Little ones under 3

Pack 4: Interests & play

Five play ideas for babies (0–1) and toddlers (1–3), at home or at nursery.

How to use these cards

Each card has a toddler version and a simpler version for babies. Children develop at their own pace, so go by what your child is doing, not just their age. These are invitations, never tests.

Keeping it safe

Stay within arm's reach the whole time. Anything smaller than a 2p coin can choke a young child, so check every object against a real 2p if you're unsure.

A look, reach, point, sound, sign or walking away all count as answers. Stop or change the activity if your child seems overwhelmed, and offer more if they're seeking more.

I'm a parent navigating the SEND system, not a lawyer or a doctor. I share what works for us and translate the rules to save you time. Sources for these ideas are listed on the **Little ones under 3** page at little-wires.co.uk.

Idea 4.1

Follow my lead

Toddlers (1–3)

Sit near your child and do what they're doing alongside them. Comment rather than question ("Round and round") and don't redirect.

For babies (0–1)

Watch what the baby is looking at and talk about that.

You'll need

Whatever your child has chosen.

Safety

Check the chosen object is bigger than a 2p.

A look, reach, point, sound, sign or walking away all count as answers. Stop or change the activity if your child seems overwhelmed, and offer more if they're seeking more.

Idea 4.2

Lining up and sorting

Toddlers (1–3)

Offer a set of large, similar objects (wooden blocks, stacking cups, toy cars made for under-3s) to line up, stack, sort or carry. Lining up is a real way to play; join in by making your own row beside theirs.

For babies (0–1)

Put a few large blocks or cups in and out of a box together.

You'll need

Large blocks, stacking cups, a shoebox.

Safety

Only toys labelled for under-3s. Keep older siblings' small cars and building bricks away.

A look, reach, point, sound, sign or walking away all count as answers. Stop or change the activity if your child seems overwhelmed, and offer more if they're seeking more.

Idea 4.3

My favourite things book

Toddlers (1–3)

Make a photo book of your child's passions (washing machines, trains, the cat) and look at it together. Add real non-fiction books about their interest.

For babies (0–1)

Photos of familiar faces and objects to look at together.

You'll need

Printed photos in a plastic-pocket folder or a cheap photo album.

Safety

Remove loose plastic sleeves and staples if your child mouths it.

A look, reach, point, sound, sign or walking away all count as answers. Stop or change the activity if your child seems overwhelmed, and offer more if they're seeking more.

Idea 4.4

Simple pretend play

Toddlers (1–3)

Real-looking everyday items (hairbrush, cup, teddy, blanket) for “putting teddy to bed” or “brushing hair”. Copy your child’s ideas.

For babies (0–1)

Pretend to drink from a cup or brush teddy’s hair, and let the baby watch or join in.

You’ll need

Plastic cup, child’s hairbrush, teddy, tea towel as a blanket.

Safety

No toy phones or gadgets with button batteries unless the battery cover is screwed shut. If a child swallows a button battery, go to A&E straight away.

A look, reach, point, sound, sign or walking away all count as answers. Stop or change the activity if your child seems overwhelmed, and offer more if they’re seeking more.

Idea 4.5

Big ball games

Toddlers (1–3)

Roll, kick or chase a large soft ball. Rolling it down a ramp (a tray propped on a cushion) is great for children who love watching things move.

For babies (0–1)

Roll a large soft ball gently towards a sitting baby, or let a lying baby kick or bat at it.

You'll need

A large soft ball (bigger than your child's fist), a tray or board.

Safety

No small balls or bouncy balls. Clear trip hazards. Keep it fun, not a test of what they can do.

A look, reach, point, sound, sign or walking away all count as answers. Stop or change the activity if your child seems overwhelmed, and offer more if they're seeking more.

The 2p rule

Anything smaller than a 2p coin can choke a young child. Check every object, every time.

Worried? Talk to your health visitor or GP.

If something worries you, including your child losing skills they used to have, or how they move, communicate, play with others, hear or see, you don’t need to wait for a review.

More free guides and activities at **little-wires.co.uk**