

Play during infancy represents the various social modalities observed during cognitive development. The activity of infants is primarily narcissistic and revolves around their own bodies. As discussed under Development of Body Image (earlier in this chapter), body parts are primarily objects of play and pleasure.

During the first year, play becomes more sophisticated and interdependent. From birth to 3 months old, infants' responses to the environment are global and largely undifferentiated. Play is dependent; pleasure is demonstrated by a quieting attitude (1 month old), a smile (2 months old), or a squeal (3 months old). From 3 to 6 months old, infants show more discriminate interest in stimuli and begin to play alone with rattles or soft stuffed toys or with someone else. There is much more interaction during play. By 4 months old, they laugh aloud, show preference for certain toys, and become excited when food or a favorite object is brought to them. They recognize images in a mirror, smile at them, and vocalize to them.

By 6 months to 1 year old, play involves sensorimotor skills. Games such as peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake are played. Verbal repetition and imitation of simple gestures occur in response to demonstration. Play is much more selective, not only in terms of specific toys, but also in terms of "playmates." Although play is solitary or one sided, infants choose with whom they will interact. At 6 to 8 months old, they usually refuse to play with strangers. Parents are definite favorites, and infants know how to attract their attention. At 6 months old, they extend their arms to be picked up; at 7 months old, they cough to make their presence known; at 10 months old, they pull their parents' clothing; and at 12 months old, they call their parents by name. This represents a tremendous advance from the newborn who signaled biologic needs by crying to express displeasure.

Stimulation is as important for psychosocial growth as food is for physical growth. Knowledge of developmental milestones allows nurses to guide parents regarding proper play for infants. It is not sufficient to place a mobile over a crib and toys in a play yard for a child's optimum social, emotional, and intellectual development. Play must provide interpersonal contact and recreational and educational stimulation. Infants need to be *played with*, not merely *allowed to play*. Although the type of play infants engage in is called