

# First Crayons

*You made red  
marks on  
your paper!*



Give your child a crayon and paper and talk about any marks he makes.

Playing with crayons and paper introduces your baby to using tools for drawing and writing. Your words let him know that this activity is important.



## Why this is important

Crayons provide an easy introduction to writing tools. The simple act of putting a crayon to paper gives your baby a chance to freely explore some of the elements of drawing and writing. He will enjoy moving his arm and hand and seeing the result. Later he will learn to use crayons to express himself creatively.

## What you do

- Tape a large piece of paper on the table. Seat your baby at the table and offer him one crayon. He may taste it, feel it, or show it to you. Talk about the crayon. *This is a red crayon. It is smooth and round.*
- Wait for him to make an accidental mark on the paper, or choose another crayon and make a small mark yourself.
- Offer positive encouragement when he makes a mark. *You made red lines with your crayon!* He may make long strokes or just poke at the paper.
- Give him a crayon only when he is seated in front of paper and can freely explore. **Do not leave your child alone with crayons or any other small objects that could be swallowed. Let him explore with crayons only while you are watching to make sure he uses them safely.**

## Ready to move on?

When he has practiced with a crayon many times, offer him a choice between two crayons. Eventually, he will be able to choose a crayon from a variety placed before him.

### Let's read together!

*The Shape of Things*  
by Julie Lacombe

# Things to Taste

*What's under  
the lid?*



Describe your baby's experiences as she touches and tastes things.

Your baby may connect your words to what her senses are telling her as she explores.





## Why this is important

Babies put everything in their mouths because tasting is one of the ways they find out about new objects. After they have tasted and handled something, they decide whether or not they like it. This activity encourages your baby to practice using all of her senses together. Letting her choose from among several tastes establishes positive attitudes toward new eating experiences and helps her learn to make choices.

## What you do

- Sit with your baby where she usually eats her meals.
- Encourage her to taste things by putting a few items within easy reach. Try a slice of banana, a spoon, a peeled and very thin apple slice, or a cracker. **Be sure to give only things you are confident your child will not choke on. If you are unsure, save specific foods or this entire activity until your child is older.**
- Let her choose what she wants and let her taste as long as she wants. She may not eat the item, but simply use her mouth to explore. Talk about her choice. *The spoon is smooth and cool. That's a sweet apple!*
- Describe her actions as she makes choices. With each item, she may drop it and try something else immediately or she may show interest in only a single item. *You really like the banana.*

## Ready to move on?

When you see that she enjoys looking under objects, try this. Sit at the table with a cupcake pan filled with items of different textures and smells, such as a spoonful of pureed vegetable, a bit of ice pop, or a slice of seedless orange. Lay a lid over each cup. Encourage her to lift the lids and try the contents. Observe and describe her experience with words such as *sweet, cold, and wet.*

### Let's read together!

*My Food Mi Comida*  
by Rebecca Emberley

# Find a Picture

*Look at that cat.*

Name a picture and then turn it away from your baby so he can try to find it.

Using language to help your baby locate an item out of sight helps him remember the names of objects.

*He's gone. Can you find the cat?*



## Why this is important

Naming a picture before making it disappear helps your child to associate the words with the picture. Using language is one way to help your child remember what he is looking for. Hearing the words will bring to mind the picture if he has seen it a few seconds before. As his memory develops, more time can pass between seeing and recalling.

## What you do

- Attach a large picture of something familiar to your child, such as a teddy bear, baby, or cat, to a cardboard box.
- Sit with your baby on the floor. Show him the box with the picture attached. Talk about the picture: *Look, it is a picture of a baby. The baby is smiling.*
- Encourage your child to explore the picture. Then turn the box to move the picture out of his sight. *Where is the baby?* If he does not look for the picture, repeat the game from the beginning.
- Offer positive feedback for his efforts. *You moved the box to find the baby!* He might reach toward the box and flip it over or crawl around it to see the other side.

## Ready to move on?

After playing several times with the same picture, add another picture to the second side of the box. Now ask the child to find first one picture and then the other. After two or more pictures have been added, he must make a choice.  
*Baby. Find the baby.*

### Let's read together!

*Where Is My Friend?*  
by Simms Taback



# Making Useful Choices

*Let's go for a walk. Do you want a hat or a towel?*



Let your baby choose between two things during an everyday task, one that is useful and one that is not.

