

Playpen Time

Playpen time provides a safe environment for infants and toddlers up to about age two where the child is required to play alone in a playpen with a limited number of toys. Mom chooses the time and the toys. The walls of the playpen provide boundaries that limit the variables and choices for your child. They also help him feel secure. For a toddler, this defines an adequate space with appropriate play things without offering the whole house to roam. In the playpen, he learns where he is supposed to be and what is expected of him. Playpen time fosters learning to yield to parental instruction. Other benefits to the child are strengthening mental focusing skills; developing sustained attention span so they can investigate and revisit something again; encouraging creativity; nurturing self-play adeptness; and teaching orderliness as the child learns to help Mom pick up after play time.



Ideally, the playpen should be placed where you can see the child, but he cannot see you. As with learning all new things, it is best to choose a time when your child is fresh and not hungry. Right before a meal or naptime are usually not a good time. This training can begin as soon as your child is three months or older. Start with a short time, maybe 5 minutes. Set the timer for the time allotment and leave it where the child can hear it go off. When the timer goes off, go to the child and get him out of the playpen, cheerfully saying, "The timer went off, playpen time is over. Let's pick up the toys together." Do not be disturbed if the child cries in the beginning. He will learn to like this time. Daily practice will help the child adjust to this new habit. You can practice it more than one time a day with these short intervals if you desire. Using this method, you can increase the time in the playpen in 5 minute increments after he is content with 5 minutes. You can work your way up to 30-45 minutes once or twice a day. Don't be discouraged and quit before you gain the benefits. The rewards will far outweigh the training effort required. Some children enjoy the addition of music to keep them company during this time. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." Playpen time does not keep your baby from experiencing life or exploring his environment. If he is not secure, he cannot do either of the above.

Boundaries begin early and begin tightly. They gradually expand as the child demonstrates responsible behavior. Using a playpen does not mean your child does not have time for crawling and exploring your home, you can make time for those things also. Playpen time is over when the parent decides, not when the child is upset. This activity teaches the child to focus on what is in front of him and to shut out other distractions. As he learns to explore all of the possibilities of playing with a limited number of toys, he is developing creativity. Instead of flitting about from one thing to the next, he is learning to focus and concentrate on the thing at hand. With you out of sight, he learns independence and contentment. When you have him pick up the toys at the end of playpen time, he learns orderliness. All of these things take time and practice to accomplish. Be patient in the process.