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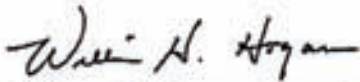
Dear Alaskans:

We are excited to provide you with this activity booklet for parents and providers based on the *State of Alaska Early Learning Guidelines*. Please join us in using this document to improve the well-being and school readiness of Alaska's children. We believe these activities and interactions will help guide our children to school success and healthy and productive lives.

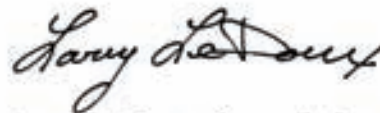
In addition, these activities will serve as a tool for discussion, sharing, and decision-making between parents and local early childhood professionals. They, along with the Early Learning Guidelines, can also serve as a source that can inform parents, care givers, and educators about expectations related to our children's needs for active intentional interactions, and interventions with adults, other children, and the world around them to enhance their learning and development.

As you use and adapt these activities, we hope they and the goals, indicators, ideas and strategies found in the Early Learning Guidelines will help guide your decisions and interactions with the children in your homes, early care and education settings, and communities across Alaska.

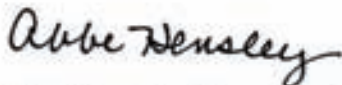
Sincerely,



William H. Hogan, Commissioner
Health & Social Services



Larry LeDoux, Commissioner
Education & Early Development



Abbe Hensley, Executive Director
Best Beginnings

Acknowledgments

This project was supported by the Alaska Departments of Education & Early Development (EED), Health and Social Services (HSS), and Best Beginnings.

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www.eed.state.ak.us/pubnstats.html

www.hss.state.ak.us/publications/EarlyLearningpweb.pdf

www.BestBeginningsAlaska.org

We also would like to thank the Southeast Alaska Regional Resource Center (SERRC) for their work in editing this first in a series of English language activity booklets for parents and providers.



BEST BEGINNINGS
Alaska's Early Childhood Investment

Introduction

Whether you are a parent, grandparent, doting aunt or uncle, admiring friend, or child care provider, you can help a child's development by offering these simple activities. At the same time, you can observe the child's own special way of interacting with the world.

This booklet includes activities for five areas of child development. These correspond with the domains described in the *Alaska Early Learning Guidelines*. The activities do not require special equipment or expensive materials. You can use things you already have in your home or child care center.

It is not the intent of this book for you to 'teach' your child a new skill or to 'push' him along to the next step in development. Just as you can't force a child to get taller, you can't rush him to develop in other ways. Your child's inner timetable helps decide when he will learn to grab objects, sit up, walk, speak, or develop his thinking abilities.

This booklet is divided into six sections by age: birth to six months, six to 12 months, etc. Each age group provides suggestions for activities that are designed to aid in your child's development in one of these key areas:

Area I: Physical Health, Well-Being, and Motor Development

The suggestions in this area are designed to help develop your child's large and small muscle control, her coordination, and her overall physical fitness.

Area II: Social and Emotional Development

Activities in this area target your child's ability to make and keep social relationships, both with adults and with other children. He will learn to recognize and express his own feelings more effectively. He will gain experience understanding, and responding to, the emotions of others.

Area III: Approaches to Learning

Children differ in how they approach new tasks, difficult problems, or challenges. These activities will spark your child's curiosity, interest, attention, and ability to stay on task. Research suggests strong links between positive approaches to learning and children's success in school.

Area IV: Thinking Abilities and General Knowledge

The suggestions in this area help your child figure out how the world works and how things are organized. Your child will experience 'learning how to learn.' As a result, she may have better problem-solving abilities and better abstract thinking.

Area V: Communication, Language, and Literacy

These ideas will help your child learn to express himself and to understand what others say. Early reading and writing skills are also targeted.

Suggestions for All Activities:

1. SAFETY FIRST!

Materials:

- When making materials, smooth off or tape any rough edges.
- Check other homemade items often for safety. For example, you may need to re-glue or re-tie some materials.
- Small items may pose a choking hazard.
- Be careful with string, yarn, ribbons, scarves, etc. Your child may accidentally become tangled in them.
- Keep your hot glue gun, sharp scissors, and other 'grown-up' tools away from curious fingers!

Activities:

- Always supervise your child!
- Make sure he knows how to handle all materials and tools safely.
- Use child-safe scissors whenever your child cuts.
- Wash your child's hands after he paints, glues, uses play dough or soap products, etc. Be sure to wash up before he handles food!

2. HAVE FUN!

Focus on playing and having fun rather than on improving one particular skill. A single activity can promote learning in many areas. When a child is playing, she is learning!

Don't do too much for your child. Sit back and allow her to explore materials in her own way. Remember that there are no 'wrong answers' for these activities!

3. AGE RANGES

Although each activity has an age range, you don't need to follow it strictly. Observe what your child is already doing. Use your own judgment and knowledge of your child to determine if the activity is appropriate.

As we know, each child develops at his own pace. It is not a good idea to compare one child to another of the same age.

4. DO THESE ACTIVITIES OFTEN

Don't hesitate to offer the same activity (or variations of it) over and over again. Young children thrive on repeating familiar activities. This helps them learn the new skill well.

5. SHARE YOUR FAMILY'S CULTURAL HERITAGE WITH YOUR CHILD

Sing songs and tell stories from your family's culture. If you are bilingual or multilingual, talk to your child in the languages you know.

