



Bubble play

Almost all children love bubbles. They can be fun, motivating, great for developing joint attention and are usually easily available or you can use washing up liquid! Below are some ideas for bubble play activities. Build a play routine that suits your child and their developmental stage.

A sensory experience with bubbles

An easy way for your child to experience bubbles and a way to build bubble play into your daily routine is through bath time. Help your child experience the feel, smell and touch of the bubbles through trying things like:

- Move the bubbles towards them in the water;
- Placing bubbles on their hand or tummy so they can see and feel them;
- Use the bath water to slowly wash the bubbles away;
- Gently blow the bubbles off; and
- Hide a favourite toy in the bubbles and slowly make it appear.



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Another way could be to introduce bubbles to tummy time or after a change, before you dress them. Blow some bubbles near your child or gently on them so they can feel them pop. They might watch the bubbles float away or reach out to touch them. If they make a noise or laugh, copy them.

To add an extra sensory element to the activity, say a rhyme, sing a song or try playing the same music each time. Some children will hear that and know that bubbles are coming next.

Exploring bubbles

Provide a tray of bubbles for your child to sit or lie in so as your child moves so do the bubbles. Have a bowl of soapy bubbles in water to explore through play; to feel, scoop, blow, pour, etc. Copy what your child does with the bubbles. Comment on what they are doing and what is happening to the bubbles. Try putting a toy animal in the bowl to hide and find.



Games with bubbles

Introduce a bubble wand. Try capturing your child's attention. Show them, 'Oh, I've got some bubbles!'. If your child doesn't show an interest, try blowing some bubbles. Use words like, 'look bubbles!' or just 'bubbles'. Exaggerate blowing! You are the toy – make yourself interesting 😊



Once your child is interested, try the **Pause and Wait** strategy before blowing. Wait for a few seconds to see if they respond and watch and listen to see what they do. Look for cues that they want you to blow the bubbles. It might be a head movement, a glance at you or the bubbles, a hand movement, making a noise, trying to say a word, eye contact - however brief. If you see a cue say 'more bubbles' and give some more.



If you don't see a cue after pausing and waiting, still say 'more bubbles' and give some more. You are building up the routine and the anticipation.



Be dramatic at each step, so the interest is in you and the bubbles. Your child needs YOU to get the reward.

Always finish on a high when you can. Before the child loses interest, give a warning like 'last one' or 'one more' or whichever phrase your child is used to. It might be a natural gesture, Makaton, or a symbol and the words 'finished' or 'bubbles finished' and put them away.



Play Ideas

Bubble play

Taking it further!

- Encourage your child to catch, pop or chase the bubbles. This can be a lovely opportunity to build up vocabulary or perhaps provide a sensory break.
- Try using a handheld battery-operated fan to do the blowing.
- If they can't blow, try catching a bubble you have blown on the wand and hold this out to your child to blow. It's much easier for a child to blow a bubble off the wand than to blow their own. If they are not successful, give them a quick try first, then you do it, so they don't get frustrated.
- Get down to their level and show them how to blow. Model taking a deep breath and a slow blow.
- Try practising blowing with blow toys, like party blowers or musical instruments.
- You could try building in some body awareness. Model trying to pop the bubbles with different body parts: head, stomping feet, clapping hands, gentle fingertips and bottoms (lots of giggles!) Your child might be able to indicate their choice of body part.
- If your child can concentrate on the game for longer, try building in some choice making. Model and label the choices a few times and then try asking something like: just one or lots? Big or small? Slow/fast? Up/down, high/low? My turn/your turn.



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Outside ideas

- Bubbles could float higher outside. Try blowing them under an umbrella to keep them closer to your child. You might use this trick inside too if your child needs more time to see and explore the bubbles. This could also be helpful for children with mobility difficulties.
- Try blowing bubbles in front of a brightly coloured wall or adding colouring to the mixture to make them more visible.
- Using a big outdoor wand makes big bubbles which are slower when they float along. This gives more time for watching and playing catch.
- A bubble string wand can be easy to make and use and is good for independence. It has a good visual reward because the bubbles are so big. They are also useful for children who don't have the 'blow' mastered.
- To add interest, try experimenting using other things: a wire hanger with different shapes, plastic bottles with the bottoms cut off and blowing through the mouth of the bottle, a funnel or a whisk. The list is endless!



Some things to consider

If your child doesn't show interest straight away or it's hard to get their attention, try saying 'Bubbles finished', put them away and try again another time. This might be a short activity to start with. Short successful sessions can be a great confidence booster. It can be good to stop when it's going well and finish on a positive.

If your child wants to pour or drink the liquid set ground rules. Do not give them the bubbles. If they get really upset just put them away for another time. Try something else and come back to it later.



Bubble play

Things to try

- A bubble machine on a high shelf or hidden in a box, with a hole for the bubbles to come out!
- Fix a piece of towelling to the top of a carton and make a hole in the side for a straw. Reusable straws can be washed, and you can have one for everyone taking part. Dip the towelling into the bubble mixture. Blow through the straw and little bubbles will come out of the top. There is no mixture in the pot for your child to pour or drink.



Shared bubble play with a sibling or friend

- A sibling or friend could blow the bubbles for your child to pop using your familiar routine.
- A wheelchair user or child in a pushchair could be pushed around to try and catch the bubbles or other children!
- Try using a bubble machine to build up the relationship between your child and their sibling or a friend. If your child can't activate the button, try linking it to a switch so they can do it independently.
- If your child is not keen or physically able to join in, perhaps they might be able to activate the machine and watch others chase the bubbles.



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Vocabulary

Words, signs or symbols you might use: bubbles, more, again, last one, just one more, pop! open, catch, look, wow!, blow, finished, big, small, slow, fast, up, down, high, low, my turn, your turn, game over!



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Songs

“I’m forever blowing bubbles”

“Bubbles, bubbles here and there”

“Bubbles” bubble machine from Maggie Moo Music.

“Pop the Bubbles!” not a song but a video of characters popping bubbles and counting.

‘This is the way we....’ The tune can be adapted for any activity and you never forget the tune!



Storytime

“Bubble Trouble” by Margaret Mahy and Polly Dunbar. “Bubbles” on Peppa Pig.

Apps and online games

Baby Bubble Pop Press to get some bubbles and press for longer for bigger bubbles. Some bubbles have a reward inside e.g. a rainbow. This could be good for cause and effect play.

Blow Bubble and Waterwheel Press the wand to get lots of bubbles, choose the colour and pop the bubbles.

Phonics Pop Pop the letters as they appear. The first level of letter matching is “s a t p”. Letters can be motivating for some children.

“Bubble Breathing”

Blowing bubbles can be a useful way to practice controlled breathing. This can help to reduce anxiety or other strong emotions. Learning how to relax can be helpful, even at a young age. **This information sheet** is adapted from activities in Resilient Kids to School, a **resource pack** from Highland Council Psychological Service, created for children in the early years and used in many Highland schools.



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