms and hands out in a bowl shape away from their face
 - It may be easier for them to catch the ball if it is bounced so they are looking down rather than up at the ball.



They may also like to stop a slowly rolling ball with their feet and then bend down to pick it up. Sometimes they may just like to carry the ball around.

Throwing

Toddlers start by throwing a ball forward from above their head.

- **Throwing to you.** Encourage them to look at you with their eyes before rolling or throwing it to you.
- **Target throwing**

They could try:

- Rolling a ball towards stacked objects, trying to knock them over
- Throwing a ball towards a clothes basket or large box. They may have to start with dropping it into the box – gradually move them back as their skills improve. You could place the box in a corner to increase their chance of success.

Kicking

- At this age children may tend to walk into the ball rather than kick it and may need you to hold their hands for balance. Soon they will enjoy running around with the ball in front of them.
- Toddlers love playing the same game as someone else, so you could dribble your own ball around obstacles or gently kick at a target or goal. Toddlers learn a lot by seeing what you do.