Encourage others – grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, and friends – to engage in activities with your child.

6. DELIGHTFUL LEARNING

Enjoy these activities with your child! Through positive adult attention and interaction, children learn that it is fun to be with other people.

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Area I: Physical Health, Well-Being, and Motor Development

Tummy Time

Use these ideas to develop your baby's head control and upper body strength. He'll also learn to lift his head and neck.

As your baby gets stronger, he will extend his arms and push up on them to reach and play. This helps prepare him for sitting and crawling.

Safety Alert: *Don't leave your baby by himself while he is on his tummy. Always supervise your baby's playtime!*

Materials:

- Blanket or small towel
- Picture books or favorite toys

What to Do:

1. Place a soft blanket or towel on the floor.
2. Put your baby down on his tummy for three to five minutes. Keep him on his tummy for just a short time, but do it often!
3. If your baby cannot lift his head, place your hand on his bottom. This causes the weight to shift from his upper body and helps him lift his head.
4. Give him something interesting to look at. For example, place your baby's favorite toy in front of him. Also, try propping open a colorful picture book in front of him.
5. Plan tummy activities for times your baby is not already tired.
6. Let your baby be a little fussy, but pick him up and hold him if he is crying hard. He needs to know that you always will care for him if he is upset. Wait a while before you put your baby on his tummy again.

Variations:

- A. Put your baby on your chest when you lie down. Talk and sing to him as he looks into your face.
- B. Roll up a small towel or baby blanket. Place it under your baby's chest just under his arms. This will make his head and upper body a little higher.
- C. Once your baby learns to hold his head up to look at things, put an interesting toy in front of him, but just out of reach. Move the toy back and forth. As he tries to get the toy, he probably will shuffle forward a little. Give him a chance to touch or grab the toy. Praise him for getting it or for trying to get it. Balls with jingles are a good choice for this activity.

Infants Birth – 6 Months





Infants Birth – 6 Months



Area II: Social and Emotional Development

Body Awareness

Your baby is discovering different body parts. She has become very interested in her feet and hands!

Materials: None

What to Do:

Say the following rhyme. Each time you say the word “fingers,” wiggle your baby’s fingers. Each time you say the word “toes,” wiggle your baby’s toes.

*“Fingers and toes, fingers and toes
Here are your fingers
And here are your toes
Wiggle your fingers
Wiggle your toes
Here are your fingers
And here are your toes
Wave with your fingers
Wave with your toes
Here are your fingers
And here are your toes.”*

Variations:

- A. Hold your baby in your lap and say the following:

*“Where is your toe?
Here it is! (Touch her toe and kiss it)
I love your toe very much!
Where’s your nose?
Here it is! (Touch her nose and kiss it)
I love your nose very much!”*

- B. Continue the game with other body parts.



Area III: Approaches to Learning

See-Through Shake Toys

Objects that move and make noise will stimulate your infant's curiosity. It will give her experience in the concept of cause and effect.

Safety Alert: *Be sure to keep small items, hot glue gun, and super glue out of your child's reach. These may pose a choking or burning hazard, or may cause your child's fingers to stick together!*

Frequently check to see that the bottle tops are glued on tightly.

Materials:

- Small plastic soft drink or water bottles with screw tops
- Interesting objects that will fit inside the bottle, such as colored sand, beads, small pompoms, pieces of colored yarn, etc.
- Hot glue gun or super glue
- Food coloring dye (optional)
- Liquid dish soap (optional)

What to Do:

1. To make the shake toys, soak off the bottle labels in soapy water. Put one or more interesting objects inside the bottle.
2. Securely glue the top on the bottle.
3. Place one or more of these bottles near the baby and watch what she does.

Variations:

- A. Fill the bottles almost full with water. Put some of the interesting objects inside. Be sure to glue the top on!
- B. Fill the bottles half full with colored water and add some liquid dish soap. Glue on the top. Let your baby shake the bottle to make bubbles.

What to Observe:

- Is she interested in or excited by the bottles?
- Does she shake or bang the bottle to move the objects inside?
- Will she shake the bottles again to repeat the effect?

Infants Birth – 6 Months

Infants Birth – 6 Months

Area IV: Thinking Abilities and General Knowledge

Find the Noise

Hold your infant in your lap and play this game.

Materials:

- Rattle

What to Do:

1. Shake a rattle on one side of his head, then on the other side.
2. Shake it slowly at first, then faster.
3. Your infant will search for the noise with his eyes. When you see him responding to the sound, praise and cuddle him.
4. Experiment to find the types of objects and sounds your infant likes to look at and listen to.
5. Touch the object lightly to his tummy, face, and arms.

Variation:

Use an interesting object that does not make noise. This might be a picture of a face, a mirror, a shiny pinwheel, or any colorful object. Hold it in your infant's line of vision. Next, make a noise with something that is out of his view. For example, you might shake a bell or open a music box. Observe what your infant does. Show him the noisemaker so he will learn what it looks like.



Area V: Communication, Language, and Literacy

Talk to Me, Baby

When you repeat your baby's sounds, it lets her know you are listening to her. It shows her that communication is a two-way process. Even though your baby can't understand all of your words, just listening to you helps develop her language.

