

Smiling Faces

Understanding People, Great Connections

Activities with Children

Play, play, and play...We want our au pairs to be actively playing with the children. You need to be funny, happy, silly, smiling, being creative and be playful. Children of different ages have different needs. These needs are based on each child's stage of growth and development. Try to understand the unique aspects of each child. This helps children feel good about themselves. This will also help you plan activities that are developmentally appropriate for each child. Appropriate activities help children learn and are lots of fun. In our au pair training you will learn all about playing with children. But here we give you some playing tips and play suggestions for all ages.

Playing Tips

Sometimes children can play very well on their own, but there are also many occasions when you have to play with them or make a suggestion to play with something. This is of course depending on age and interest. Maybe your host family has different needs and rules. Please discuss it with them.

1. *Make a day schedule on what you are going to do with the children*
To spend a nice day with the children try to make an activity plan what you are going to do the next day. Make a schedule for a rainy and sunny day.
2. *Vary toys, activities, spaces to play*
It's important that children play with different toys and do different activities (creativity, imagination, educational and activity). Change every 20 minutes. Try to vary the place of the activity. Play sometimes in the living/play room sometimes in their own room and also outside. Vary playing on the floor and playing at the table.
3. *Play with toys suitable to their age*
When children of different ages are playing in one room, let the smaller children play with toys that are suitable for them. They will learn something from it. Toys for older children can also be dangerous.
4. *Safe playing*
Of course all the toys are child proven and safe, but children of different ages play together. Please watch small parts for babies and toddlers. They can suffocate, while putting the toy into their mouth. Try to avoid playing with sharp objects like scissors and pencils. Always play with these toys on the table with the bigger children and clean them up after playing. Also balloons, plastic bags and robes are dangerous for little children.
5. *Communicate while playing*
It is important to connect with children. This is not only by playing but also by talking. Although we try to teach you the basics of Dutch before you travel to the Netherlands, it will be very hard to communicate in Dutch. Try to communicate in English. If you do not know how to tell it in Dutch or English, please speak to the children in your own language.
6. *Praise the child*
If a child is doing something right, made a beautiful drawing or finished a puzzle with good result, you have to praise the child by saying: good girl/boy (goed gedaan) or this is so beautiful (mooi) or give them a hug. This way you will build self esteem.

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7. Give them space to learn

Realize that children can learn many things while playing. For example how to make a puzzle. Try to stimulate the child to do the game, or play on his own. Assist only when necessary for example when the child gets frustrated. Always praise the child for trying or doing something right.

8. Play outside when the weather is nice

It's important to play outside and have some fresh air even when it is winter and cold. As long as it is not raining please stimulate the children to play outside.

9. Free play: just let them play on their own

It's important that children are not entertained all the time, but also use their own creativity. Depending on the age of the children, they will play a big part of the day by themselves. During that time you can do some light house work. But of course always under your supervision. Children under the age of six can never be left alone in a room.

10. One toy at a time

When the children playing at the table: drawing, painting, puzzling or doing a game.

Let them play with one thing. They have to clean it up before they play with the next toy.

11. Tidying Toys

Clean up toys is what they have to learn doing themselves. You have to educate them.

12. When they are having an argument

When they are fighting over a toy, just let them solve the matter themselves first. If you think it is time to interfere, try the following solutions:

1. Try to stimulate to share the toy and play together
2. Ask who had the toys first
3. Give the other child another tool

Play suggestions

Here we give you some play suggestions for all ages. Please look if the activities are suitable and safe for your host children. Ask your host parents what toys each child can play with. We suggest you make your own list of play activities divided into the 5 categories of playing: Creativity, Imagination, Cognitive, Activity and Outdoor. At the specially developed au pair training we will give you more funny activities and games to do with children.

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Creativity and arts

Art and music are common examples of creativity, believed in the importance of creative expression through open-ended activities. It is important to provide children with experiences that stimulate and encourage their natural creativity.

Drawing (tekenen) and coloring (kleuren):

Drawing is a wonderful way for all children to become creative regardless of their educational level. You can make a drawing with different materials suitable for each age: Making a drawing with Pencils (potloden) of stiften (viltstiften) or chalk (krijtjes). You can make a drawing on white paper on a chalk board or coloring book.

Painting (verven):

Painting is always a fun activity for every child. Early on, they learn about texture by using their hands, and later on they can master fine motor control when you introduce a brush. We have all kinds of painting materials, including special paint for the bath.

Clay / Play dough (kleien)

Clay is lovely to squish and squeeze, and fun to model. The child can use it from around two years, but make sure it doesn't get eaten! You can either make your own or buy it.

Arts (knutselen)

Let toddlers tear old wrapping paper. Then have them paste the pieces to make a collage. Bigger children can use especially designed scissors to cut pictures and shapes and glue them on a paper or create something.