Your baby will have a chance to make choices and learn from the results.



*It's time to eat. Would you like a spoon or a lid?*



## Why this is important

Choosing between two objects on the basis of their usefulness is an early step in the process of learning how to evaluate. Adding a few safe choices to his day opens up new possibilities for him to have some control. Making these choices helps him to understand what an object can do and what is needed for a particular task. With practice he can choose the right tool for each job.

## What you do

- Give your child two choices of objects to use when he needs to complete a task. For example, if he is ready to drink, let him choose between an empty cup and a full one. When he is ready to eat, offer him the choice of a spoon or a plastic lid. When it is time to wash hands, show him a block and a bar of soap. When it is time to take a walk, offer him a hat or a towel. Let him choose which item he wants.
- Let your child play with the item, even if he chooses the less useful option. Laugh with him as he enjoys the silliness of washing his hands with a block, for example.
- Show him the two choices again and give him a chance to choose more appropriately. *Do you want water? Which cup has the water?* At first, he may choose the less useful object, but with experience he will intentionally choose the more useful one.

## Another idea

Add as many choices to his day as you can. Let him feel in control when there is no harm in either option. *Would you like to play with your truck or your fire engine?*

### Let's read together!

*Wibbly Pig Likes Bananas*  
by Mick Inkpen



# Let's Clean Up

*You're putting the rattle in your basket.*

Make clean-up time a game by naming the toys your child chooses to put in the clean-up basket.

Having choices during clean-up time may make it easier for your child to learn about taking care of his belongings.





## Why this is important

Giving your child a chance to make choices during play and cleanup helps him learn about taking care of his things. When the choices he makes during simple tasks bring a positive result, such as helping you, he gains trust in his own ability to make decisions. As he has opportunities to make more choices, he builds confidence and independence.

## What you do

- Invite your child to help you clean up toys after playing. At this age, don't expect him to really clean up things by himself. Sit beside him, show him a container such as a toy box or basket, and drop in one of his toys. Talk about what you are doing. *It's time to put the toys away. Mommy put the car in the basket.*
- Hand him a toy and ask him to put it in the basket. If he does not drop it, help him release it into the basket. Then, hand him the toy again and let him have another try.
- Repeat the game until he understands what you want him to do. Offer encouraging words when he drops the toy in the basket. *You put the ball away!*
- Invite him to choose a toy to put in the basket. If he chooses an object not intended for the basket, give him another place to put it. *Only toys go in the basket. You can put the magazine on the table.*
- Talk about each toy as it goes in the basket. As he has more practice with cleaning up, count the toys as he puts them away. *One, two, three. You put three green cars in the basket!*

## Another idea

Use different containers for storage to give your child more choices. Try putting toys away in a large plastic bowl, a shopping bag, an egg carton, or a backpack.

### Let's read together!

*I'm Dirty!*  
by Kate and Jim McMullan

# Pointing and Naming

*Look at that big dog over there.*



Point to things as you name them for your child, and name the things your child points to.

Purposely pointing out objects, both near and far, helps your child to notice those things and gradually learn their names.



## Why this is important

You can guide your child's attention by pointing to objects he may not notice. Pointing and gesturing help him begin to understand direction. Starting now and continuing throughout his life, body language and pointing will help him communicate.

## What you do

- Point out interesting and useful objects during the time you spend with your child. For example, when he is looking for his toy truck, point to the truck and say *Truck. There is your truck.* Wait to see if he notices the truck before you walk over and touch it to get his attention.
- Show him everyday objects outside his home such as birds at a birdfeeder or cars driving by. Point to high clouds, airplanes, or blowing leaves. Point to faraway lights, signs, or people walking.
- Always name the objects as you point to them.
- If your child makes any attempt to point, smile and talk about what he sees. *Kitty. You're showing me the kitty!*

## Ready to move on?

As you point to something say, *Look at that.* Do not immediately name it. Instead, ask a question. *What do you think it is?* Pause before giving the answer. *That's a butterfly.*

### Let's read together!

*Bright Baby Trucks*  
by Roger Priddy

# Animal Sounds

*The dog says  
woof, woof!*



Make a sound for an animal toy and see if your child can imitate the sound or point to a picture of that animal.

Your child will begin to connect animals with their sounds and their pictures.