Materials: None

What to Do:

1. When babies first begin to talk, it is called babbling. A baby will make all kinds of sounds as she experiments and moves her tongue around in her mouth.
2. First sounds like "da, da, da" are exciting for adults. When the baby says "da, da, da," answer her with the same sounds. Do this for other sounds the baby makes. This will encourage her to babble more and more because she enjoys communicating with you.
3. Make a new sound for the baby to imitate. Try "mo, mo, mo" or "bee, bee, bee."

Variations:

- A. Sit down with your baby and look into her eyes. Start a conversation about anything. You can talk about what you are having for dinner, about members of the family, or anything else relating to your baby.
- B. If your baby responds with coos and other sounds, copy these sounds and include them in your conversation.

Infants Birth – 6 Months





Area I: Physical Health, Well-Being, and Motor Development

Blanket Fun

Try this activity when your baby can sit up by herself. It will help develop and strengthen her upper body. She also will practice keeping her balance while sitting.

A natural time for this activity is on the days when you strip beds or do laundry.

Materials:

- Blanket, bed sheet, or large towel

What to Do:

1. Put the blanket, sheet, or large towel on the floor. Seat the baby on it.
2. Walk from room to room pulling the blanket with your baby riding along.
3. Talk to your baby about where you are going. Make sounds as you slow down or gently speed up.

Variation:

Place your baby in a cardboard box or a laundry basket big enough for her to sit in. Show her how to hang on to the sides. Prop her up with a small pillow behind her back. Then gently push her around the room. Talk about what you see along the way. Make car, plane, or boat sounds as you go.

Infants 6–12 Months

Infants 6–12 Months



Area II: Social and Emotional Development

Let's Play!

Simple games can be fun. This one helps build trust between babies and adults.

Materials:

- Washcloths
- Diapers

What to Do:

1. Lay a clean washcloth or diaper lightly over your baby's face. Say, "Tommy, where are you?" or "Where's Tommy?" Pull it off quickly and exclaim, "There you are! I see you!" Let him see your smiling face. This game can help make diaper changing or face washing a more pleasant and exciting time.
2. Help him remove a washcloth or diaper that covers his face. When he pulls off the cloth, respond with a surprised look and say, "Peek-a-boo!" Your reactions will help him see this as a game. He may be very quiet at first, as he anticipates his face being covered. Later your baby will cover and uncover his face by himself. Sometimes, he will start the game!

Variations:

- A. Change the game by covering and uncovering your own face. Say, "Where's Daddy?" or "Where did Mommy go?" While your baby's attention is still on you, quickly reappear and say, "Peek-a-boo!" Try sitting close enough to him so that he can reach over and pull off the cloth. There are many other variations in playing peek-a-boo, such as hiding behind a couch or door.
- B. If your baby is fussy at dressing or changing time, sometimes a quick game of peek-a-boo can brighten his spirits.
- C. Show him how to play peek-a-boo by covering his eyes with his hands. Uncover his eyes after a moment and say, "Peek-a-boo!" Use a lot of expression in your voice to build up his anticipation of what will happen.

Area III: Approaches to Learning

Let's Make Noise!

Stimulate your child's curiosity about how noises are made. He'll get creative by making his own new noises!

Materials:

- Metal pan lids
- Metal bowls and pans
- Empty oatmeal boxes with lids on
- Wooden spoons
- Metal spoons (optional)

What to Do:

1. Show your baby how to make noises by beating the metal objects together or by hitting them with a spoon.
2. Let him experiment! Your baby may get very noisy!

Variations:

- A. If you have a hard floor, choose this for your child's play area. He'll create even louder noises!
- B. Provide metal spoons for your baby to drop into a metal bowl or pan.

What to Observe:

- Does your child use several different objects to make noises?
- Is he delighted at the loud noise?
- Does he go after rolling pan lids or other items that get away from him?
- Does he try to repeat a certain sound?

Infants 6–12 Months



Infants 6–12 Months

Area IV: Thinking Abilities and General Knowledge

Coffee Can Scarves

Babies this age love to find things hidden inside a container. This helps your baby understand that things still exist even when they can't be seen. Also, your baby practices using her hands as she grabs the scarves.

Safety Alert: *Carefully supervise your child when she plays with scarves. These may pose a choking hazard!*

Materials:

- Empty coffee or potato chip can with plastic lid
- Light scarves
- Needle and thread
- Scissors

What to Make:

1. Sew the ends of the scarves together.
2. Stuff the scarves into the can.
3. Cut a hole about the size of a dime in the plastic lid of the can.
4. Stick the end of the first scarf through the hole in the lid, and put the lid on the can.

What to Do:

No instructions necessary! An older baby will love pulling the scarves out of the can.

Variations:

- A. Try using an empty diaper wipes container.
- B. Stuff unattached scarves into an empty tissue box. Your baby will love pulling them out one by one.

Area V: Communication, Language, and Literacy

Read, Read, Read!

Reading to your baby is one of the best ways to develop his language.

Materials:

- Books

What to Do:

1. Read to your baby every day. Young children enjoy short, simple stories, rhymes, and songs.
2. Read the same books over and over, but also read new ones.
3. Babies have short attention spans, so it's best to read for short periods of time. Do this often during the day.
4. Point to the pictures in the books and name what you see. Ask your baby to point or to name things.
5. Smile, change your voice, nod, or make faces when you read. Your baby will have fun copying your actions.
6. Let your baby choose the books or set the pace for reading. You don't have to look at every page, read the whole page, or finish the book at one sitting.
7. Provide books that appeal to him. He will be able to turn the pages more easily if you have books with thick, cardboard pages. Babies like books with simple drawings or photographs of familiar objects, animals, and scenes from daily life such as taking a bath, eating, or playing outside.
8. Store cardboard, cloth, and plastic books on low, open shelves along with other safe toys.

