

# Why playing with toddlers important

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**KOTA KINABALU:** The toddler years (12-36 months) are a time of great cognitive, emotional and social development which is mainly associated with play.



There are many types of play, for instance, imitative play, constructive play, a game with rules and role-play, said Universiti Malaysia Sabah's Psychology and Education Faculty's Child and Family Psychology programme Head Dr Hon Kai Yee (pic).

"To date, most of the parents in the millennium are postulated technology savvy is the convenient technique to 'babysit' the children and keep them quiet. Most of the traditional toys have been transformed into a mobile phone or any screen device.

"There is yet to be confirmed that technology devices perform better than traditional toys in terms of learning."

She said amid the Covid-19 crisis people are told to stay at home.

"Most of the parents must work from home and it added to the burden of caring for toddlers. Undoubtedly, the screen time of children is then increased tremendously.

"So, how do parents play effectively with toddlers without screen time, especially during the lockdown? Here are some tips," she said.

The first tip is to use stickers as a learning tool for toddlers, said Dr Hon.

"You may wonder how can stickers help in toddlers' learning? They are just some colourful, attractive stickers. I found stickers are a 'magic' tool for learning as well as improving fine motor skills!

"First, you must know your children's preferences, whether they likes animals, plants or cartoons, among others. For instance, my child likes animals. I would look for the animal sticker books or any stickers related to animals.

"She will study the animal stickers and later try to remember the name of the animals. She then removed the stickers and paste it in her a sticker book as a collection.

"Bear in mind, a scrapbook is important to keep the stickers otherwise your house will be full of animal stickers as they just stick it anywhere they like!

"Through playing with stickers, interaction between parents and children is established, where children can visualise and name the animals, using fine motor skills to paste it on the book, and review the book whenever they are free. Who said only technology devices can educate kids?"

Go "fishing" can also help the toddlers to improve their concentration, Dr Hon said, sharing her second tip.

"There are several types of fishing toys. Some can be played during bath time. Personally, fishing toys help toddlers improve fine motor skills and concentration. It requires the toddler to focus on catching fish, though it is quite hard sometimes.

"You may find that toddlers give up easily when they could not catch the fish they wanted. Practice a few more times and they will master and enjoy the fishing. Motivation words such as 'keep trying' or 'well done' help toddlers to stay focus during play," she said.

The third tip is to use flour as "play dough" to increase the creativity of the toddlers and release tension, said Dr Hon.

"We can make our dough free from chemicals by using ingredients such as flour, salt, oil, warm water and food colouring! It is completely safe for toddlers and most importantly, saves cost and user-friendly.

"Besides, it can help toddlers to release their anger and stress while playing with the dough. Toddlers are having fun through creativity and later promote social skills as well.

"In a nutshell, having a good routine is the key to success. Consistently doing similar things at the same time will help toddlers understand what is next on the schedule.