



Tips & Tricks

10 Strategies to Make the Most of Play

Created by Erin Murray for **BECKER'S**

1 **Connect with the children as they play**

Get close to the child, on their eye-level, face them, and make eye-contact.

2 **Be warm, encouraging, and have fun!**

Smile often, and use children's names as they play. Give children specific encouragement, and remember, laughter is contagious.

3 **Talk before touch**

Before moving a child, giving them a toy, switching toys, etc, tell them what you are going to do before doing it.

4 **Observe and respond**

Watch for children's attention, interest, frustration, etc. with a toy and respond according to their cues.

5 **Serve and return**

Mirror children's facial expressions, sounds, words, and actions.

6 **Follow the child**

Ask the children for their input about where and what they want to play. Follow where the child's curiosity takes them. Allow physical movement, and go with the flow. Allow and encourage children to access toys, and play with them as independently as possible.

7 **Say the behavior you want to see**

Communicate clear expectations for playing safely. Ex. "The cups are for stacking. You can get a ball to throw." Tell children what they can do with the toys instead of what they can't do.

8 **Make connections**

Use "I notice" and "I wonder" statements to describe the children's play. Ask open-ended questions like, "Why did you choose..." "What will happen if..." "How could you..." "What did you want to happen when you..." Limit close-ended cognitive questions like, "What color/shape/number/animal is this?"

9 **Give just enough help**

As children play with toys, offer just enough help so they don't give up, but don't do all the work for them.

10 **Describe the play**

Narrate your own actions as well as the children's actions using complete sentences. Repeat and extend children's sounds, words or phrases. Describe play objects by color, size, shape, texture, etc. and make connections to familiar ideas.