PEEKABOO
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The 12 Days of PLAY-List

A Special Note from Dawn Jeffrey

Though we can't believe it's already December, we can't complain! After all, it is *The Most Wonderful Time of the Year.* In fact, we say December 2020 is EXTRA wonderful. It's been a year we'll never forget. We have worked hard and we know the new year is going to bring *JOY to the World!*

The holiday season can be tough for your child, so we want to remind you to take this time to slow down and enjoy some fun time with your family over the next month. And remember, whether your child is looking for a *Hippopotamus for Christmas* or she's dreaming of being as cool as her big sister (who just wants her *Two Front Teeth*,) PLAY will bring your child more joy this season than any gift under the tree.

As we approach the end of the year, the saying "work hard, play harder" comes to mind.

Better Beginnings has a similar saying, but we say "Play hard, learn MORE!"

It's true, for the kids at least. We've said it before and we will say it again, because we are that passionate about it. The best way for your child to learn is through PLAY.

Honestly, it's not much different for us adults either. Think about it. Sure we study, and train and memorize, but we ultimately learn best when we DO.

Right now, your child's job is to learn. Playing leads him to ask questions and solve problems. It helps him discover the world around him. Learning through play is teaching your child skills he will carry through life.

The best part about this? Young children can play with anything and in any setting. I mean come on, who hasn't watched their child become more infatuated with the holiday wrapping paper and box than the actual gift inside?

So, in honor of this magical season, we present to you, the ***12 Days of PLAY-List***. Try doing one of these every other day. That should keep you and your child busy through the rest of the holiday season

1. **SCIENCE PLAY –** *Rainstorm in a Jar*

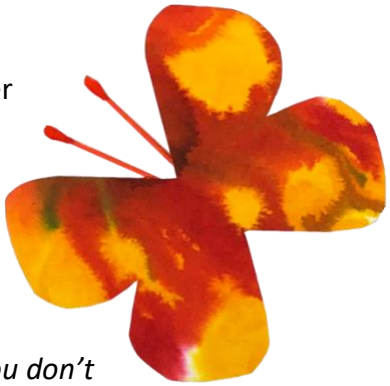
Though we wish we could make a snowstorm in a jar, this Rainstorm in a Jar is probably a more accurate representation of the kind of weather your child will see here. It's a good one too. The different textures will teach him how things feel and the bright colors will hold his attention. Save it for a real rainy day and play as you listen to the sounds of rain "***up on the housetop."***

2. **MATH PLAY -** *Play Your Way to Math*

It says it right there in the title. This resource shows you easy ways to Play Your Way to Math with your child. Write numbers, play I Spy, measure things around the house! Practice counting by singing the ***12 Days of Christmas***! *Note, do this at your own risk, or you might catch yourself singing about seven lords-a-leaping all the way into 2021.*

3. **READING PLAY –** *Bring Books to Life*

Put on a show! Pick out your favorite bedtime story and act it out with your little one. You might do most of the acting, or maybe he will. Either way, we're not looking for an Emmy here. Just get creative and have fun. ***Frosty the Snowman*** tells a great story! Ask your child to bring Frosty to life, just like the children did in the holiday classic. This is a great snow-day activity, but since you can't count on those around here, make it even more engaging by challenging your child to act him out without snow! You'll enjoy seeing his interpretation of the story.



4. **OUTSIDE PLAY –** *Play, Explore, Discover*

No need to go far, just take it to the back yard! Try setting a timer for five minutes and gathering as many outside things as possible, with supervision of course. Talk about why the leaves used to be green and now they're not. Tell your child why it snows more in the mountains than it does in Arkansas, and tell her if she goes outside every day, jumps on one leg, spins around and sings ***"Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it Snow!"*** the mountains might share some of that snow with us! *(Okay, you don't have to do that last one, but based on normal Arkansas weather patterns, we wouldn't be surprised if it worked!)* Anyway, you get the drift. Mother Nature is full of new discoveries. Get going, your adventure awaits!

