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Sensory play

Sensory play helps babies and toddlers to learn about texture and encourages their concentration. Playing with sensory materials also promotes fine motor skills, and helps babies and toddlers to gain in confidence.

Safety and hazards
Materials for sensory play have to be carefully chosen. It is important to think about possible choking hazards, as babies will put items in their mouth. Children can also have allergies. For example, the wheat found in pasta can cause an allergic reaction. Always check first with parents and experienced staff before putting out sensory materials.

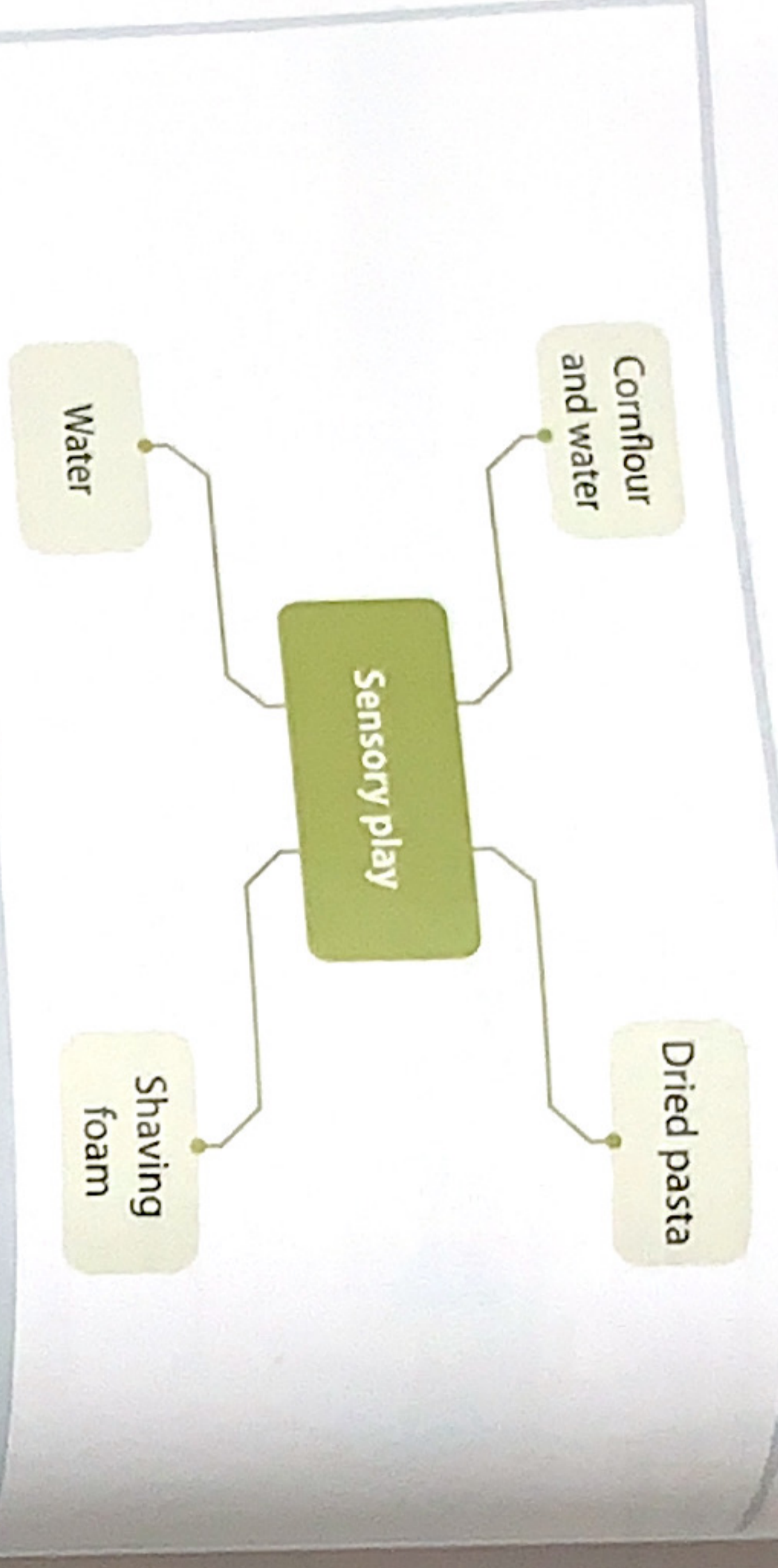


Figure 2.1 Examples of materials for sensory play.

