

20 Ideas for Bonding with Infants



CAREGIVERS

EYE CONTACT

Look into baby's eyes while breastfeeding or feeding a bottle.

SWADDLING

Learn how to swaddle baby with a blanket to help them feel snug and secure while sleeping.

KISSES

Give kisses on baby's belly or feet.

ROCKING

Rock in a rocking chair together.

SKIN TIME

After a bath or before bedtime hold baby to your bare chest for "skin to skin" time.

HOLD HANDS

Let baby wrap their hand around your finger.

CRADLE BABY

Cradle baby and gently rock them side to side.

LISTEN CLOSE

Listen to baby's heartbeat.

SCENT

Smell the top of baby's head.

SOOTHE BABY

Find out what helps baby settle—try rubbing their back, patting their bum, or gently bouncing up and down.

GENTLE NOISES

Gently whisper or make the “shhh” sound in baby’s ear to help them fall asleep.

REPEAT BACK

When baby gurgles, coos, or makes another noise—make the same noise back to them!

TRACK CUES

Listen carefully and respond when baby cries—soon you’ll learn which cries mean that they are hungry, sleepy, or need some attention.

HAVE A CONVERSATION

Talk to baby while you are changing their diaper.

HOLD OVER HEART

Hold baby on the left side of your chest so they can hear your heartbeat.

SING

Sing a favorite song.

DANCE

Hold baby close and dance to the radio.

DISCUSS ROUTINES

Talk to baby about your routine, “It’s time for bed! Let’s find your pajamas.”

TUMMY TIME

Place baby on their belly for “tummy time.” Try a few minutes at first and then longer as baby develops. During this time, you can lay down too so that you see eye to eye!

CARRY BABY

Carry baby around with you and point out all of the different things they see.

20 Ideas for Bonding with Older Babies



CAREGIVERS

EXPLORING TOUCH

Let baby feel your face—they might grab your nose, sunglasses, or hair!

TALK DURING CHORES

Talk to baby while you are doing routine activities like folding laundry, sweeping the floor, or getting the mail.

FUNNY FACES

Make a funny face! Wiggle your eyebrows or stick out your tongue. See if baby tries to mimic it.

MIRROR GAME

Stand in front of a mirror together. Ask excitedly, “Who’s that baby?” and respond with the baby’s name.

RASPBERRY BELLY

Blow “raspberries” on baby’s belly.

COUNT OUT LOUD

Count baby’s fingers and toes—say the numbers out loud while you touch each one.

BICYCLE LEGS

Hold baby’s feet and gently move baby’s legs towards and then away from their body, like they are riding a bicycle.

BATH TIME

Gently splash the water while giving baby a bath. Encourage baby to splash, too!

FLY LIKE A SUPERHERO

Hold baby like they are a flying superhero and walk around—whoosh!

HOW BIG IS BABY?

Ask in a happy voice, “How big is baby?” Then, lift baby’s arms above their head and say, “Soooooo big!”

BOWLS, SPOONS & CUPS

Let baby play with mixing bowls, wooden spoons, and measuring cups in the kitchen. Add water for even more fun!

EXPLORE TEXTURES

Have baby feel different textures like a washcloth, a crumpled piece of mail, or a metal spoon. Describe what they are feeling—hard or soft, wet or dry, bumpy or smooth, warm or cool.

EXPLORE SOUNDS

Explore different noises—jingling keys, crinkling a water bottle, or fanning the pages of a book.

NAMING THE BODY

Point out baby’s body parts—you can even sing, “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes”!

DESCRIBE THE WEATHER

Describe the weather when you go outside or look out the window—is it rainy, sunny, snowy, cloudy, hot or cold?

PLAY PEEKABOO

Play a baby’s favorite game by covering your face with your hands, a blanket, or a piece of clothing before surprising baby by uncovering and smiling as you say, “Peekaboo!”

SOUND OUT ACTIONS

Say “Zzzzip!” as you zip the zippers or “Snap!” as you snap the buttons on their onesies.

WAVING

Practice waving hello and goodbye together.

BOX AND TOYS

Give baby an empty box and some safe items. They will love putting the items in and out!

DINNER TIME

As baby starts to try solid foods, encourage them by saying, “Yummy!”, pretending to take a bite, and even letting them hold the spoon with your help.

20 Ideas for Bonding with Toddlers



CAREGIVERS

NURSERY RHYMES

Wiggle the toddler's toes while saying the nursery rhyme, "This Little Piggy Went to the Market."

NURSERY RHYMES

Sing "Itsy Bitsy Spider" and show the toddler the hand movements. Help the toddler try with their hands, too!

ENGAGE WITH A BOOK

Read a book and describe the pictures on the page, make up silly voices for each of the characters, or have the toddler turn the pages.

BUILD A SANDCASTLE

When playing at the beach or in a sandbox, build a sand structure together and enjoy knocking it down or watching it be washed away by the waves.

NAME THE STORES

Name the stores or markets you pass by when out walking and talk about what each one sells.

DESCRIBE TYPES OF CARS

Talk about different vehicles you see outside and what jobs they do—the mail truck, garbage truck, construction truck, fire truck.

ANIMAL SOUNDS

Point out animals you see in real life or in the pictures of a story. Talk about what sounds they make: "tweet" when you see a bird and "woof" when you see a dog.

PLAY IN THE RAIN

Put on your rainboots and jump in the puddles together!