Child Care Center Adaptation:

Make a book about the things that the baby does at child care. Paste photographs or simple drawings on cardboard. Cover these with clear adhesive paper. Then, punch holes in the cover and finished pages. Bind them together with a piece of string. Make new books during the year.

Infants 6–12 Months





Area I: Physical Health, Well-Being, and Motor Development

Feed the Clown

Give your baby practice lining things up with a hole and pushing them through. He'll use different grasps and develop his eye-hand coordination.

Safety Alert: *If you use cans for this activity, be sure to make the edges smooth or to tape them. Make sure any toys you use are large enough not to be a choking hazard. Sharp cans and small items are dangerous!*

Materials:

- Shoeboxes with lids
- Drawing materials such as non-toxic markers or crayons
- Scissors
- Cardboard
- Plastic coffee container or other large can with smooth edges (optional)

What to Do:

1. Draw a bright clown face on the cover of a shoebox. Cut out the clown's big, open smile. Be sure that the hole you cut is big enough so that small fingers won't get stuck in it!
2. Use sturdy cardboard to cut several circles. Show your baby how to feed these 'cookies' to the clown by dropping the cardboard circles into the clown's mouth. Count each 'cookie' as it goes in.
3. When all of the 'cookies' are gone, help him get them out of the shoebox. Next, help him put the lid back on. Repeat this game often!

Variations:

- A. Use old shoeboxes or oatmeal boxes to make drop-in boxes for your baby. Simply cut a hole in the top or side of the box. Give him small toys to drop in his box by poking them through the hole. These might include blocks, toy cars, balls, etc.
- B. Cut a round hole, about the size of a quarter, in the lid of a coffee can. Let your baby poke clothespins through the hole in the lid. Next, he can peel the lid off and dump the clothespins out. Help him put the lid back on and repeat the process.
- C. Use this type of container to store crayons. Your baby will love putting them away!

Infants 12–18 Months



Infants 12–18 Months



Area II: Social and Emotional Development

Cooperative Play

This means engaging your child in back-and-forth play. Practicing this with adults helps her get ready for playing with other children.

Materials:

- Large, soft ball
- Pair of socks (optional)
- Toy trucks (optional)
- Pillowcase, towel, or sheet (optional)

What to Do:

1. Sit on the floor opposite your baby, just a few feet away. Slowly roll a big, soft ball toward her so that she can easily catch it.
2. Hold your arms out and say, “Roll the ball to me.” At first, your baby may be reluctant to give it up. You may have to make exaggerated motions to get her to roll or throw the ball. Once she does it, show excitement at getting the ball and then immediately roll it back to your baby. This will help her understand that she won’t lose something completely if she gives it up.
3. Repeat this over and over. Pause each time to see if your baby will roll the ball independently. When she does, provide a lot of praise.

Variations:

- A. Tie a pair of socks in a knot and toss them back and forth.
- B. Toss a ball across the room and enjoy chasing it with your baby. Be sure she has a chance to ‘win.’
- C. Play ‘parachute.’ Hold one end of a pillowcase or towel and have your baby hold the other end. Show her how to lift her arms up high to make the parachute go up, and then how to drop her arms to make it go down. It may take several tries before your baby understands this idea.

Child Care Center Adaptation:

- A. Seat several children in a circle. Include another adult to help, if possible. This is especially important if the children are unfamiliar with the game.
- B. Push a toy truck to one of the children in the circle.
- C. Help her push it to another child. Often, a young child will simply hang on to the toy when it reaches her. If she refuses to give it up, continue the game with a second truck.
- D. When she does push the truck to another child, see that she gets it back again soon. This way, the benefit of giving up the toy becomes apparent to her. She learns the pleasure of give and take.

Variation of the Parachute Game:

Include several children in this game. Use a bed sheet, with everyone holding onto an edge. When you say “up,” everyone needs to lift up the sheet. When you say “down,” they drop it to the floor.

Area III: Approaches to Learning

Hide 'n' Seek Game

In hide 'n' seek games, children set up social interactions and respond to them. This game helps develop your baby's thinking abilities.

Safety Alert: Make sure all containers have smooth edges!

Materials:

- Containers of different sizes
- Dishtowel
- Toys

What to Do:

1. Set out two or three containers or objects that are very different, such as an oatmeal box and a bowl, along with the dishtowel.
2. Show your baby a favorite toy.
3. Turn her around so she can't peek. Hide the toy under one of the containers or the dishtowel.
4. Turn your baby around and ask her to find the toy.
5. Once she finds it, try the game again. This time keep the toy in the same spot, but under a different container.

Variations:

- A. Once your baby knows the game, increase the number of hiding containers.
- B. Use your imagination to change this hide 'n' seek game. Make it simpler or more challenging depending on your baby's ability level.

What to Observe:

- Does your baby keep trying to find the toy?
- Will she try to play the game by hiding something from the adult?