Making music (muziek maken)

Making music is an important part of a child's learning. Children develop a way to express their creativity and emotion when they participate in activities involving music. You can make your own musical instruments with materials you probably already have on hand. Music toys or just with a pot and a wooden spoon.

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Cognitive / Educational games

Learning colors, forms, numbers, words, counting, letters, reading and writing

Learning occurs in meaningful ways when children are playing with educational toys as they gain knowledge about letters, numbers, counting, shapes, colors etc. Games to learn about opposites are fun and can help improve the child's language skills. Please look at toys to see what kind of educational toys puzzles and games your host child has.

Lego / Duplo / Blocks

Children may continue to use blocks as they grow. Infants and toddlers enjoy simply touching and gripping larger, textured blocks. As toddlers, they develop more muscle control and are able to combine blocks, stack them, or line them up. Two-year-olds may demonstrate their first attempts at building structures, and show the beginnings of fantasy play. Around the age of three, children learn how to balance and fit pieces together to build sturdier towers, then bridges and enclosures. Threes and fours begin to recognize designs and patterns, their towers and buildings becoming works of art. In kindergarten and early primary grades, blocks allow children to recreate structures, cities and landscapes from everyday life. Blocks offer children the chance to make their own designs, and the satisfaction of creating structures that did not exist before.

Activity

Kids need regular exercise to build strong bones and muscles. Exercise also helps children sleep well at night and stay alert during the day. Such habits established in childhood help adolescents maintain healthy weight. And active children are more likely to become fit adults.

Hide and seek (verstoppertje)

First you pick someone to be the seeker (the person to seek) then he/she turns around and counts with their eyes closed at the "base" while the rest of the people hide. Then the seeker says "Ready or Not, (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 wie niet weg is is gezien, ik kom) Here I Come" and rushes to find everyone. Then the people try to get to base without getting tagged or else they will be the seeker. If the seeker doesn't get someone in three tries he gets to pick a man to be the seeker! Young children love this game, although they're often not very good at hiding! Play in an enclosed area, so you know your child can't go far.

Play with the ball (met de bal spelen)

Roll the ball over the floor or invent games. Like hide the ball. Please be careful with playing with a ball inside. If you want play active, you better can go outside.

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Dancing and singing (dansen en zingen)

Little children love singing songs and moving to music and it helps their language development and physical skills. Ask your host parents about the favorite cd's and songs of the children.

Jumping (springen)

Toddlers like to jump. Put pillows, cushions, or a mattress on the floor.

Build a tent (een tent maken)

Place a sheet or blanket over a table to make an indoor tent. Put a special snack inside and give your child a flashlight. If you like, furnish the tent with pillows and a blanket, and let your child camp out all morning.

Outdoor Activities

The best way to do this is by encouraging as much outdoor activity as possible. Let the children use up their energy by playing outside every day and enjoying other lively activities. When playing in the park, toddlers usually run, jump, and climb and this encourages the development of their gross motor movements. Young children under the age of 6 years old always should be supervised while playing outside. Older children can play outside, but always check every 10 minutes. Please ask your host parent what are their rules for playing outside.

Go to the playground (speeltuin) or park (park)

Go to the little zoo (kinderboerderij)

Go for a little walk

Go biking (fietsen)

Go Playing in the garden (tuin)

Making bubbles (bellen blazen)

Making bubbles are always fun. If you have older children they will love blowing them and younger children will love just watching or chasing and popping the bubbles you blow. Add 3/4 cup of liquid dish soap to 2 quarts of water.

Playing in the sandbox (zandbak)

Playing with water

Play football, tennis, hockey

Make a drawing with chalk on the ground (stoepkrijt)

Playing with the swings or other toys in the garden

Other toys to play outside:

hula hooping, jump robe, bike, step, tractor etc.

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Play for babies younger than 1 year

- Hold, rock, and sing to young babies.
- Take them outside on nice days.
- Explain what you are doing throughout the day when you change or feed them.
- Let young babies lie on a big piece of paper and hear the crunching noise when they move.
- Play different kinds of music on the radio.
- Put bright toys near babies.
- Give them soft toys (like a stuffed animal or a clean sock) to hold and feel.
- Give babies toys they can move and make noise with (like a rattle).
- Hang up big pictures of people and animals on the wall at their eye level to look at.
- Hang up toys you make yourself for babies to see and hear. Hang aluminum pie plates on a string. Let a breeze blow them, or move them with your hand.
- Have a clean space for babies to crawl. Put bright toys near babies so they can reach out or move toward them. Put a big cardboard box on the floor so the babies can crawl inside and play.
- Put some chair cushions on the floor. Babies can bounce and roll on them.
- Read aloud books that have colorful pictures.
- Have blankets and scarves for infants to hide under.
- Remember that infants put everything in their mouths. Wash toys, and be sure they cannot be swallowed.