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Playing Baby Computer Games - The New Parent–Child Tradition?

By Emma Rath

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Imagine cuddling up with your small child to look at a picture book together that is interactive, musical, responsive and talks to you?

This is the experience that people are having who are engaged in that relatively new pastime - playing computer games with babies.

JumpStart's Knowledge Adventure calls it "lapware", Kiddies Games' logo is "Hop on the lap and tap", and Sesame Street's "Baby and Me" opens with an animation of a baby monster hopping onto the lap of a Daddy monster to play the computer. Playing computer games with your baby is being promoted as a fun activity that a child and their caregiver can share together. And rightly so, because whatever the activity, physical, loving closeness is an important ingredient that infants need for healthy intellectual, emotional and physical development.

Reading a bedtime story to a small eager child is a tradition in many homes. As the children get older, this may be replaced by watching TV together. Our parents' families listened to the radio together. Playing on the computer with a small child may become a new type of family tradition. Home computers and internet are making their way into more and more homes. Some parents use the computer in their work and are delighted to share the computer for a fun activity with their kids. Other parents want to make sure their children become computer literate. Well–designed, interactive, educational computer games engage small children as much as the television and are more educational than TV because they incite the child to interact and think, rather than passively watch and listen. These are the reasons for the increasing popularity of toddler computer software. Although a relatively small industry, software for infants has been cited as being a very fast growing industry.

What type of computer software is available for babies, toddlers and preschoolers? There are free games on websites and there are download and CDROM software that you can buy. Most software for this age group is games, but computer story books also exist. Wonderful websites that offer free games of which many are suitable for preschoolers (preschoolers are able to do directed clicking with the mouse) are:

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<http://www.sesamestreet.org/sesamestreet>
<http://www.noggin.com>
<http://www.cbc.ca/kidscbc>
<http://www.abc.net.au/children/games>
<http://www.meddybemps.com>

Great free sites for babies (whose skills tend to be more limited to banging the keyboard) are:

<http://www.kiddiesgames.com>
<http://www.toddletoons.com>

CDROM or download software that you buy is usually better than free internet games. The games are usually superior (more graphics, more music, more involved games for older kids) and the software takes over the entire screen, which is more appropriate for very young children who click anywhere and everywhere on the screen. Some of the well-known producers are:

Reader Rabbit software from <http://www.learningcompany.com>
JumpStart software from <http://www.knowledgeadventure.com>
Fisher–Price software from <http://www.knowledgeadventure.com>
Sesame Street software from <http://www.encoresoftware.com> or <http://www.amazon.com>
<http://www.babywow.com>

Computer game softwares for this age group make conscientious efforts to be suitably educational. To judge their effectiveness for your child, try them out with your child. If your child finds that it's fun, then it's probably educational. For a baby, fun usually means that the game responds in some way to random keyboard presses and mouse clicks, and that the game continues in a positive way even when no input is forthcoming from the baby. A preschooler will need more of a challenge or more educational content, but the game should be designed to be always fun, reactive in a positive way and self-resolving when the child does not get the correct answer. At this age, it is more important that computer games contribute positively to self-esteem, rather than conscientiously correcting incorrect answers about educational concepts that the child will master when they're older anyway. The KiddiesGames.com software is meticulous about adhering to these rules.

What types of skills are learned by playing toddler computer games? Obviously, computer software is not suitable for practicing gross motor or even fine motor skills. However, there are many types of educational concepts that computer games can help a child master, including shapes, sounds, cause and effect, identifying and naming things (such as objects and colors), increasing vocabulary, language concepts, the forms of letters and numbers, counting, pattern recognition, detail observation and word construction. At KiddiesGames, we strive to offer games for small children that are out of the ordinary, such as foreign language exposure and practicing the positions on the telephone for dialing emergency. The reactivity and interactivity of computer software is, of course, superior to that of books, and can be superior to that of toys, especially in the area of language. Infant computer games are also being cited as excellent resources for children with special education needs, because such games are simple, happy, brightly-colored, patient, controlled by the child and allow the child to make things happen.

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An official recommendation from the American Academy of Pediatrics at <http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics%3B107/2/423> is to "Discourage television viewing for children younger than 2 years, and encourage more interactive activities that will promote proper brain development, such as talking, playing, singing, and reading together." This has been taken as advice to avoid exposing those young children to the computer. However, well–designed infant software actually encourages those great activities of "talking, playing, singing, and reading together". By carrying out the play activities proposed by the computer game, the caregiver is actually prompted with a framework or script for carrying out those "talking, playing, singing, and reading" activities with the child. Experts are now saying that while computer games for infants should not replace toys and blocks and books and should not be used as an electronic babysitter, that they are yet another valid toy resource. For example, a summer 2004 newsletter from the Hawaii State Health Department at <http://www.hawaii.gov/health/family–child–health/eis/summer2004> encourages playing with lapware. The emphasis is not on acquiring measurable skills or getting correct answers, but is on open–ended exploration on the part of the child - which is another way of saying "having fun". Children

are programmed to learn and practice what they learned by playing and having fun.

Playing computer games with your small child is not yet a family tradition. However, it is an enjoyable, sharing activity that is becoming more and more popular.

The author of this article, Emma Rath, produces free online and purchasable download baby and preschooler software, available at <http://www.kiddiesgames.com>.

Here's What to expect at a Baby Shower

By Mike Yeager

A baby shower is a great way to welcome a new child and congratulate the new mother. Many mothers appreciate the help in purchasing the items they will need for their new baby. Commonly, baby showers are given only to new mothers or mothers who have not had a child in a long while. This way, friends and family, can help give the family the things babies need.

Baby showers are a tradition, but what happens at a baby shower is less formal for sure. Sometimes, friends and family members will hold a baby shower for a new Mom as a surprise. Often times, new mothers will get several showers thrown for her first child from different groups, such as one from friends, one from the mothers side of the family, and maybe one from her friends at work. Regardless of how many, these get–togethers are a great way for people to welcome the new child.

Planning a baby shower can be a lot of fun. For baby shower ideas, try checking online at the many websites that offer new parent information. Another place to get some ideas is at craft supply stores where there are aisles and aisles of ideas. Some things to consider for your baby shower are baby shower invitations and baby shower favors. Other things to think about are baby shower decorations! Baby shower games can make a boring party a lot of fun. Most of these can even be free baby shower games by using items from around your home. For example, you can take a roll of toilet paper with you

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to the party. Each guest has to guess how many individual sheets it will take to circle the mother to be. Giving away small gifts can make these games even more fun.

Planning a baby shower and attending them can be a lot of fun. Take a trip to the craft store and look around at all the baby shower decorations, games, and favors they have to offer. Pull together some friends and plan a few baby shower games and make your own decorations. Pinks and blues in streamers and tablecloths can fill a room with excitement. Either way you are sure to make the mother to be happy and feeling loved.

Mike Yeager
Publisher

Here's What to expect at a Baby Shower

A Bedtime Routine For Your Baby

Gift Ideas for men: Computer Games!

Baby Sleep Tips – Feeding During The Day

Playing With Your Baby - How To Make An Impact

Baby's First Year –What Parent Needs To Know

Help Your Child Succeed In School

The Art of Kissing

How Nice Guys, Shy Guys and Good Guys Finish First!

Understanding Acne: Causes, Cures and Myths



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