Infants
12–18
Months





Infants 12–18 Months



Area IV: Thinking Abilities and General Knowledge

Imitating New Gestures and Sounds

You'll both enjoy making up new movements and noises!

Materials:

- Non-toxic crayon (optional)
- Paper (optional)

What to Do:

1. Show your baby a simple gesture or movement that you have not seen him do. Some examples are: opening and closing fists, rubbing hands together, rubbing tummy, patting legs, lifting arms, and touching two index fingers together.
2. To make the activity more fun, tell a story or sing a song to go along with the actions. Babies usually enjoy songs such as "Patty-Cake," "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," "The Wheels on the Bus," and "If You're Happy and You Know It."
3. Begin by practicing one or two movements. If he will allow you, physically guide your baby's hands to make the correct movement. Some babies need a lot of practice to do this.

Variations:

- A. Make the activity more challenging: stand a different way, change your expression, or hold something in a new position.
- B. Combine actions and sounds during your activities. Children this age enjoy imitating animal sounds and the way the animals walk, run, and eat.
- C. Use a non-toxic crayon to make dots or lines on a big sheet of paper. Make a different sound for each one. For example, a small dot might mean a low or short sound, and a large dot might mean a loud or longer sound. Or, you might make your voice rise and fall as you draw a crooked line. Encourage your child to imitate these sounds.

Area V: Communication, Language, and Literacy

My Own Word Book

A child this age enjoys pointing to things and naming them. This activity lets her practice her new vocabulary.

Materials:

- Empty photo album with magnetic plastic pages or other homemade book
- Magazine or catalog pictures, photos, or drawings
- Tape (optional)

What to Make:

Use the photo album or other blank book to make a personal word book. Add pictures to show each new word your child says. It's a fun way to keep track of her growing vocabulary!

What to Do:

1. Put your baby in your lap and enjoy looking at the pictures together.
2. As she names things, do not correct her pronunciation. Instead, use the word in a sentence with correct pronunciation:

"Yes, that's right...that is orange juice."

Variations:

- A. Add a few pictures of very familiar things or actions that she has not said yet. Tell her these words when you look at the book. Soon, she will be saying them herself!
- B. You can 'test' her understanding of new words by asking, "Where's the kitty?" or "Show me the boy running." If she doesn't do it by herself, help your child point to the correct picture.

Infants 12–18 Months





Area I: Physical Health, Well-Being, and Motor Development

Toddler Mural

Scribbling helps children learn to control the marks they put on the paper.

Materials:

- Drawing paper or scrap paper
- Large, non-toxic crayons or coloring pencils
- Small box or container
- Tape

What to Do:

1. Create a space where your child can draw and scribble. This might be a low table or a blank wall.
2. Make a box to store non-toxic crayons. Keep this box in or near your child's drawing area.
3. Tape a sheet of drawing paper to the wall or tabletop.
4. Now your child can scribble anytime she wants to, without waiting for you to set out the crayons and paper.
5. Remember to display your child's artwork or to give it to a family member or friend.

Toddlers 18–24 Months



Toddlers

18–24

Months



Area II: Social and Emotional Development

Bath Time for Baby

Use this activity to help your child develop important social behaviors, such as taking care of someone.

Remember: dolls are valuable toys for both boys and girls!

Materials:

- Basin or baby bathtub
- Towels, washcloths, soap, and bath toys
- Old toothbrushes and hairbrushes
- Doll clothes and baby blankets

What to Do:

1. Set up a doll's bathtub by filling a basin or baby bathtub with warm, soapy water. To make it even more realistic, provide towels, washcloths, soap, and bath toys.
2. Encourage your child to test the water's temperature ("Is it too hot for your doll? Is it too cold?") Show him how to be gentle while washing the doll.
3. Point out many of the doll's body parts. For example, you might say, "That's her nose! And those are her toes!" This gives your toddler more practice in labeling his own body parts. At his age, this is a favorite activity.
4. Pretend the doll is dirty. Encourage your child to clean behind the doll's ears, between the toes, and over all other parts that need washing.
5. When the doll is clean, let your child dry it with a towel.
6. Remind him to clean one more thing: his doll's teeth!

Variations:

- A. Give your child a favorite doll or stuffed animal to hold. Suggest that he gently brush the doll's hair or rock it in his arms.
- B. Tell your child that the doll or teddy is cold. Ask him to comfort it by dressing the toy in warm clothes, socks, and shoes. He might cover his toy with a blanket or towel.
- C. Suggest that the doll must be hungry. It hasn't eaten all day! Prompt your child to give the doll imaginary food with a spoon and a small dish. If you want to use real food, dry cereal or raisins are easy to clean up.
- D. Join your child in singing a favorite lullaby to the doll. Help him rock it to sleep, and then ask him to gently tuck the doll into bed.

Area III: Approaches to Learning

Finger Painting on Paper

Encourage your child to be creative! He will invent many different ways to make marks and will discover that he can change something. He also may learn some color words.

Safety Alert: *Be sure to wash hands after this activity.*

Materials:

- Art smock or old shirt
- Finger-paint paper or freezer paper
- Tape
- Sponge
- Water
- Non-toxic finger paint

What to Do:

1. Put a smock or old shirt on your child. Make sure the sleeves are rolled up and out of the way.
2. Tape a piece of finger-paint paper or freezer paper to a tabletop.
3. Use the sponge and water to make the paper damp.
4. Put a blob of non-toxic finger paint in the middle of the paper and encourage your child to smear it around.

