

A child's interests are

Windows of Opportunity

to fun and enjoyable learning

Pretend play
is a powerful
learning activity
for many young children



Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AT HOME**

In the yard

- Take on a variety of pretend roles as you play together in the yard. When a passing airplane or bird catches your little one's attention, for example, spread your arms wide and run about, pretending to soar. "I'm an airplane! Vroom, here I go! Would you like to be an airplane, too?"
- Suggest imaginative ways to use things you find in the yard together. Let an empty wading pool be a boat and find sticks for oars and fishing poles!



I'm a bird flying high!

In the bath tub

- Foamy soapsuds in a bubble bath can be shaped into all sorts of "beards" and "hairstyles" on your young bather for imaginative fun at bath time. Let your child see his reflection in an unbreakable mirror (if available) as he plays.

In the kitchen

- Encourage your young child's exploration of pots, pans, plastic storage containers, and other kitchen supplies by keeping some child-safe items in an unlocked lower drawer or cabinet. Show him how something as basic as a plastic mixing bowl can be used as a drum, or a washtub for doll clothes, or a firefighter's helmet, or in dozens of other ways.
- An empty lower kitchen cupboard makes a wonderful little "shelter" for a small child. Let your child explore how the space can be used. It might serve as a playhouse, a space ship, a barn, or a bird's nest, for example.
- Praise and play along with your child when he imitates some of the things you do in the kitchen. "Looks like you're pretending to be Daddy making pancakes! Hello, Daddy! May I taste one of your yummy pancakes?" Help him add to his character choice, for example, by letting him try on an apron or try out an oven mitt.

Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AWAY FROM HOME**

Visiting friends and family

- Join your child in putting on some of Grandma's costume jewelry (and other accessories, perhaps!), then pretend to be grown-up guests at a formal tea party as you enjoy special refreshments with Grandma.
- Your friends or family may enjoy helping your child look around for interesting places and objects that might prompt pretend play during your visit to their home. A tree stump in the yard might make a perfect throne for an imaginary king. An empty basket could become a baby doll's cradle. A small table might be the cage of a fierce lion. So many possibilities!



**Let's pretend we're puppies
and this box is our dog house!**

At a beach

- As you play together in the sand, spark pretend play by commenting on and helping your child explore what she can do with the sand. For example, if she's digging a hole you might say: "You look just like a puppy, digging a hole to bury a bone. Do you want to be puppies?" If she's filling a bucket, you might say: "You remind me of a baker putting flour in a bowl. What are you making, Miss Baker? May I taste some when it's ready?"
- Gather seashells and use them in pretend play with your child. They might be little boats, Easter hats for dolls, coffee cups, and much more.

Taking a walk

- Suggest ways you can pretend together as you push your child in a stroller. Have fun moving your body and using your voice in ways that add to your pretend roles. Some examples:
 - "Let's pretend the stroller is your car. How do you drive your car?" Give your child a chance to respond and, if needed, add, "You can turn the wheel and honk the horn. That's right! Use your hands to show me which way you want to go now. What sound does your car make?"
 - "Do you want to be cowboys riding our horses? Hold on tight! Trot-trot, trot-trot. Do you see the cows? Let's gather them up and take them home to the barn! Giddy-up!"
- See the route of a simple neighborhood walk in a totally new light by letting your child turn it into an imaginative adventure. For instance, join your child in pretending to be squirrels gathering food for the winter. Together you can talk "squirrel talk," collect acorns, and look for the perfect tree for a new nest!

Taking a ride in a car or on a bus

- Tell stories as you drive—stories you've read to your child and stories you make up. While entertaining your child, you'll be providing characters, situations, language, and information to fuel your child's developing imagination.
- Talk about the people and places you see as you drive or ride together with your young child. "We're passing the fire station. See? There are the firefighters washing their red truck." As you share information about different people and places with your child, you will enrich her understanding of the world around her and offer inspiration for pretend play.
- Bring along a few toys your child can use for pretend play as you travel. Perhaps your child would enjoy having a favorite teddy bear or doll buckled into the seat next to his car seat. He could chatter with his "friend," share snacks and toys with it, show it interesting things to see out the window, or care for it like Mom and Dad care for him. Encourage this pretend play by doing things such as talking to the bear or doll, asking it questions, and expanding your child's ideas for what to do with it on the ride.

