

Parent-Child Social Games

When infants begin showing interest in their parents and other adults, the time is right to play social games. Social games are back-and-forth, your-turn/my-turn infant-adult play accompanied by short rhymes or songs that engage infants in playful interactions. Some of the results of playing social games with your child are active child participation, lots of playful bouts of back-and-forth communication, and bunches of smiles and laughter. Enjoy!

Learning Guide: Playing Parent-and-Child Social Games

- **Begin by watching your child**, paying special attention to **things that appear interesting to her**. What kinds of things make your child smile or coo? If she seems interested in looking at your face or hearing your voice, she may enjoy the game of “Peek-a-boo.”
- Peek-a-boo is played by covering the baby’s eyes with a soft cloth and asking “Where is _____?” Then remove the cloth and exclaim, “Peek-a-boo! I see you!” Notice your child’s response. She might coo, smile, make eye contact, kick her legs, or do something else that tells you she likes the game. **Follow your child’s lead** by continuing the game based on her response. Cover baby’s eyes and **wait for her to do something** to tell you she wants you to pull the cloth from her eyes. When the baby coos, moves her arm, or uses any other behavior that is telling you to continue, **respond immediately** by pulling the cloth from her eyes and saying “Peek-a-Boo. I see you!”
- “So Big” is another engaging social game. Gently stretch the baby’s arms above his head while saying, “How big is _____? *SO BIG!*” Then kiss or tickle his tummy or neck. Once you have played the game two or three times and know the baby likes it, **try waiting a few seconds before lifting his arms again**. If he moves his arms, coos, smiles, waves his hands, or uses another particular behavior, assume that he is telling you to do it again and **respond promptly**. When you wait for your child to respond, you are teaching **how to take turns**, and he may **begin to learn that his behavior gets you to respond with the desired consequence**. In other words: “When I wiggle, I get Daddy to play our funny game!”
- If you play social games often and begin to notice your child is not as excited as before, you may want to **add something new**—such as a new challenge—to a game.
- Keep your games fun and simple. Smiles and laughter are important too!

**Watch a video of
this Learning Guide**

You’ll know the practice is working if ...

- The infant tries to start a social game.
- The infant smiles or laughs when the adult responds to the child’s behavior.
- The infant seems to understand how a game is played.

A Quick Peek

Andy, 3 months old, and his father have found a fun way to play Peek-a-boo. When Andy wakes up after sleeping, Dad hides behind Andy’s favorite blanket and calls to his son:



“Where’s Andy? Where’s Andy?” Hearing his father’s voice, Andy starts cooing and wiggling with excitement. As soon as Andy “calls” back, Dad pops his head from behind the blanket and says, “Peek-a-boo! I see you!” Then Dad hides and the game begins again. Andy looks to the right and then to the left to see where his dad will appear next.

For more ideas, ask a home visitor, teacher, early interventionist, therapist, or another experienced parent. [Click here to download a free booklet full of lap game ideas from Pierce County Library \(Tacoma, WA\).](#)