Variations:

- A. Give him two or more different paint colors at the same time. At first, place the different colors far apart on the paper.
- B. After your child has plenty of experience with finger painting, encourage him to use different parts of his hand to make different kinds of marks.
- C. Give your child other things to use to make marks in the paint, such as combs and sponges.

What to Observe:

- Is your child cautious about touching the gooey paint, or does he dive right in?
- Does he try different ways to smear the paint?
- Will he experiment by mixing different colors together?

Toddlers 18–24 Months

Toddlers 18–24 Months

Area IV: Thinking Abilities and General Knowledge

Learning to Sort

Introduce your child to the concepts of ‘same’ and ‘different.’ She will learn to notice the features and qualities of different objects.

Materials:

Sets of different objects, such as:

- Balls and toy cars
- Crayons and toy animals
- Plastic stacking rings and blocks
- Spoons and forks

Variations:

- A. When you are doing dishes, let your child help you sort utensils into the proper compartments or drawers.
- B. When she can sort two sets of objects, make the activity more challenging by adding a third set. For example, let her sort the trucks, blocks, and crayons into three different containers.

Child Care Center Adaptation:

Let the children sort toys during clean up time. Put pictures of each type of toy on the outside of its storage container. This will help them remember where things go.

What to Do:

1. Use several groups of objects to show your child the sorting process.
2. Have her help you sort. Tell her, for example, “The ball goes here, the car goes here. The ball here, and the car here. Where does this ball go?”
3. Give your child objects to sort into containers or to put with the correct group. For example, give her a pile with three or four blocks and three or four stacking rings. Place a tower of two blocks and a ring-stack rod in front of the child. Have her sort through the pile to put blocks on the block tower and rings on the ring-stack rod.

Area V: Communication, Language, and Literacy

Building Muscles for Writing

Use homemade toys to build up your toddler's finger muscles.

Safety Alert: To prevent choking, make sure all snaps and buttons on dress-up clothes are firmly attached.

Materials:

- Cardboard
- Pictures from magazines, catalogs, or old calendars
- Scissors
- Glue
- Dress-up clothes with zippers, snaps, and buttons
- Art paper or scrap paper
- Large, non-toxic crayons
- Clay or play dough (optional)
- Safe kitchen tools (optional)

What to Do:

1. Glue a picture to cardboard. After it dries, cut it into five or six pieces. Let your child play with this simple puzzle.
2. Provide dress-up clothes that have snaps, zippers, and buttons.
3. Look for inexpensive, large pads of paper; large, non-toxic crayons; and washable markers. Save scrap paper and paper bags. Keep these supplies where your child can reach them whenever he wants to practice scribbling.

Variation:

Your child will enjoy rolling, pounding, and squeezing clay or play dough. Also, let him use safe kitchen tools such as wooden spoons, plastic knives and forks, or plastic cookie cutters.

Make Your Own Play Dough!

Ingredients:

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup flour
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 cup water
(with your choice of food coloring)
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil

Instructions:

Mix together all ingredients. Knead the dough until it is smooth. Add a little more flour if the dough is too sticky. Store it in the refrigerator in an airtight plastic bag or container.

Toddlers
18–24
Months





Area I: Physical Health, Well-Being, and Motor Development

Chase and Pop

As he plays this game, your child will use and strengthen his large muscles, such as his neck, arms, and legs.

Safety Alert: Prevent stinging eyes! Wash your hands after this activity.

Materials:

- Bubble liquid and bubble wand
- Thin wire (optional)
- Small, safe, electric fan with spaces too small for fingers to poke through (optional)

What to Do:

1. Blow bubbles for your toddler to chase and pop. You can use the bubble wand that comes in store-bought bottles of bubble liquid, or make your own by bending a thin wire into a small lollipop shape.
2. Blow some bubbles up high so he has to stretch, reach, and jump.
3. Blow others down low so he has to bend and stoop.

Variations:

Turn on a fan and blow bubbles in front of it. Your toddler will have fun chasing the bubbles and stomping on them. This activity can be great fun outside on a cloudy or windy day.

Make Your Own Bubble Liquid!

Ingredients:

- 1 cup warm water
- 2 tablespoons corn syrup or 2½ tablespoons white sugar
- 4 tablespoons dishwashing liquid

Instructions:

Stir the syrup or sugar into the water. Add the liquid dish soap. Add a little more water if your bubbles pop too easily.

Toddlers 24–30 Months



Toddlers 24–30 Months



Area II: Social and Emotional Development

Puppet Show

Staging a puppet show is an excellent way to help build an emotional vocabulary. This supports your child in understanding and naming the feelings she is experiencing.

Materials:

- Card table, large empty box, or couch
- Dolls
- Stuffed animals
- Hand puppets

What to Do:

1. Place a card table or large empty box on its side to serve as your stage. Kneel behind it.
2. Or, move the couch away from the wall and kneel out of view behind it. Use the back of the couch as your stage area.
3. Act out short skits using your child's dolls, stuffed animals, or hand puppets. (See below for homemade puppet ideas.)
4. Let your child watch as you perform a short conversation between puppets. Talk in a high-pitched, very expressive voice.
5. Act out familiar experiences or events that your child can understand and relate to. Have one puppet help or console another. Keep your conversations short and lively. For example:

First puppet: *"I feel sad. I lost my new ball."*

Second puppet: *"Oh, that's OK. I'll help you find it."*

6. Encourage your child to join in the puppet play. Accept whatever she is able to express, whether in gestures, sounds, or words. If your child is using words, follow her lead and listen to what is said. Children often will say much more about their feelings when talking 'through' a toy or puppet in pretend play.

