



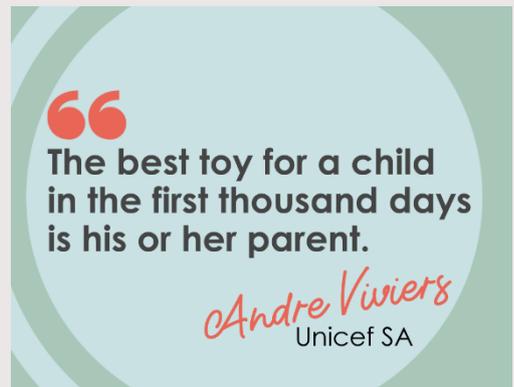
# PLAY & EARLY LEARNING

How local churches & individuals can support PLAY for learning

## BUILDING BRAINS THROUGH THE POWER OF PLAY

**Babies are learning all the time!** And did you know that parents and caregivers have the superpower of PLAY? Small, everyday actions can build brains in young children. **What can you do to encourage play in the First Thousand days?**

All positive playful interactions between baby and parent/caregivers are vitally important in the early years of a child's life. These shared moments build the relationship or bond between the baby and parent, they build the child's brains and are essential to stimulate the child's healthy development.



The question for FTD-friendly churches is, **'how can we encourage our moms & dads to have positive enjoyable everyday moments with their young child?'** As churches, you have a wonderful opportunity to foster playful interactions in the home.

### HERE ARE SOME IDEAS OF WHAT YOU CAN DO TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT PLAY AND EARLY LEARNING:

- **Speak up** and talk about the importance of play. This will create awareness in your church, in your parents' groups and the community around you. **Talk about the importance of why** spending time with young children is so essential. And time that isn't just for feeding, changing, and cleaning.
- **Create opportunities and safe spaces** in moms' groups, on Sundays and in other gathering to encourage moms and dads to play peek-a-boo, sing a song, talk through a picture book.

**Play** = learning = play  
**Play** = physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and creative skills  
**Play** = school readiness  
**Play** = a positive adult – baby relationship  
**Play** = lots of back-and-forth interactions between adult – baby



- **Equip parents** through starting a Home Visiting ministry, running Antenatal and postnatal classes like Flourish, and using other parenting events at your church will build the capacity of your parents. It is extremely important to equip young parents with the knowledge that positive engagements like making lots of eye contact, cooing, singing, cuddling, following the cues of baby, reading, talking, gazing, mirroring, pointing – right from the very start of life is critical to help their children thrive.
- **Share quality information and helpful tips** around play with practical ideas through WhatsApp groups or parent groups or on Sundays. You can share one new idea a week with parents to do together. Here are some suggested websites for practical ideas to share with parents to use:
  - **Vroom app** has practical activities that are specific to the age of baby - <https://www.vroom.org/>
  - **Do More - Parenting resources** hub - <https://domore.org.za/parenting-resources/>
  - **Learning through Play** - <https://learningthroughplay.com/>
  - **The power of play** - <https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/power-play>
- **Affirm and encourage** moms and dads when you see them interacting with their baby in a playful way. Highlight what they did well and encourage them to keep playing and responding to babies' cues. *"Well done mom! I love seeing you making eye contact and smiling with your baby. You are doing such a great job!"*
- **Avoid shaming** or blaming parents. Rather find ways to encourage parents to find **5 minutes** a day to be with their young child and to be intentional around shared moments and play.
- **Relax and have fun with it.** Encourage parents to enjoy these positive moments. There isn't a right or wrong way to do it. Encourage parents to use the everyday normal things they do around the house and to use them to engage with baby. Making lots of eye contact, smile, talk and follow babies' cues when changing nappy, bath time and dressing baby.



As adults, let's remember to have fun, and enjoy the good sense of humour God has given us. God has created us with a playfulness to enjoy life, to have fun with our family, friends and especially our children – even our young babies.

The more we all PLAY the easier it gets. We don't need fancy toys, all baby needs are a loving, engaged, caring adult. **Parents are the best toy! By far!**

## Watch these video around the topic of play

### **Baby talk for Dads** by Unicef

Baby talk may sound silly, but it actually helps develop the brain.



### **'Peek-a-boo' can really change the world.**

How every child can thrive by five. Inspiring Ted Talk by 7-year-old, Molly Wright.



## **Building brains through the power of play**

The Sikunye Gathering

Watch the recording of this inspiring event

