

Developing Object Permanence

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Object permanence is when a child understands that an object still exists in their lives, even though the object may be out of sight, not felt or heard. Linguistically, it allows us to label and discuss objects when they are not present. Cognitively, we recognize that a label is not only for the actual object. It also *represents* the *idea* of the object. And emotionally, missing or not visible entities can be discussed comfortably. E.g., when parents leave to spend time alone or when a treasured stuffed animal must be left behind, while the family visits Grandma, who is allergic to stuffed animals, children will understand and accept: *They'll be back*. Object permanence is an important developmental concept emerging around eight months of age. Here are ways it can be fostered:

- Show a toy to a child. Then hide it under a cloth as the child watches. Ask, *Where's the toy?* After a few seconds, uncover the toy as the child watches and say, *There it is!* Initially, a noisemaking toy, like a squeaker, may facilitate this process as it can be squeaked under the cloth, presenting a clue.
- Put your hands or a cloth in front of your face. Ask, *Where's Dada?* Part your hands and say, *Here I am!* This is an early form of peekaboo because the child still sees the rest of your body.
- In front of the child, hide a small object in your hand and say, *Where's the ____?* Let the child open your hand to find the object and say, *There it is!*
- Hide a large object under a cloth so the shape is obvious. Ask, *Where's the ____?* Let the child pull away the cloth. You say, *There it is. There's the ____.*
- You hide under a blanket on the floor or in a chair. It will be obvious you are there. From underneath ask, *Where's Mommy?* After a few seconds, throw off the blanket and say, *Here I am. Here's Mommy.*
- Play peekaboo venturing totally out of sight. E.g., Leave the room. Ask, *Where's Dada?* Pop out and say, *Here I am!*
- Place a small ball inside a container or under an overturned bucket or box. It should not be visible, but perhaps the container can be rattled to hear the ball inside. Ask, *Where's the ball?* When found, say, *There it is! You found the ball!*
- Around your home search for hidden familiar objects where they usually reside, while asking, *Where's the ____?* When it's found, say, *There it is!* Then search for something else.
- Share search-and-find books (E.g., I Spy) or regular picture books with illustrations full of things. Go through the same routine as above: *Where's the...* or *Find the...* Take turns, i.e., let your child ask you to find something.



Be animated and HAVE FUN!

See the lizard?

