

Developmental Milestones of the Different Types of Play

Different types of play	What does it look like?	At what age do we see this?
Exploratory Play (also called object play) Sensory Play	Exploration play: Babies and toddlers like touching, mouthing, tossing, banging, and squeezing objects. Sensory play: Emerges in early attempts to feed themselves. Materials like play dough, clay, and paint become a part of play as children get older.	birth–2 ½ years
Dramatic play (also called pre-symbolic and symbolic play)	Young children engage in imaginative play throughout their childhood. They invent storylines and take on roles within play. Toys or props (e.g., dolls, cars, and household items) support their play. Refer to the handout on “Developmental Milestones of Pretend Play” for more details.	3–8 years
Construction play	Children begin to build and construct (e.g., Lego, blocks), household items (cardboard boxes, bubble wrap) and with a variety of materials, (e.g., Play dough, paper). Older children play for extended periods with complex commercial model sets. Children across the age range engage in this kind of play by themselves and in groups, often combining it with periods of playing alone and socially.	
Physical play	Sensorimotor play begins as young infants learn about cause and effect (e.g., kicking hanging animals on a mobile or rolling a ball). Young preschoolers engage in physical play such as rough-and-tumble play or play fighting. Older preschoolers engage in running, climbing, sliding, and jumping, on their own or in groups. Physical play lays the foundation for the development of games with invented rules.	3–8 years
Socio-dramatic play (also called advanced symbolic play)	Pretend play where children take on roles, invent their own rules, and make up story lines with friends in small groups.	3–6 years
Games with rules	Children begin to play games with rules (e.g., card games, board games, and sports like hockey and soccer).	5 + years
Games with invented rules	Children begin to make up their own games and/or change the rules of familiar games in their self-organized playgroup (e.g., tag)	5–8 years

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