COUNT STAIRS

Count the stairs as you go up and down.

OFFER CHOICES

Give toddlers choices: “Would you like to wear your blue shirt or your red shirt today?”

HELP IN THE KITCHEN

Have toddlers help you in the kitchen! They can mix, stir, and scoop with your help.

PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE TOGETHER

Practice daily hygiene habits together like washing hands, brushing teeth, and combing hair. Make it silly and fun by looking into the mirror together, singing songs, or counting how long it takes.

WALK FAST, THEN SLOW

Take turns walking super-duper-fast and then very sloooooow.

TALK LOUDLY, THEN QUIETLY

Sing a song very LOUDLY and then again very *quietly*.

PLAY WITH EVERYDAY OBJECTS

Use everyday objects in pretend play—like a banana for a telephone.

SILLY VOICES

Give silly voices to the toddler’s favorite toys—have them talk to each other.

NAME FOOD ITEMS

Name each item of food as you place it into the grocery cart.

MAKE A TOWER

Stack up plastic cups to make a tower and then let the toddler knock it down.

MAKE A PUPPET

Make a sock puppet—the only things you need are a sock and some imagination!

VISIT THE LIBRARY

Visit the local library and choose a book together.

20 Ideas for Bonding with Preschoolers



CAREGIVERS

NAME THE STREETS

Name the streets or stops while on the bus or train and count how many more stops until you reach your destination.

HIGH FIVE

Give out high fives!

FREEZE DANCE

Play freeze dance—dance all around but stay very still whenever the music stops.

HELP WITH CHORES

Let children help around the house—can they help set the table for dinner? Wipe up a spill? Put their toys away before bedtime?

SILLY GREETINGS

Say goodbye in a silly way: “See ya later, alligator!” or “In a while, crocodile!”

KNOCK-KNOCK JOKES

Tell the child knock-knock jokes and then have them make up their own.

BEDTIME ROUTINES

Tuck the child into bed at night.

PRACTICE MANNERS

Practice good manners—say please & thank you, wait your turn, and chew with your mouth closed.

SILLY FACES

Make mad, silly, sad, and happy faces—have the child guess what emotion you’re acting out.

RHYMING

Practice rhyming with real and pretend words.

MOVE LIKE AN ANIMAL

Pretend to move like an animal does. Can you walk like a bear? Fly like a bird?

HELP WITH COOKING

While cooking, explain each step, have the child pass you the ingredients, and describe what type of flavors each ingredient contributes to the dish.

TAKE DEEP BREATHS

Practice taking deep breaths together to relax: Pretend to smell flowers (inhale) and blow out birthday candles (exhale).

PLAY OUTSIDE

Build a sandcastle, bake a mud pie, make snow angels, roll down a grassy hill, or dance in the rain.

NOTICE SHARED LETTERS

Point out things that begin with the same letter as the child's name.

SIDEWALK GAME

Jump over the cracks in the sidewalk or skip every other tile in the grocery store.

PIGGY BACK RIDES

Give the child a piggy back ride.

CHOOSE AN OUTFIT

Let the child pick out their clothes for the day. Talk about what types of clothes make sense for the day's weather and activities.

STUDY THE SKY

Look up at the clouds together and talk about what shapes or characters you see.

DISCUSS THE SEASONS

Talk about the four seasons—explain the months, holidays, and activities that happen in each one.

20 Ideas for Bonding with School-Age Kids



CAREGIVERS

ASK ABOUT FRIENDS

Ask the child to tell you about their friends at school. What are their names? What do they like to do together?

SHOW YOUR PRIDE

Show that you are proud of them by hanging up a picture that they drew or a school project that they completed.

PLAY I SPY

Play “I spy with my little eye...” when stuck in traffic or in a waiting room.

READ A BOOK

Read a book together, taking turns reading out loud every other page, section, or character.

SHARE A STORY

Tell the child about something that you liked to do when you were their age.

CELEBRATE HALF BIRTHDAYS

Celebrate the child’s “half birthday.” You could even sing, “Happy Half Birthday to you!”

WRITE NOTES

Write the child a note and leave it under their pillow or on the bathroom mirror.

SPECIAL HANDSHAKE

Create a special handshake together.

DANCE IT OUT

Ask the child to teach you a new dance move.

BE GENEROUS

Do something nice together for a neighbor or another family member.

DISCUSS DREAMS

Ask the child if they remember their dream from the night before.

BUILD A FORT

Build a fort out of couch cushions, blankets, pillows, or sheets.

PLAY GAMES

Play “Rock, Paper, Scissors.”

SCAVENGER HUNT

Hide things around your home and send the child on a scavenger hunt.

FAVORITE THINGS

Ask the child about their favorite things: game, color, animal, etc.

GUESS THE DIRECTION

When noticing an airplane, train, bus, or boat pass by, guess together what the vehicle’s destination might be based on what direction it’s traveling: north, south, east, or west.

WRITE LETTERS

Write a letter to a far-away family member or friend and mail it together at the post office.

OBSTACLE COURSE

Create an obstacle course together using everyday objects. Try to beat your best time!

GUESS THE LETTER

Use your finger to draw a simple picture or letter of the alphabet on the child’s back and have them guess what you drew. Now they try! Then, they can do the same to you and let you guess!

PAPER AND PENCIL GAMES

Play paper and pencil games like tic-tac-toe.