## Why this is important

Animal names and sounds are useful information in your child's expanding world, and imitating those sounds can be fun. Playing the game with a toy animal and a picture of that same animal helps your child understand that a picture can represent an object. Later, seeing letters next to the animal pictures will help your child to understand that letters stand for sounds.

## What you do

- Name one of your child's animal toys and make the sound that animal makes. *This is a dog. The dog says woof!* Repeat the sound and encourage your child to make dog sounds.
- Add a new animal to the game periodically until he knows several animals and their sounds.
- Show him a picture of an animal he knows while also showing him the toy. Remove the toy and point to the picture. Ask him what sound it makes. He may not immediately connect the sound with the picture. *This is the cat. What does a cat say?*

## Ready to move on?

Help your child learn the word for the animal as well as the sound the animal makes by repeating the name a couple of times and making the sound. *Dog. Dog. A dog says woof, woof!* Acknowledge any attempts your child makes to say the word. For example, if your child said *Doh, doh*, you might say, *Dog! You are saying dog!*

### Let's read together!

*Old MacDonald*  
by Rosemary Wells



# Making Lines

*You made a long,  
straight line!*

Describe the marks your child makes with his fingers or a stick.

This encourages your child's awareness of the many kinds of marks that he can later use in drawing or writing.





## Why this is important

Children enjoy making marks. With practice, he will become aware of the feeling of his hands and arms as they draw lines. He will begin to notice and feel the differences among the marks he makes. Pointing out the shapes of lines helps him see the variations he has accidentally made happen. These steps will help him when he begins to use his hands for more complex tasks such as controlled scribbling, drawing, or writing.

## What you do

- Talk about what your child is doing when you notice him tracing his finger over a flat surface. *You are making a wiggly line.* Trace your finger beside his line and tell him you are making a wiggly line like his.
- Look for interesting places around the house to practice making lines. Trace lines with your child on a steamy window or mirror. Talk about what he makes. *That is a straight line. That line is curved.*
- Show him how to spread his fingers apart and make a series of lines or make a fist and create a wide stroke. When playing outside, show him how to use a stick to draw in the sandbox, dirt, or mud.

## Another idea

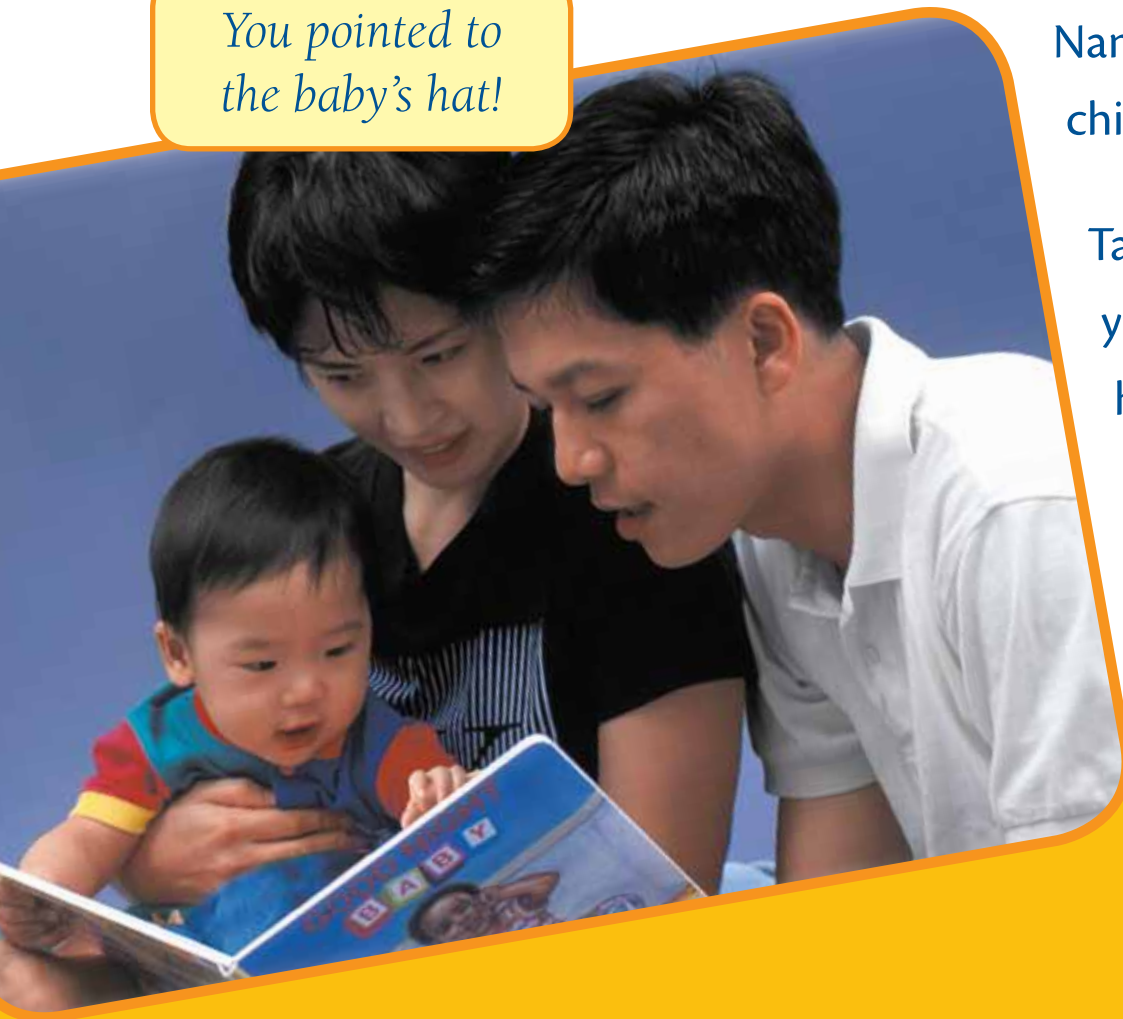
Put a few cups of sand in a baking dish. Encourage your child to use his fingers to make lines in the sand.

