

Attachment Play-Used with permission from *First Steps for Strengthening Adoptive Families: Tools and Techniques for Meeting the Needs of Your Adopted Child Study Guide* by Melissa Nichols and Todd Nichols, Family Attachment and Counseling Center of Minnesota, www.familyattachment.com

Attachment Play replicates healthy attachment interactions between a parent and a child. It utilizes four modes of interaction: activities are structured, engaging, nurturing and challenging. This type of play focuses on increasing intimacy between a child and parent through direct body and eye contact, rocking, singing, nurturing, and positive affirmations that emphasize a child's health, strength and potential. Listed below are exercises designed to enhance attachment with your child. Many of these activities can be adapted for younger or older children.

One to Three Years

Play pat-a-cake, peek-a-boo, this little piggy, massage lotion on your child, feed each other finger snacks, teach the child something they don't know, build a structure with blocks and encourage the child to copy it.

Three Years and Older

Play with stuffed animals, play hide and seek, comb each other's hair, put hats on each other, read a book together, feed each other finger foods.

Adolescent

Look into each other's hands and tell your fortunes, put lotion on each other, describe a day in you child's life 10 years from now, thumb wrestle, feed each other finger snacks, have a marshmallow food fight.

Other Activities

Mirroring: face the child, move your arms, face, or other body parts and ask the child to move in the same way. For a very active child you can use slow motion or vary the tempo. Take turns being the leader.

Knock on the Door this is a simple baby activity. "Knock on the door" (tap on the child's forehead) "Peep in" (peek at the child's eyes) "Lift up the latch" (gently push the child's nose up) "Walk in" (pretend to walk fingers into a child's open mouth or pop a piece of food in).

Cotton Ball Hockey lie on the floor on your stomachs (or sit with a pillow between you). Blow cotton balls back and forth, trying to get the cotton ball past your partner's defense. You may increase the complexity by saying how many blows can be used to get the ball across the pillow, or by trying to blow at the same time to keep the ball in the middle.

Drawing Around Hands, Feet, or Bodies trace the child's hand or foot on a piece of paper. Full body drawings require that the child remain still (this can be challenging). The parent can make verbal comments regarding progress while drawing—e.g., "I'm coming to your knee..."

Measuring Measure the child's height, length of arms, legs, feet, hands, etc. Keep a record for later comparisons. Measure a child's smile, length of ears & nose, etc. You can use fruit tape, or roll-up snack for measuring and make a game out of feeding it to your child.

Stack of Hands Put your hand palm down in front of the child and guide your child to put his or her hand on top. Alternate hands to make a stack. Take turns moving the bottom hand to the top. Putting lotion on hands before this activity can make it slippery and nurturing at the same time.

Special Handshake Make up a special handshake together, taking turns adding new gestures. For example, you can do a five high, clasp hands, tickle palms, etc.

Decorate the Child Make rings, necklaces, bracelets with play-doh, crazy foam, etc.

Manicure Soak the child's feet or hands in warm water. Using lotion, massage his/her feet or hands. Paint toes or fingernails the color your child wants.

Twinkle Song Adapt the words of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," to the characteristics of your child: "What a special boy you are/Dark brown hair, and soft, soft cheeks/Bright brown eyes from which you peek/ Twinkle, twinkle little star/What a special boy you are."

Special Kisses Butterfly kiss: parent places cheek against the child's cheek and flutters eyelashes so the child feels the brush of her eyelashes; Fish kiss: have parent and child pucker their lips and kiss each other; Eskimo kiss: parent and child rub noses together, etc.

On Your Face On your face you have a nose/ And way down here you have 10 toes/2 eyes that blink/And a head to think/ You have a chin and very near/ You have 2 ears to help you hear/(Arms go high and arms go low)/ Arms go low and arms go high/A great big hug to say hello/(A great big hug to say goodbye). On the first verse, touch your child's nose; touch your child's arms and touch his toes; touch the child's temples next to his eyes; cradle the sides of his head; touch his chin; touch both ear lobes and whisper something in their ear like "I love you"; grasp the child's wrists and hold the arms high over his head and bring them down or visa-versa; extend your arms to give the child a hug.

There was a Little Mouse There was a little mouse/and she had a little house/and she lived /up here. Holding the child's palm, "walk" your fingers in his or her palm like a little mouse; release the child's palm and encircle the child's hand with both of your hands; walk your two fingers up the child's forearm. With your tone of voice and facial expressions, build the child's anticipation of the next move; Touch the child in a spot that would be a surprise—ear lobe, chin, nose, etc.

Balloon or Bubble Tennis Keep balloon or bubble in air by using specific body parts. Cotton Ball or Feather Guess: Have child close eyes and tell where you have touched him/her with a cotton ball or feather.

Caring for Hurts Check the child for bruises, hurts or "boo-boos." Put lotion on or around it, kiss it or touch with a cotton ball.

Balancing Activities Have the child balance pillows, books or hats on head or on their feet when lying on their back on the floor with feet in the air.

Straight Face Challenge Child has to keep a straight face while you try to make him/her laugh.

* Many of these exercises are taken from *I Love You Rituals* and *Theraplay: Helping Parents and Children Build Better Relationships through Attachment-Based Play* (see p. 24 for full citations).