

# 1 American Baby

JUNE 2008

MOM TO MOM. WOMAN TO WOMAN.

STROLLER  
GUIDE 2008  
\*\*\*  
18 Cool  
New Rides!

## WHAT MAKES A GREAT DAD?

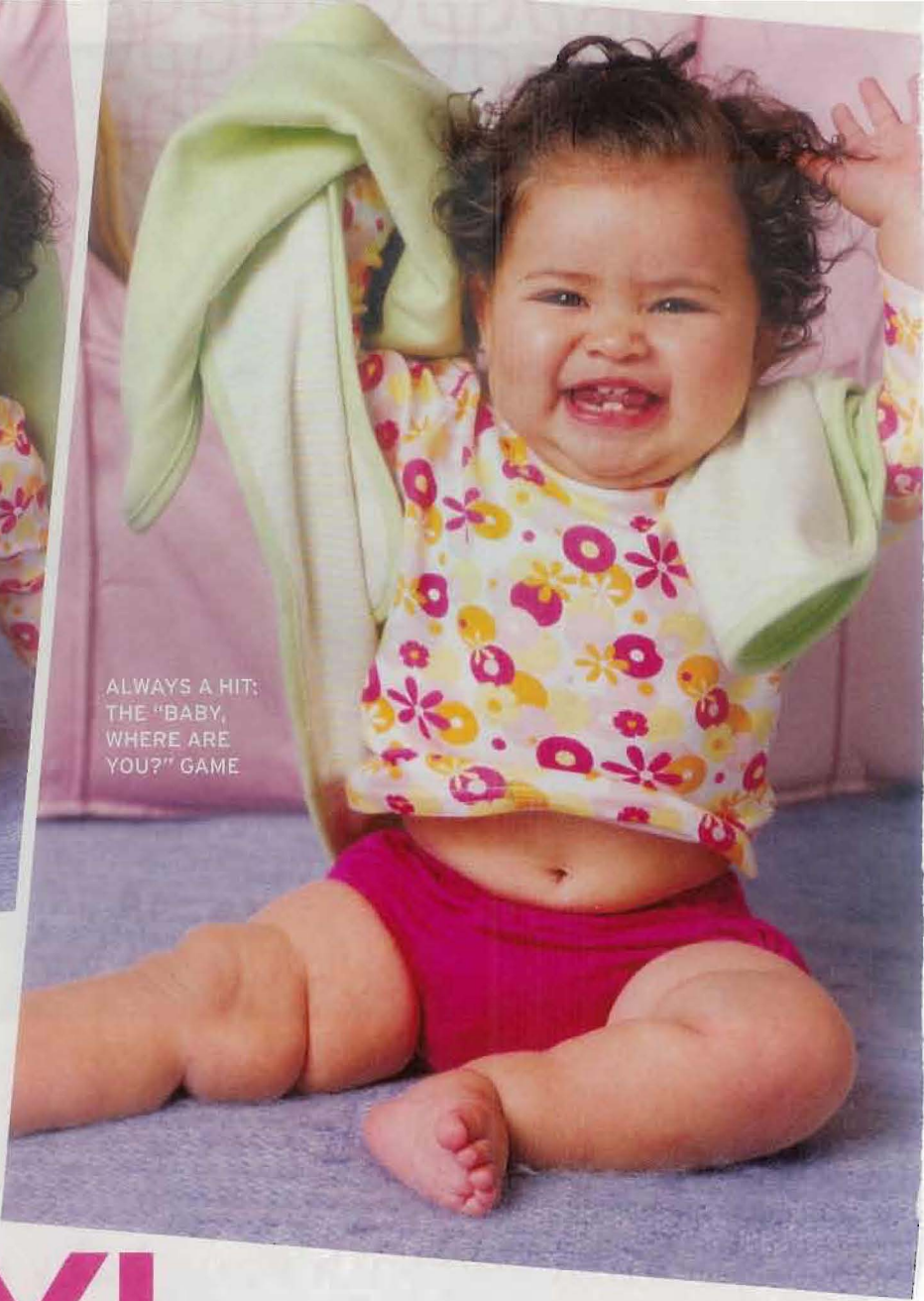
Meet the Winners  
of our Contest

## Happy Father's Day!

## Cash Flow Problems?

How to Take Control  
Of Your Money—  
Once & For All

Your Child's  
Ups & Downs—  
\* Explained



ALWAYS A HIT:  
THE "BABY,  
WHERE ARE  
YOU?" GAME

# READY, SET, PLAY!

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH A BABY? TEN GAMES BOTH OF YOU WILL LOVE—AND THEY BOOST LEARNING TOO! **By Kristen Finello**

**P**laying with your baby—and being treated to an ear-to-ear grin or a deep baby belly laugh—is one of the most enjoyable parts of parenting. But playtime with your infant is more than just, well, fun and games. For your little one, activities such as splashing in the tub, blowing bubbles, and handling new objects are also teaching her valuable lessons about the world. “There is a lot going on when babies are playing,” explains Claire Lerner, director of parenting resources for Zero to Three, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the development of healthy infants and toddlers. “Play builds thinking skills, helps little ones learn language, boosts their self-

confidence, and provides them with valuable opportunities for interacting with other people and the world around them.”  
Another benefit to baby games: connecting through play provides a chance for you to learn about your baby’s particular likes, dislikes, and interests, Lerner says. Follow your baby’s cues—when he loses interest and turns away, change the game or let him take a break from playing. If he starts crying, it might mean he’s overstimulated and would appreciate a quieter activity, such as having a snuggle or looking at a picture book. Wondering exactly what to actually play with your baby? Here are some great first-year games to add to your repertoire.