5. **MEMORY PLAY –** *Simon Says Roll*
Understanding and remembering short commands is something your child should practice before entering Kindergarten. Maybe your child is an expert at remembering those classic**, but guaranteed-to-get-stuck-in-your-head**, holiday songs like ***Carol of the Bells***. But chances are his future Kindergarten teacher won't appreciate that very much. This *Simon Says ROLL* resource helps your child practice memory and math skills at the same time! He will have to think before each move, so it might even bless you with some silence. Brings a new meaning, ***Do You Hear What I Hear***, huh?

6. **MUSIC PLAY –** *DIY Instruments*
Make your own instruments. Enough said. Music is a wonderful way to inspire creativity and teach your child how to express emotion. So grab some paper towel rolls, a bucket, a kazoo and even some ***Jingle Bells***. We can hear your ***Little Drummer Boy*** already!

7. **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PLAY –** *Get Outside and Explore*
We didn't call it exercise for a reason. Come on, it's the holiday season and we all know you would have skipped right past it! Kids need it, though. They have endless energy, and allowing them an outlet to let some of it loose will improve their health, emotional well-being and even sleep habits! Yes, sleep. It's a favorite word around here too. So what are you waiting for? ***Run, Run Rudolph! (Momma's) gotta make it to town***!

8. **WINTER PLAY –** *5 Activities for a Wonderful Winter*
Here are five activities for a wonderful winter. We know, here in Arkansas, we aren't exactly ***Walkin' in a Winter-Wonderland***, so we're not suggesting you build a snowman or go sledding. You can try making bird feeders or just pretending you're in the Winter Olympics! Since our cold weather isn't too unbearable, make sure you let your child get outside. We all need fresh air, and after almost an entire year of staying at home or at school, outside time is a must.

9. **SENSORY PLAY**
   Sensory Play is also known as messy play. Don't cringe yet! The best artists make messes before their masterpieces. Sensory play is all about what they see and feel. Do we need to revisit the birthday box and wrapping paper? Grab that box, or in this case, any plastic bin will do, and fill it with STUFF. Think of your child's ***Favorite Things***. Maybe create your own Winter Wonderland full of ***snowflakes that stay on (Frosty's) nose and eyelashes***. Then, watch as she discovers a new world through seeing and feeling.

10. **ARTS AND CRAFTS PLAY –** *Playdough Power*
    Maybe your child loves to create masterpieces. Great! She's learning fine motor skills and using her imagination. More real-life lessons she'll need forever, just don't tell her that! Here's a thought, make your own playdough and use it to make holiday ornaments or creations. *Pro tip: it helps if you sing* ***"Dreidel Dreidel Dreidel, I made you out of PLAY(dough)."***

11. **SMALL GROUP PLAY**
    Playing together helps your child develop mentally, emotionally and socially. It encourages him to hold meaningful conversations. Playing with siblings helps him learn how to take turns and cooperate. Remind him that ***Santa Clause is Coming to Town*** when you talk about why sharing is important. Use our newest resource, *Paper Playground for Learning* to set up a fun family game or obstacle course tonight!

12. **SELF-LED PLAY**
    We weren't joking about the box thing. It's okay to allow your child some alone time to play. Self-led play helps him develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Let him discover new things and figure out why they exist in his world on his own. Children are naturally curious, so he will entertain himself longer than you think. Seriously, don't be surprised when you catch him ***Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree*** full of curiosity and without a care in the world!

See? Anything, anywhere. Play is possible, and it's powerful too.

We encourage you to communicate with your child care providers and talk to your child about her experiences at school. Be sure that interactive play is part of her early learning experience. It preps her for kindergarten and MORE. We're talking life-prep here. These are the years where she learns some of life's most valuable lessons.

So whether you sing ***Mele Kalikimaka*** or ***Feliz Navidad***, Better Beginnings wishes you and your family a safe, happy and healthy holiday season.

Be sure to follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to stay caught up with the Better Beginnings community. You can also sign up for our monthly newsletter, *The Buzz,* here.

All the best,

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