Variations:

Make different types of puppets to use in your plays.

A. Bag puppets

Materials:

- Small paper bags
- Non-toxic markers

What to Do:

1. Turn the bag so that your hand will go in the opening.
2. Draw a face on one side of the bag. Make faces that represent different feelings — happy, sad, and mad.



Toddlers 24–30 Months



B. Cup Puppets

Materials:

- Paper cup
- Scissors
- Non-toxic markers
- Construction paper

What to Do:

1. Cut a hole large enough for your finger in the side of a paper cup.
2. Use construction paper or markers to make a face for the puppet on the bottom of the cup.

C. Sock Puppets

Materials:

- Sock
- Non-toxic markers

What to Do:

Draw eyes, a nose, and mouth on the toe end of an old, clean sock.

D. Stick Puppets

Materials:

- Tongue depressors
- Popsicle sticks, rulers, or other flat sticks
- Pictures from old magazines or catalogs, or photos of your child or other family members
- Scissors
- Glue

What to Do:

1. Cut out face pictures from an old magazine or use your own photos.
2. Glue a picture to the end of each tongue depressor or other flat stick.

E. Wooden or Plastic Spoon Puppets

Materials:

- Small wooden or plastic spoons
- Non-toxic markers
- Yarn
- Scraps of old fabric
- Glue

What to Do:

1. Draw a face on the spoon.
2. To make hair, glue yarn to the top of the spoon.
3. Glue or tie a piece of fabric around the neck of the puppet for his clothes.



Toddlers 24–30 Months



Area III: Approaches to Learning

Sticker Puppets

A two-year-old loves stickers! Using them in games may improve her attention span.

Materials:

- Popsicle sticks, tongue depressors, rulers, or other flat sticks
- Stickers

What to Do:

1. Use two tongue depressors or other flat sticks. Put a sticker on the end of each. These are your puppets.
2. Hold one sticker puppet in each hand and put your hands behind your back.
3. Sing your child's favorite songs. Bring out one hand and move the puppet up and down in rhythm.
4. Ask the child, "Would you like to see another puppet?" Bring it out and move it up and down while you sing a different song.

Variation:

Give the sticker puppets to your child and let her try to play the game.

Area IV: Thinking Abilities and General Knowledge

Just 'One'

This is one of the very first math concepts young children learn.

Materials:

- Household items
- Groups of toys such as blocks, cars, or toy animals
- Pairs such as shoes, socks, or mittens

What to Do:

1. When shopping, let your child help you choose one of each item you need, such as one carton of milk or one head of lettuce. Say the word "one" each time you ask for his help.
2. During your daily activities, tell your child when you need one item. Then have him help you select one towel or one spoon, for example.
3. When your child is playing with a group of toys such as blocks, ask him to hand you "just one."
4. Use pairs of objects to further draw his attention to the concept of "one." For example, when your child is looking for his shoes, say, "You only found one shoe. Where is the other one?" When helping your child put on his coat, hide one hand in his sleeve and say, "Look! I can only see one hand. Is that all you have?" When playing in front of a mirror, point out his two eyes, two ears, and two cheeks. Then count just one nose. Ask, "Where's your other nose? Oh, you only have one nose? How many noses do you have? Just one."

Variations:

- A. Have your child help set the table for snack or mealtime. Ask him to put one cookie on each napkin or one spoon on each plate. The first few times, you may have to help him step by step.
- B. When your child has all his trucks out to play with, ask him to put one toy animal in each truck.

Toddlers 24–30 Months



Toddlers 24–30 Months

Area V: Communication, Language, and Literacy

Pack a Bag

This fun activity gives your toddler practice following one- and two-step directions.

Materials:

- Clothes and other household items
- Small suitcase or other bag
- Puppet, doll, or stuffed animal

What to Do:

1. Tell your child that the puppet or other toy is going on a trip and needs help packing.
2. Bring out a small suitcase or other bag.
3. Have the puppet or doll tell your child what to pack by using one-step directions. Do this as part of a conversation. For example, “Please get me a blanket to put in my suitcase. Thank you! Now, please get me a book.”
4. Once she can follow one-step directions, make your requests more challenging:

“Please get my shoes and my hat.”

“Get my toothbrush, please, and put it on my blanket.”

Variations:

- A. Talk about where the toy is going on the trip. Describe what it might see or do.
- B. Let your child tell you what to get for the suitcase.





Area I: Physical Health, Well-Being, and Motor Development

Tape Walk

At first, your toddler walked with her feet spread far apart and her hands held high for balance. When she does this activity, she'll learn to put one foot in front of the other.

Materials:

- Masking tape

What to Do:

1. Put a long strip of masking tape on the floor.
2. Show your toddler how to walk on the line, putting one foot in front of the other.
3. If needed, walk beside her and hold her hand or arm. This will help your child feel balanced and secure until she can do it by herself.
4. Count the number of steps it takes to get to the end of the tape.
5. Once she can walk the straight line well, use the tape to make a zigzag line or one with corners and turns. Show her how to follow these lines.
6. Provide positive encouragement as she practices following the lines.

