

The park is a wonderful place for children to play and explore. At the park children can learn and practice physical and social skills as they play with other children. They can also “do science” as they explore nature. If the park has a playground, children can also explore science as they slide, swing, and balance.

Baby/Toddler

Ball Fun Play a simple ball game with your toddler. Sit her down opposite you, just a few feet away. Use a big light ball. Roll the ball to her gently. “Here comes the ball! *Catch* the ball! *Catch* the ball!” Then encourage her to roll the ball back to you. Give her lots of praise as she lets the ball go. “You *rolled* the ball! You *rolled* the ball!”

So Much Nature Put your baby down on a blanket in the grass. Let him explore nature using his senses of sight, hearing, smell, and touch. He can see the trees against the sky. He can hear the leaves blowing. He can smell the fresh air. He can feel the breeze on his skin and the grass in his fingers. Talk to him softly as you enjoy the experience together. “Feel the breeze! Feel the grass!”

All Kinds of Leaves Toddlers love to collect things. Leaves are especially fun to collect in the fall. Explore the *colors* of leaves with your child. Introduce words for color names like *red*, *brown*, *yellow*, and *orange*. Compare different leaves. Are they all the same or are they different? Collect leaves in a bag. Take them home and start a leaf collection.

Preschooler/Kindergartner

Balls, Balls, Balls Children love to play with balls because they can do so many things. Play a game of catch with your child, and use words like *bounce*, *roll*, and *fly* to describe the ball’s movement. Use different forms of the words like *bounced*, *rolled*, and *flew*. Invite your child to move the ball in different ways; *throwing*, *hitting*, *punching*, and *kicking*, and notice what happens. Invite another child to play and talk about *sharing* and *taking turns*.

Balancing Children first learn about the idea of balance as they use their own bodies. Use the word *balance* as your child runs around and uses playground equipment. “Wow! You really *balanced* your body on the swing!” Then extend this idea to other situations. “Did you see how the ball *balanced* on the basketball hoop before it fell through?”

Swing High, Swing Low Encourage your child to use all of the playground equipment. You can introduce a lot of vocabulary that describes movement and location. For example, when your child is on the swing, you can say “*High, high, fly* to the sky!” each time you push her. As she comes down, you can say “*Down, down, swing* to the ground!” When she is finished, talk about how it felt and use interesting words. “You were flying like a bird! How did it feel to *soar*?”

All Kinds of Trees Children are curious about trees because they are so big. You can be *scientists* as you collect some information about a tree. You can measure a tree by stretching your arms around it. “Can you reach all the way around?” Feel the *bark* of the tree and use words like *smooth*, *soft*, *rough*, *bumpy*, and *hard*. Look at the leaves of the tree. Notice the *veins*. Ask your child to describe the leaf’s *shape*. Compare the shape to something familiar. “It looks like your hand with fingers.” Compare the bark and leaves from different trees.

First-Grader/Reader-Writer

Ball Games Children need practice playing team games. Sometimes you have to be flexible about the rules. Try an easy game of *baseball* with your child and some friends. Use a big plastic *ball* and a big plastic *bat*. Make sure that each child has a turn to hit the ball and run around the *bases*. Introduce words like *teamwork* and *sportsmanship*. If your child has experience with team sports use specific vocabulary like *score*, *base hit*, and *homerun*.

Balancing Act As children get more practice controlling their bodies, they can balance more easily. They also begin to understand the idea of balance in a scientific way. Encourage your child to notice and think about *balance* in many situations. “How can we move the children on the see-saw so they will balance?” If your child has other experiences with balance make a connection. “Remember when we weighed the tangerines at the market on a balance scale?”

Who Lives in a Tree? The park is a good place to learn about how plants and animals help each other. Look with your child for *evidence* that animals live in the trees at the park. Maybe animals use the trees for *food* or *shade*. Look for birds flying near the trees. See if you can find any nests. Look for animals like squirrels or chipmunks. “Why do you think they like the trees?” Tell your child that it will be fun to learn more about trees. “We can look for a book about trees at the library or the bookstore.”

Adapted from *My PBS Parents*, Reading and Language articles.

**Reading books with young children is important in developing early literacy skills.
Greet fall with a selection of autumn and Halloween themed children's books.**

- *Arthur Jumps Into Fall*, by Marc Brown
- *Boo! Made You Jump! (Charlie and Lola)* by Lauren Child
- *It's the Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown* by Charles M. Schulz
- *The Berenstain Bears and the Prize Pumpkin* by Stan and Jan Berenstain
- *Biscuit Visits the Pumpkin Patch* by Alyssa Satin Capucilli and Pat Schories
- *Leaf Man* by Lois Ehlert
- *Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf* by Lois Ehlert
- *Fall Leaves Fall* by Zoe Hall
- *Why Leaves Change Colors* by Betsy Maestro and Loretta Krupinski
- *Too Many Pumpkins* by Linda White
- *Pumpkin Jack* by will Hubbell
- *Patty's Pumpkin Patch* by Teri Sloat
- *The Little Scarecrow Boy* by Margaret Wise Brown
- *Waltz of the Scarecrow* by Constance W. McGeorge
- *The Season's of Arnold's Apple Tree* by Gail Gibbons
- *Picking Apples and Pumpkins* by Amy Hutchings
- *Pumpkin, Pumpkin* by Jeanne Titherington
- *The Pumpkin Book* by Gail Gibbons
- *Hurry, Hurry Mary Dear* by N.M. Bodecker
- *Woody, Hazel and Little Pig* by Elsa Maartman Beskow
- *The Lonely Scarecrow* by Tim Preston
- *The Stranger* by Chris Van Allsburg
- *Ox-Cart Man* by Barbara Cooney
- *Hello, Harvest Moon* by Ralph Fletcher
- *Sara Squirrel and the Lost Acorns* by Julie Sykes