

# Birth to two... All fall down

Knock-down play is more versatile than it may seem, with many developmental benefits. By *Penny Tassoni*

From a very young age, children seem to delight in a little destruction. 'Knock-down play' is my personal term to describe the range of play activities that result in things being knocked down, such as a tower of bricks or a stack of beakers.

## WHEN AND HOW

The great thing about knock-down play is that once a baby or toddler has understood the game, you can play it anywhere and any time. To introduce the game, consider using the following steps:

- Choose some lightweight objects that can be built up into a tower. Stacking beakers are often a good starting point.
- Choose a time when the baby or toddler is not tired and is fairly content.
- Draw the baby's or toddler's attention to you as you build up the tower slowly.
- Pause a little before modelling the 'knocking down'. The pause is important to see whether the child will spontaneously knock it down.
- Smile and clap when the tower has fallen down and use a phrase such as 'All fall down'.
- Repeat the game a few more times, each time extending the pause and repeating the same phrase when the bricks or beakers have fallen down.
- Watch to see how much the child anticipates the fall of the items.

## DEVELOPMENTAL BENEFITS

This simple game provides opportunities to support many aspects of babies' and toddlers' early development. It is, therefore, worth playing it every day. Knock-down play:

- empowers babies and toddlers as they learn that their actions can have an impact on objects (emotional)
- provides opportunities for joint

attention whereby they enjoy sharing an experience with an adult (social)

- supports co-ordination and balance as they learn to make the movements that will knock the objects flying (physical)
- gives them experience of how objects move and fall, which helps them to learn about the world. This is an early introduction to science (cognitive)
- encourages understanding as babies start to associate the repeated phrase with the action. For toddlers, the repeated phrase will also be a prompt for talking as they at first will echo it back before eventually using it spontaneously (language).

## NEXT STEPS

The knock-down theme can be developed in a range of ways and eventually can lead to a range of games, including commercial ones such as Jenga or Kerplunk, as well as squashing sand castles.

Through playing knock-down games, babies and toddlers are also likely to want to try building towers. It is, therefore, worth looking out for resources such as biscuit tins and small cardboard boxes, as well as wooden bricks that can easily be made into a tower.

## WHAT TO OBSERVE

There are several aspects of development that are worth observing:

- Co-ordination. Think about how easily the baby or toddler finds knocking toys down. Look also to see if they start to pick up any of the fallen items.
- Play. Consider whether the child is enjoying the game and is engaging with you by making eye contact or by initiating it by bringing you the bricks or beakers.
- Communication and language. Look out for any vocalisations that



Wooden shapes are just one resource suitable for knock-down play

take place during the play and especially during or soon after the repeated phrase, including echoing back the last word.

## HOME LEARNING

While some parents may have come across this game, there will be others who may not have used it with their baby or toddler. It can be useful to create a film clip that shows how their child responds to it – and the importance of 'pausing the action' to allow the child to take over. It is also helpful for parents to understand how using the same phrase following the 'knock down' will encourage their child's language.

The great thing about this game is that children find it very entertaining and so it can be a wonderful distraction when toddlers are proving a little challenging.

## RHYME TIME

You can build on the theme of knock-down play with this well-known action rhyme:

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall  
All the king's horses and all the king's men  
Couldn't put Humpty together again*

## Video

To see a video of how to share the rhyme, as well as videos of some alternative versions, go to: <http://tmas.kcls.org/humpty-dumpty>

## BOOK TIME



Look out for simple picture books that contain a theme of things falling down. For babies and toddlers, consider the simple board book *All Fall Down* by Helen Oxenbury. While it can be bought separately, it is also now part of a set called 'Baby Love'.