

Let's Play Ball!
(And Learn to Talk!)

1. Set a very young child in front of you on the floor positioned across from another child or adult. Take turns rolling a ball back and forth between you. Perhaps sing a song as you roll the ball. Encourage the child to push the ball away toward the other person.
2. As you roll a ball back and forth between you and your child, indicate whose turn it is, such as 'my turn'/'your turn', 'me'/'you' or 'mine'/'yours'.
3. Roll the ball just out of reach of your child to encourage him to move toward the ball, such as crawling or reaching for it. Say 'uh-oh' when you see that he cannot reach it.
4. With a large ball, sit on the floor with legs apart. Roll the ball back and forth between you and your child. Say a word each time you pass the ball. For example, say the name of a family member or an animal or a food.
5. Pass the large ball back and forth between you and your child as you sit on the floor, but try to make it bounce between you. Count the bounces. Try to make different rhythms as you bounce the ball. Say, 'bounce-bounce-bounce'.
6. Try to roll the ball between yourselves along a drawn line on the floor or ground between you.
7. Take a beach ball and attempt to hit the ball back and forth with the intention of keeping the beach ball in the air as long as possible. Count how many times you hit the ball. Talk about the ball being 'up' and then 'down' when it returns to the ground.
8. Set up a laundry basket, large box or other large container to throw balls into. Say 'in' when the ball makes it into the basket and 'out' when it does not.
9. With an older child take some marbles outside to the dirt and make grooves in the dirt to shoot the marbles through. Make a small hole at the end for a goal to achieve. Talk about where the marbles are going.
10. Throw a tennis ball against a wall and catch it when it returns. Say 'throw' or 'toss' when you throw the ball and 'catch' or 'got it' when you catch it! Talk about 'high' and 'low' balls and/or count the number of bounces.
11. Play with different balls, such as a ping-pong ball, a golf ball, a tennis ball, and a basketball. Talk how the different balls sound when they bounce. How high does each one bounce? How far does each one roll? Experiment with each ball in a bucket of water.
12. Play a simple version of four-square where you set up four large squares on the ground – either in the dirt or with sidewalk chalk on a sidewalk or pavement. Have 2 – 4 people take a square each. Bounce the ball back and forth to each other. Try saying a nursery rhyme to each other as you bounce the ball.