

Play is the key way children learn about themselves, others and the world they live in. It is essential to their learning, development, health, and physical, mental and social well-being – and it's FUN! Play provides the building blocks to be ready for school.



Fun with animals

Caring for animals together provides lots of opportunity to learn and practice important social and emotional skills.

Did you know?

Caring for a pet can be a great way for young children to develop non-verbal communication, nurturing and empathy. Practicing being gentle and caring with animals helps your toddler to learn to be aware of the needs, feelings and behaviour of others.

Add language

Try responding to your toddler's interest by naming the animal and talking about what they are doing; how they move; and what noise they make. Remember to keep your sentences only one or two words longer than your child uses. If your toddler says "dog" you could say "yes, black dog" or "dog is running".

Other development

The warm, furry touch of a loved pet or even watching fish swim is very calming for children and adults. Practice being calm helps develop self-regulation skills (the ability to manage emotion, behaviour and activity levels).

Being with animals provides opportunities for your child to see and experience the link between behavior and feelings e.g. the dog wags its tail when happy.

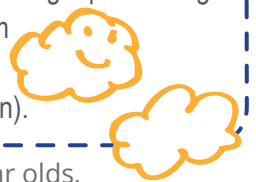
Tuning into the animal's behaviour can help your



toddler learn social skills. For example, when the dog wags his tail he is happy to play. When the cat jumps out of reach she has had enough and wants a break. Learning to accept this with animals can help your toddler accept this with human playmates when they don't want to play! Live animals provide opportunity for learning early science and maths concepts. You can compare animals by size e.g. big and little when your toddler is younger. As they get older you can compare animals by coverings e.g. fur, feathers, scales; or by number of legs e.g. two, four or six.

Safety

Even well-known animals and children can be unpredictable. Close adult supervision reduces health and safety risks to both your toddler and the animal. Note: Getting a pet is a big decision – the adult is making a long-term commitment as they are responsible for the welfare of the animal (and the children).



Playgroup WA has a treasure trove of play activities for babies, toddlers and 3-5 year olds, for home and playgroup. These play activities cover a balanced diet of play across sensory, movement, language and thinking skill areas.

You can find them at www.playgroupwa.com.au/playideas or visit www.facebook.com/playgroupwa