Games played with adults

Games played with adults help children to develop social and communication skills. They support children's language too, as adults will talk to them while playing. Some games such as knocking down toys or bricks and building them up again also encourage children's fine and gross motor skills. Games with adults also help babies and toddlers learn how to play with others.

Knocking down and building up. As soon as babies can use their hands and arms to swipe, they enjoy games where they can knock things down, such as a tower of bricks or wooden cubes. This type of game is fun and builds confidence and social skills. Toddlers continue to enjoy this game.

Peek-a-boo and games where things are hidden. Babies and toddlers love games such as peek-a-boo or games in which things are hidden and they have to find them.

Imaginative play

From around 12 months toddlers start to enjoy joining in with adults in pretend or imaginative play. This type of play is very simple, but helps toddlers' language and physical skills. Common imaginative play includes using a pretend phone or wrapping up a teddy bear or dolly in a blanket and holding it. At this age this type of play is quite short-lived. It is also quite physical, with children showing very simple actions. These movements help physical development.

Take it further

Find out what other simple games are played with babies and toddlers.

Construction play

From around 9 months babies and toddlers will enjoy building things or connecting things with adult involvement. This might consist of putting stacking beakers together or doing very simple jigsaw puzzles, such as ones that are in a tray and are lifted out by holding on to a peg. With toddlers, wooden bricks and sets of Duplo® are often used, as these are easy for toddlers to handle. Construction play helps children's fine motor skills, logic and also confidence.

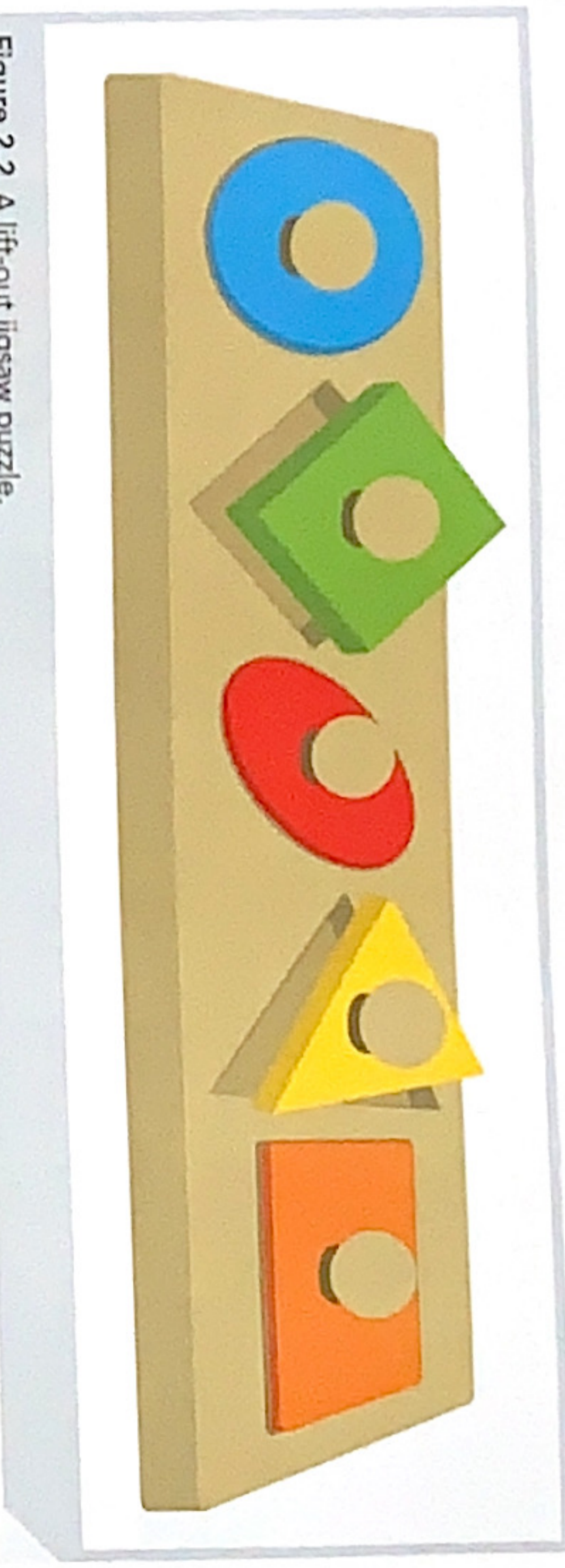


Figure 2.2 A lift-out jigsaw puzzle.

