

HOW TO PLAY AND INTERACT WITH PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE CHILDREN

Thanks to Donna Barlow, MA, Child Development
And Jean Nelson Erichsen, MA, LBSW, Human Development

You can relax and interact with children between one and three when you take a "bag of tricks" along on your visits. The toys can be small enough to carry in your purse or you can put them in a little bag. Huge developmental differences exist between one year olds and three year olds. Even within the same age group, children are at different stages of ability. Please note that some children may need to see your toys several times before they are ready to touch them.

Praise your child for her efforts in working with these toys. Some orphans have never had the opportunity for play. If possible, play with the child outdoors, where the interaction is better.

INFANCY TO THREE

INTERACTION

Call the child by name. Repeat the child's name when you start a new activity. If you plan to change the child's name, use the names interchangeably. Notice if the child squeals, laughs, babbles or vocalizes words. This is a good sign.

HANDKERCHIEF OF SCARF

This game is universal. You go first. Put the cloth over your head to hide your face, say "peek-a-boo" and pull the cloth off to show your face. After a few times, put the cloth over the child's head and say "peek-a-boo". She/he will pull it off. Pretty soon, she/he will put the cloth over your head. Babies and children LOVE this game.

KEYS

Jingle your keys behind the child's head on each side. See if she/he hears and turns to find them. Let her/him jingle the keys. (Then try to get them back!)

PENCIL OR CRAYON AND SPIRAL PAD

You go first. Draw a line and a circle. Does the child hold the implement in her/his fist or in her/his fingers? Does she/he scribble or draw lines?

SMALL RUBBER BALL

Roll the ball to the child. Does she/he try to pick it up? Does she/he roll it back?

SMALL BLOCKS

You go first. Stack them, arrange them in patterns or colors. See what the child does with the blocks.

LITTLE DOLL, PREFERABLY WITH BOTTLE

Touch the nose on the doll and then on yourself. See if the child will mimic you. Touch your ears, hair and so on to encourage the child to mimic you. This can also teach them English words for body parts.

Does the child hold the doll in a nurturing way? Does she/he feed or talk to the doll?

LITTLE TRUCK

Zoom it around on the ground. Make truck noises. Give it to the child to play with on the ground. Does she/he mimic you?

TINY BOX OF RAISINS

Put three to five raisins down in a clean place. Can the child pick one up one at a time? The reward is a sweet treat!

YOUR EXIT

Be certain to take the toys back when you leave. On future visits, the child will probably get excited when she/he sees that you have the toys. Best of all, you'll have something to play with together.

CHILDREN THREE AND OLDER

INTERACTION: This is similar as with a baby except that you can bring a small spiral notebook and pens or markers to write the old child's name and embellish the new name.

CHILD'S WALLET OR PURSE: Help your child feel a new sense of identity by filling out an identity card and putting it in the wallet or purse. Add some money, and teach them what the coins and paper money are called.

SPIRAL PAD: Write letters and numbers and help the child to do so.

CELL PHONE: You can play a lot of games with the child on your cell phone to show them how it operates, preferably over a carpeted floor. Teach them the cell phone number.

DIGITAL CAMERA: Children love to see a replay of the pictures that they see you take. You can also show them how to use it, preferably over a carpeted floor.

PHOTO ALBUM: Show the child pictures of your house, the park, your relatives and friends, and pets, if any. Name the people, places and pets each day and help the child pronounce their names.

PICNIC ITEMS: Weather permitting, children love picnics and prefer them to restaurants. Buy disposable items at the grocery store or pack them in your suitcase. Make sandwiches and serve fruit for dessert.

HAND PUPPETS: These can get you over the language barrier. Take one for each family member on the trip. Give the puppets your names and use them a lot.

HOME MADE TOYS: Paper goods from the hotel can be put to use in a lot of creative ways..

COLORING BOOK AND CRAYONS: Color pictures with your child

PICTURE BOOK: Start reading at bedtime to start a new tradition at home.