

# Exploring

## infants and toddlers

Capital District  
Child Care Council

*a tipsheet for parents and caregivers of children ages 0 to 2*

## Let's Play Dress Up

Providing toddlers with experiences that promote imaginary or dramatic play is a rich way for them to explore and understand the worlds they live in while discovering their roles in it. Participating in pretend play helps children understand symbols. For example, when a toddler plays with a shoebox as if it were a car, that behavior indicates that the toddler is beginning to understand how one object can represent another. This is an important skill toddlers will need to utilize at an older age when they are learning to read. Playing with friends and family will help toddlers learn social rules and skills and develop and sharpen problem solving skills.

### For Infants

- Provide babies with shatter-proof mirrors that they can examine their facial expressions with.
- Supply them with soft baby dolls to reach for and play with, ones with rattles tend to peak interest.
- Physical activities that encourage exploration, like pushing/pulling, filling/emptying, climbing in/out, around and on top of will help babies build cognitive skills that will help them develop their pretend play and enhance other areas of brain development.
- Boxes, purses, and sand and water play all encourage dumping and filling.
- Larger baby safe pushing and riding toys will promote a great deal of physical exploration.

The imagination truly starts to come around between the ages of one and two, depending on the child. Here are some ways to help inspire toddler's pretend play.

### For Toddlers

- Provide them with toddler safe materials such as: pots and pans, dishes, hats, pocketbooks, briefcases, suitcases, shopping carts, hats, scarves, baby dolls and doll accessories such as bottles and blankets, phones, cameras, jackets, dresses, and transportation vehicles, to play with freely.
- Give children items to play dancer, doctor, construction worker and other materials that will allow exploring roles adults take on in the world. Items such as tutus, stethoscopes, boots, and flashlights will encourage such play.

Play should be fun for both the adult and the toddler. It should never feel like work, this should be an exciting and enjoyable time together.

