

What can babies do at Playcentre?

A simpler question to ask might be 'What CAN'T babies do at Playcentre?' and the answer is 'not much'. Babies learn more, and faster than they will at any other time in their lives. Providing them with a variety of rich experiences feeds their growth.

They certainly are not just at Playcentre to sleep. They can be included in every area of play – just think about how you can make things simpler and lower. Think about safety – is anything sharp? Heavy? Brittle? Smaller than a \$2 coin? Have a long string or cord? Harbour germs? Does it need to be tidied away straight after play? Think about where you put them – what surface are they lying on? Grass, gym mats, carpet, flax mat, blankets? As babies can sit, other surfaces become possible – sand, puddles, and yes, even mud.

What can they SEE?

Pictures on the ceiling, leaves moving in the breeze, scarves on the ceiling, ribbons tied to tree branches, shadows, clouds, pictures on the walls, mobiles, other children playing.

What can they REACH?

Babies are competent and confident learners too – can they freely choose what to play with, hold and manipulate, rather than having it chosen for them, hung over them, or placed in their hands?

Where can they GO?

When they are on the move are they able to decide for themselves where to go or do we try to keep them where it is convenient for us?

Who can they PLAY with?

Think about who they seem to enjoy cuddles with, who they seem to like looking at.



- Scarves and soft fabrics are great for 'baby massage' or playing peek a boo.
- Blow raspberries on them, tickle them.
- Make a baby massage kit with sponges, squeeze bottles to blow air on them.

- Build, hanga – towers from boxes or small blocks for them to knock over.
- Set up items for posting and ice cream containers and shoe boxes with holes in the lid – bigger holes for smaller babies as it is easier for posting. Muffin trays can be fun for sorting items.

- Loose parts play – arrange large boxes around the room for them to open, empty, crawl into.
- Anything that rolls around – waste paper baskets, skittles, balls, plastic bottles – are interesting when they are pushed. Rolled up pairs of clean socks also make safe balls for early throwing games.
- Heuristic play and treasure baskets. These may be baskets of carefully chosen natural and cultural items, with a variety of textures, or they can be simply big collections of clean junk – baskets of plastic and metal lids, yoghurt butter and hummus pots, to sort, tip, chew and explore.

- Make music, whakatangitangi puoro – give them access to small musical instruments that won't hurt if they hit themselves – rattles, bells.
- Put them on the parachute and gently pull it around the floor.

- Use puppets and finger puppets – move them slowly enough that the baby can follow them with their eyes.
- Blow bubbles – sitting the babies up may help avoid bubbles in the eyes. Baby shampoo can be used for less painful bubble mix.
- Bake, tunu – if they can sit, they can help make a scone.
- Explore, toro – let the babies see and touch.

- Read them stories, kōrero pakiwaitara – include them when reading to older children. Show them the book you have chosen.
- Talk to them, kōrero – tell them what you are doing.
- Ask them questions. Respond to their babbling and demonstrate patterns of turn taking in conversation.
- Sing, say rhymes, waiata – use interactive songs and chants – Round and Round the Garden, Incy Wincy Spider, This Little Piggy went to Market.
- Dance, kanikani – cuddle them while you dance and do action songs.

- Sensory bottles – small colourful items can be given to babies in clear plastic bottles with the lids hot glued on – these are noisy, colourful and move when touched. Coloured water with glitter is another option. Or you can create netting bags – use netting fruit bags, or undone shower scrubs, fill with stones, or plastic bottle caps, or other interesting items and tie securely.
- Mix, whakararu – Gloop (cornflour and water – is non slippery and no problem if they eat it or get it in their eyes). Fingerpaint inside a plastic bag is surprisingly still a fun and squishy sensory experience without being messy.

- Throw shredded paper.
- Paint, panipani – take their footprints (handprints are much harder), let them sit and paint with their hands and feet, immerse them in the paint for bottom prints.
- Scribble, tā kōkau – sit them on the concrete or next to a blackboard with a big piece of chalk.

- Touch, tauwere – tactile walls and tactile mats, activity walls or puzzles with locks, bolts, switches.
- Outdoor play – are parts of your playground suitable for crawlers? Can you create crawling challenges with pillows and sheets or moveable playground equipment?
- Arrange, whakarārangi – collage without glue. Stick clear coverseal to a table sticky side up, let them arrange collage items, then put a cardboard back on.
- Dress up, rerehua kākahu – sometimes babies like to watch you put on hats and wigs, and might like taking them off you.
- Water, akātao – give them a bath, or a tub of water and some things to pour with.

- Ice, hukapapa – a block of ice with things frozen inside – scenting the water with essence adds an extra element to the play.
- Babies will invent their own ways to learn too. It's often as simple as 'get out of their way and watch them play'.
- Sit or lie the baby next to a mirror so that they can see their reflection.