

Playing with Little Ones

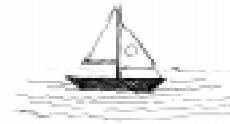
by Marty Layne

Play is one of the joys of parenting. It's fun and it's also a vital part of your baby's development. More and more research proves what grandmothers throughout time have observed, a baby that is sung to, talked to, played with and held is a happier baby, toddler, child.

So just how do you play with little ones? One of the ways is with song. You may not remember many songs from your own childhood. One song that you may remember is Row, Row, Row Your Boat. This song has a lot of possibilities. You can sing it at a fairly brisk pace such as in time with your steps as you're walking down the street.

Row, Row, Row Your Boat can also be slowed way down and become a lullaby. If you actually think about the words, this makes sense. Try singing this song slowly as though it were a slow dance.

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream



Keep in mind that when you are singing or playing with a baby or a toddler, you may need to repeat the activity many times. In many communities, music classes for parents and babies are available that can refresh your memory of songs, provide you with new ones, and offer you an opportunity to meet other parents.

Totally switching tempos, bouncy lap rides are a great way to help a baby when they have gas or to entertain a toddler or young child. There are lots of bouncy rhymes around. One of my favourites is one I made up when my children were little. It goes like this:

Here come the farmer's horses Clippity clop, clippity clop
 Slow bounce going from one leg to the other in rhythm with the words
Here come the little ponies Trit trot, trit trot
 Now you move your legs a little bit faster
Here come the race horses, Giddey-up, giddey-up, giddey-up
 Holding tightly to the child's hands, move your legs together at a gallop
Here come the bucking broncos, Whoa, whoa, whoa
 Lift your legs up high and then down holding the child firmly so that they feel as though they are riding on a bucking bronco

This is a good game to play when you're sitting in a chair. Children as old as 8 to 10 still love being bounced to a rhyme like this. It's a great leg workout!

Fingerplays are also fun. It may take quite a few years before your baby is able to make the motions, but I have had babies in my classes who understand what to do in some of the fingerplays. One baby especially enjoyed Johnny Whoops and stretched out his when his mom said, "Let's do Johnny Whoops."

Here is the rhyme:

Johnny, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny
Whoops, Johnny, Whoops, Johnny,
Johnny, Johnny, Johnny

Below are step by step instructions. It takes much longer to explain than to do.

1. Start by touching the tip of your baby's little finger (pinkie). Say either Johnny or the child's name. Move to the next finger
2. Touch the tip of your baby's ring finger. Say either Johnny or the child's name.
3. Touch the tip of your baby's middle finger. Say either Johnny or the child's name.
4. Touch the tip of your baby's index finger. Say either Johnny or the child's name.
5. Slide down the index finger and up the thumb while saying "whoops."
6. Touch the tip of your baby's thumb. Say either Johnny or the child's name.
7. Slide down the thumb and up the index finger while saying "whoops."
8. Touch the tip of your index finger. Say either Johnny or the child's name.
9. Touch the tip of your baby's middle finger. Say either Johnny or the child's name.
10. Touch the tip of your baby's ring finger. Say either Johnny or the child's name.
11. Touch the tip of your baby's little finger (pinkie). Say either Johnny or the child's name.

Here's another fingerplay involving your baby's body that's pretty self-explanatory:

Baby Peek-a-boo

Touch your ears, pat your nose

Touch your little baby toes

Hide your eyes (cover either your eyes or your baby's eyes)

Where are you?

Baby's playing peek-a-boo! (uncover eyes)

It's important to remember that little ones like to listen to or have you do any fingerplay with them again, and again, and again. One little two year old boy in one of my classes really loved the fingerplay "Here is a box." His mom told me he did it over and over in the car. It made him so happy to be able to do all of the motions.

Here Is A Box

Here is a box;

 Make a box with one fist lightly clenched.

Put on the lid.

 Use the other hand for a lid.

I wonder whatever inside is hid?

 Peep under the lid.

Why, it's a (cow) without any doubt.

 Poke one finger out of the fist.

Open the box and let it come out! (Moo)

 Open fist. Make the appropriate noise for whatever animal or thing was named.

 (Make up something to put in the box that makes a distinctive noise.)

Clapping in rhythm to a rhyme is another fun way to introduce your child to both the language of poetry and the rhythm of music. This is a poem I've frequently used in my classes for clapping:

Happiness by A. A. Milne

John had great big waterproof boots on.

John had a great big waterproof hat.

John had a great big waterproof mackintosh.

“And that,,” said John, “is that!”

From *When We Were Very Young*

I'll end with this fingerplay which entertains babies from about 6 months to toddlers of 2-3 years old. When I've used this rhyme in a class, everybody smiles! Often toddlers will want to do the motions on their mom's or dad's body as well as on their own.

Tommy Thumbs up and Tommy Thumbs down

 Have your thumbs out and tuck the other fingers in and do as the words suggest.

Tommy Thumbs is dancing all around the town

 Dance your hands around with thumbs up

Dance them on your shoulders, dance them on your head

 Gentle dance your thumbs on shoulders and then the head

Dance them on your knees and tuck them into bed.

 Gently dance on knees and then tuck the thumbs in to the hands to make a fist.

Start on the next finger:

Peter Pointer up and Peter Pointer Downetc.

Lilly Longer up and Lilly Longer downetc.

Shiny Ringman up and Shiny Ringman downetc.

Little Pinky up and Little Pinky downetc.

So what does all of this play accomplish? It gives your baby exposure to language – the sounds of language, the rhythm of language, vocabulary, and the idea of language. A game like Baby Peek-a-boo gives your child exposure to how certain words lead to certain actions. It helps a child begin to understand sequence and cause and effect. Fingerplays, rhymes and songs also give you a repertoire of things to do when you're in a car or waiting in a grocery line to keep your baby happy. And most important of all, it builds a positive relationship between you and your child. Small beginnings of touching your baby's fingers and playing "Johnny Whoops" leads to your baby knowing that being with mom or dad is fun, interesting and comforting. We build relationships with our children one small bit at a time. Engaging in play doesn't involve anything other than your voice and your hands. It's very cost effective and I promise you it will lead to laughter and smiles.

Enjoy!

Resources

Librarians will help you find suitable books to read to your baby as well as collections of fingerplays and songs

CDs:

Brighten the Day – songs to celebrate the seasons – Marty Layne
Singable Songs for the Very Young -Raffi

Books:

Games To Play with a Baby compiled by Marty Layne
This Little Puffin compiled by Elizabeth Matterson
Various editions of Mother Goose – check your library to find one you enjoy

Check your local recreation centre, music school or conservatory for mom/dad and baby classes

International Music Programs for families:

Musik Garten www.musikgarten.org/
Music Together www.musictogether.com/
Kindermusik www.kindermusik.com/defaultb.aspx

Marty Layne is the mother of four adult children who learned at home. She's a former infant massage instructor and developed and taught a program for babies and their moms, dads, or other care-takers called Games to Play With a Baby. She's written two books for adults: *Learning At Home: A Mother's Guide To Homeschooling* and *Games to Play with Little Ones*. Her new children's picture book *Autumn Stories* will be released in October 2010. She also recorded a children's music CD – *Brighten the Day – songs to celebrate the seasons*. You can read more about her at www.martylayne.com.