

6 Games to Play with Toddlers (2-3 years)

Older toddlers are developing rapidly, especially in their **language and physical skills**. They may get frustrated when they don't quite have the words to express their needs and wants. Be patient when you can and support them with playful interactions and games like the ones below. Active songs; imitation, matching, sorting, and counting games; and puzzles all teach older toddlers to focus attention, use working memory, and practice basic self-control.

Let toddlers lead and **set the pace** of your play together as much as possible. Take your cues from them about when to start, stop, and switch to another activity.

1



Active Songs

Older toddlers love physical games, but they may need frequent reminders about how to play. Songs with movements provide important physical activity, and the lyrics reinforce when and how to move along. Active songs can be found in many languages and cultures. “I’m a Little Teapot” or “I’m Going on a Bear Hunt” are popular ones in English.

Songs that require children to start and stop or slow down and speed up, such as Freeze Dance/Musical Statues or Ring Around the Rosie, help build self-control.

2



Imitation Game: Follow the Leader

Choose someone to be the leader. (Tip: Start with an adult.) Other players line up behind the leader, who then moves around in any way they choose. They may run, jump, crawl, or walk on tip toes, for example. The other players must copy what the leader does, and the leader can change movements at any time. Players then take turns being the leader. You can play with as few as two or as many players as you want! These are great tests of working memory, attention, and self-control.

3



Matching & Sorting Games

Take turns with a toddler sorting objects by size, shape, or color. For example, while playing outside, you could sort rocks into piles of small, medium, and large sizes. When folding laundry, you could put all the red clothes together, blue clothes together, etc. Once the child has lots of practice, challenge them to sort in a silly way like putting their big toys in a small basket and their small toys in a big basket.

4



Counting Games

Older toddlers are beginning to learn about numbers. Support their learning by counting together. You can count blocks, stairs, berries, crackers—anything you use or see every day. Cheer or clap as children learn to reach bigger numbers, from three, to 10, to 20!

5



Puzzles

Older toddlers may enjoy playing with simple puzzles, which require attention to shapes and colors. As they work on a puzzle, ask them to think about what shape or color they need, where they might put a certain piece, or where they might put the piece if it doesn't fit. This helps them exercise reflection and planning skills.

6



Be the Narrator

Narrate a child's play to help them learn the words to describe their actions. This can be simple or you can use a silly voice to imitate a sportscaster, news anchor, or game show host. You can also ask questions, such as, "What will you do next?" or "I see you want to put the ball inside the jar. Is there another way to do that?"



To see more brain-building play ideas for kids of all ages, visit:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/brainbuildingthroughplay>

Center on the Developing Child  HARVARD UNIVERSITY