Variations:

- A. Describe what she is doing as she walks. Help her learn new concepts by using vocabulary such as "straight," "crooked," "corner," "long," and "short."
- B. Play follow-the-leader along the tape. Take turns being the leader.
- C. Pretend the line is a path, river, or road taking your child somewhere. Make up stories about where she is going. Let her make up some of the stories, too.

Toddlers
30–36
Months



Toddlers

30–36

Months

Area II: Social and Emotional Development

Story Hand

Play this game when something wonderful has happened to your child, or when you want to point out something he has done successfully.

Materials: None

What to Do:

1. Tell the child, “It’s story time.” He probably will think you are going to read a book. Instead, take his hand.
2. Start with the pinky finger. Give his pinky a nice massage as you tell a story based on your child’s life. For example, you might say, “This little finger wanted to learn how to ride a tricycle.” Give the next finger a nice massage and say, “This finger was a little scared he might fall off the tricycle.” Continue to the next finger, saying, “But this finger said, ‘I can do it. I just know I can.’” At the index finger, continue with the story by saying, “So I decided to try again and again.” Finally, come to the thumb and with excitement have the thumb say, “Did he do it? Did he do it?” Then tuck the thumb into the palm of your child’s hand and say, “No problem! All the fingers knew the whole time that he would do it!”

Variation:

This is a wonderful game to play with children who are anxious about something. You can use this idea in a variety of situations to help your child express and cope with his feelings. As you rub each finger, express your child’s unspoken concerns. Be creative in making up your stories. When you get to the thumb, end the story in a way that will reassure him.

Area III: Approaches to Learning

Playhouse

This will encourage your child's imagination and will open the doors for pretend play. This is a valuable activity for both boys and girls!

Safety Alert: To prevent choking, choose decorative art materials and jewelry that are larger in size. Make sure they do not have sharp edges or pins.

Make sure dress-up clothes are safe. See that buttons and snaps are firmly attached. Your child may get tangled in scarves, belts, cords, and other similar items.

Materials:

- Large, empty cardboard box, such as an appliance box
- Scissors
- Construction paper or other colored paper
- Non-toxic crayons, markers, paint
- Paintbrushes, liquid glue or glue sticks, and any other safe art materials
- Old sheet, blanket, or towel
- Safe household items
- Safe dress-up clothes and jewelry
- Play items for a store or other business (optional)
- Play money (optional)

What to Do:

Follow these steps to make a playhouse out of a large cardboard box.

1. Cut out a door and windows for your child.
2. Use non-toxic tempera paint, markers, or other safe art materials to help your child decorate the box.
3. Use old sheets or other scrap material to help him make curtains for the windows or to serve as 'doors.'
4. If you wish, make a sign to put on the house. This might show your child's name, a name for the house, a house number, or other design.
5. Provide safe household items for your child to use in his playhouse. These might include plastic or metal bowls and cups, pans, spoons, unbreakable dishes, etc.
6. Provide dress-up clothes such as old shirts, dresses, pants, hats, shoes, jewelry, scarves, and other items that you no longer need.
7. Let your child engage in dress-up fun and pretend play!

Variation:

Once the playhouse is built, turn it into a grocery store, restaurant, or other business. For example, cut 'food' or other products out of construction paper, or use magazine pictures or other play items. Use play money to buy groceries, to pay for a meal, or to order items from the store.

Toddlers 30–36 Months

Toddlers 30–36 Months

Area IV: Thinking Abilities and General Knowledge

Colorful Steps

Help your child make connections between words, visuals, and actions in a fun game that links these concepts.

Materials:

- Construction paper or other colored paper
- Tape

What to Do:

1. Tape a construction paper path on your floor. Use two or three different colors in your path.
2. Sing a favorite song as you and your two-year-old walk on the path. “Twinkle, Little Star” is a good song to use.
3. Each time you stop singing, stop walking. If your child knows colors, ask her to name the color that she is standing on. Name the color for her if she doesn’t know it.
4. Suggest, “Let’s step over this paper,” or “Let’s walk on this color.” Your child learns new concepts when you use words like these to describe your actions.

Variation:

Try other actions such as hopping, jumping, and tiptoeing along the path.

Child Care Center Adaptation:

Use this activity in your child care center with a small group of children. Play music or sing as the children walk along the color path. Have each child name the color she is on when the music or song stops.



Area V: Communication, Language, and Literacy

Follow the String

Expose your child to new vocabulary by playing this game.

Safety Alert: Prevent choking and other accidents! Carefully supervise your child during this activity. Put away all yarn or string after you are finished!

Materials:

- Roll of string or yarn
- Tape

What to Do:

1. Run a long piece of string or yarn around your room. Make the string go behind, under, over, and through things. Tape it down every so often to hold it in place.
2. Let your child follow the path of the string around the room. If more than one child is playing, they should go one at a time.
3. During this game, you are the 'announcer.' Your job is to describe what your child is doing or where he is: "Peter is crawling under the table. Next, he goes down the steps. Peter is going through the tunnel, and there he goes over the chair!"

Variations:

- A. Have him try to clap along with you as he follows the string. You might need another adult or older child to demonstrate this first until he gets the idea.
- B. After your child has played this game many times, let him be the 'announcer.'

Toddlers
30–36
Months





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