Play opportunities from 2 up to 5 years

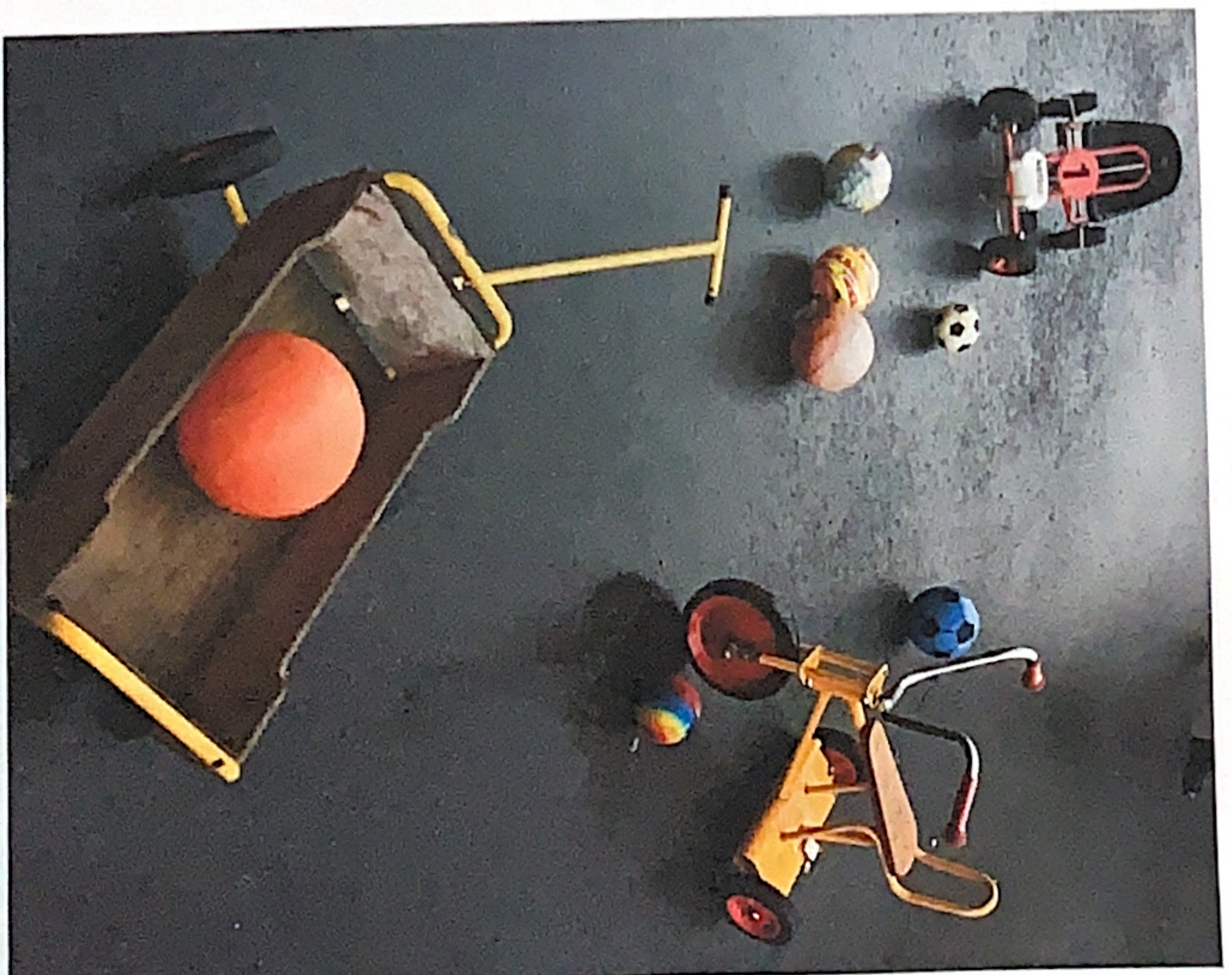
Children in this age range love playing with toys and equipment. From around 3 years they are also able to play with other children and over time need less adult help. A wide range of play opportunities helps develop further children's skills and knowledge.

Physical play

From 2 to 5 years children's physical skills are developing well. Physical play opportunities now offer them the chance to become more coordinated. They also allow children to play together and develop their social skills. Children also gain confidence from their increasing movements. Most physical play opportunities for this age group will focus on gross motor movements, balance and coordination.

Heuristic play

In this next phase of children's development, heuristic play involves adults putting out collections of objects for children to sort, match and explore. This play helps children's fine motor skills and also their mathematical understanding, as they can start to sort and match objects.



Climbing frames, hoops, tricycles and balls are used for physical play. What other types of equipment can help children's physical development?