LINDA FARWELL

## 1 Where Did It Go?

Take a koosh ball or other soft ball and squish it into a small container with a lid. Close the lid. Ask your baby, "Where did the ball go?" Encourage him to open the container and watch the ball spring out, jack-in-the-box style. The popping ball is sure to get his attention, and the game is an exciting way to learn about object permanence—the fact that an object still exists even if you can't see it—explains Susan P. Epstein, a parenting coach in New London, Connecticut.

## 2 Kitchen Stack-Ups

Empty cereal boxes, plastic yogurt containers, and unbreakable bowls are perfect building materials for teetering towers. As you stack each item, describe its size and shape. Once your homemade skyscraper is complete, you and your baby can take turns knocking it down. This activity, Epstein says, will teach your baby about shapes and sizes as well as cause and effect ("Wow, when I push on these boxes, they come down with a big boom!").



Plastic containers make great stacking toys.

Who knew? A simple game like rolling a ball back and forth teaches an early lesson in the art of conversation. The back-and-forth game reinforces the concept of waiting and taking turns.

## 3 I Can Hear It

Another way to reinforce the concept of object permanence is by hiding a squeak toy beneath a blanket or towel. Start by partially covering it with the blanket. Squeak the toy, and encourage your baby to find it. Once she gets good at that, up the ante by completely covering the toy. Again, squeeze it so it makes a noise. Cheer for her when she finds it.

## 4 Wet and Wild

Turn bathtime into aquatic exploration. Equip your child with cups of different sizes, a small plastic teapot or watering can, and a handful of plastic measuring spoons. Let her pour water from one container to another so she can see what happens. Take a turn pouring the water for her, and let her try to "catch" it in her hands. Another fun idea: let her have a wet sponge so she can watch the water drip from the sponge onto other objects, Epstein suggests. Show her how to twist and squeeze the sponge to make even more water drip.

## 5 Mommy Is Sleeping

This game was a hit with my 2½-year-old when she was an infant, and now it's a sure way to get her 7-month-old brother giggling. Sit close to your baby (he can be seated or lying down, depending on his age). Say "Mommy is going to sleep now," and close your eyes. After a few seconds, open your eyes and enthusiastically say "Hi!" or

"Good morning!" (You can switch it up with "Good afternoon" or "Good evening" to reflect the time of day.) Seeing Mom's eyes pop open and hearing her greeting usually elicits a laugh. After a few rounds, pause longer before opening your eyes to see how your baby reacts. Chances are babies about 6 months and older will start to vocalize or bat at your face to "wake you up."

## 6 Fall for Foliage

Head outside and gather leaves in a variety of colors and sizes. Give them to your baby and let him pick them up and explore them with his hands (with your supervision, of course). Crinkle some of the leaves so he can experience the sound and learn that the action of crinkling the leaf makes that crunchy noise. Use a leaf big enough to cover most of your face for a new take on traditional peekaboo.

## 7 Roll Play

Seat your baby on the floor across from you, and roll a toy car to her. Encourage her to roll it back to you. Try to keep the activity going. This back-and-forth game teaches the concept of taking turns, which will be necessary later for conversations, and it sets the stage for sharing.

## 8 Paint With Purees

This game is a little messy, but it's guaranteed to be a hit! Settle your 8- to 12-month-old into his high chair, or set him on the floor with a cookie sheet in front of him. Present him with a variety of colorful foods—try colored yogurts and baby food—and let him finger paint a masterpiece that would make Jackson Pollock proud. As he dips his hands into his edible "paint," describe

the food with words like “red,” “cold,” “squishy,” or whatever fits. If your pediatrician has given the green light, you can also supply some Cheerios or similar finger foods to add additional texture to your child’s artwork.

## 9 Get a Feel for It

Give your 10- to 12-month-old a variety of textured items to explore, suggest Sandy Jones and Marcie Jones, authors of *Great Expectations: Baby’s First Year* (Sterling Publishing, 2007). Gather items from around the house or the outdoors—a silky scarf, a piece of cardboard, tickly blades of grass, or a handful of sand, for example—and let her touch each one. (Just be sure she doesn’t put things she shouldn’t into her mouth.) The two of you will discover which textures are most pleasing to her. Will she like the softness of fleece or prefer the bumpiness of corduroy? There’s only one way to find out!



## 10 Collect Colors

Another winning activity in my house involves exploring colors by creating collections of similarly shaded items. Start by scavenging the toy box for baby-friendly objects in solid colors such as red, blue, yellow, and green. While sitting with your baby on the floor, group the items into sets based

on their color. For example, you might gather a red ball, a red plastic stacking ring, and a red rattle. Let baby handle the items as you say the color and name of each one, such as “red apple, red rattle, blue ball, blue block.”

*Kristen Finello, a mother of two, is a writer based in Scotch Plains, New Jersey.*