### Let's read together!

*When a Line Bends...A Shape Begins*  
by Rhonda Gowler Greene

# Touch and Name With Books

*You pointed to  
the baby's hat!*



Name any picture your child touches in a book.

Talking about the things your child touches helps him learn the names of things he finds interesting.



## Why this is important

You can follow your child's lead and give him information about the pictures he notices in a book. By naming the things he touches or points to, you are talking about something that already has his interest. Later he can show you he knows the names of pictures by pointing to them when you ask him to.

## What you do

- Point to the pictures as you name them when sharing a book with your child. Keep the activity simple by pointing to one object per page, slowly naming each one.
- Wait until your child touches something on the page. Then name and talk about that thing. *You're touching the pig.*
- Listen to hear if your child says something that sounds a little like *What's that?* as he points. Repeat his attempted words and immediately answer. *What's that? It's an airplane.*
- Ask him a question to encourage him to point to something, if he does not touch anything on the page. *What do you like on this page?*

## Ready to move on?

When your child becomes familiar with the book, encourage him to point to things you name in the pictures. *Can you show me the puppy? There it is!* You can also play the game with picture cards or with posters on the wall.

### Let's read together!

*Good Night, Baby*  
by Cheryl Willis Hudson  
and George Ford

# Roll the Ball

Roll a soft ball back and forth with your child and tell him he is taking turns.

You will be introducing your child to a simple game that requires cooperation and turn-taking.

*Can you roll the ball to me?*





## Why this is important

With this game, you help your child understand that some things work better with a partner. He will learn that being a partner means you must give sometimes (roll) in order to get back (catch). Rolling a ball back and forth teaches a very easy form of cooperation. Knowing how to cooperate will prepare your child to enter into more complex kinds of play with other children later on.

## What you do

- Sit with your toddler on the floor facing each other with your legs spread and your legs close to his so that the ball cannot escape.
- Roll the ball slowly so that he is sure to catch it.
- Talk to him about rolling it back. He may not want to roll the ball back to you. *Roll the ball to me so I can roll it to you again!* If he still refuses, gently take the ball and quickly roll it to him. You may have to repeat this process several times before he understands that he is not losing the ball when he rolls it away.
- Respond positively about the game you are now playing together when he rolls the ball back to you. *You rolled the ball to me and I rolled it back to you. We're taking turns!*

## Ready to move on?

As he gains better control of the ball, sit farther apart to challenge him. If your child stands up and throws the ball toward you, he may be ready to try an easy throwing game.

### Let's read together!

*Ten Black Dots*  
by Donald Crews