

Take a look at more fingerplays and action rhymes

Fingers on the Move

Dora, an early childhood specialist, consults in a classroom of 2-year-olds. She sees a teacher with a group of three children in the free play area looking a little lost. With permission from the teacher, Dora suggests playing a new game. As she starts wiggling her fingers, Dora asks the children if they like to play games with their fingers. The toddlers start wiggling their fingers too. She puts her hands behind her back and starts singing "Where Is Thumbkin?" She brings out her thumbs when it is time. As she does this fingerplay, two of the toddlers pick up the idea and start doing the motions. When they finish, the children want to do it again. As they start the fingerplay over, Dora helps them get their fingers moving in the correct ways.



Join Us!

Jay's home visitor comes to visit him and his mom weekly. At 20 months of age, Jay enjoys spending his time running, being chased, and using his body. Jay also has a sister who is 3 years old and just as active. One summer day when she arrives, the home visitor watches them running around in the yard. She suggests that their mother teach the children some action rhymes. Mom knows Ring Around the Rosies, so they decide to try it. The children keep on chasing each other around. Their mom suspects that if she asks them to stop they will just get more energized. The home visitor and Mom decide to just start doing the activity by themselves. The two children notice by the second time the adults go through the rhyme. Both Jay and his sister come over to see what they are doing and join in the action rhyme.

Even More Fun!

Luke has cerebral palsy, which sometimes makes it hard for him to get his fingers to make all of the motions for some fingerplays. Still, he very much likes to do them. His mom knows the importance of fingerplays in encouraging the development of language and rhyming. With Luke's home visitor, Mom modifies the finger motions so that Luke can do them. For Eensy-Weensy Spider, instead of touching each finger together, Luke and his mom just touch their hands together as they raise their arms. They bring down their arms when they say "Down came the rain." They swing their arms in front of them when they say "And washed the spider out." With "Out came the sun and dried up all the rain," they lift their arms high in a circle. Next, with "The eensy-weensy spider climbed up the spout again," they touch their hands together as they lift them up high.



Especially for practitioners working with toddlers! 

Action Rhymes

 *Sound and Phonemic Awareness*

Exploring the world of language while moving their bodies is great fun for most toddlers. Rhymes combined with body movements also provide toddlers opportunities to enhance their language skills.

What is the practice?

Action rhymes involve the use of rhymes and body movements that promote the development of oral language. While engaging in action rhymes with adults or other children, toddlers hear and begin to understand that certain words sound similar. This is an important step in phonological awareness.



What does the practice look like?

Action rhymes are short rhymes, either sung or spoken, that include body movements and tell a story. Ring Around the Rosie is an example of an action rhyme. It involves a toddler singing the rhyme while walking in a circle and then falling down when the rhyme says "...We all fall down." You can find other action rhymes that will help build a toddler's word skills by searching on the Web for **action rhymes**. You can also find rhyming words to use in making up your own action rhymes by searching the Web with the term **rhyming words**.

How do you do the practice?

The practice guide ***Fingerplays and Rhymes with a Punch*** offers some suggestions about how to introduce action rhymes. Using action rhymes about a topic that is interesting to the child is an important starting point. Help the child's parent or caregiver think about different times of the day when action rhymes might be used. Suggest trying some out with the toddler while playing in the yard or at the playground. Here you will find a number of action rhymes you could use with a toddler.

Little, Bigger, Biggest

A little ball (Make ball with finger and thumb)
A bigger ball (Make ball with two hands)
And a great big ball (Make ball with arms)
Now help me count them
One, two, three! (Repeat gestures for each size)

Row Your Boat

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream
(Sitting on the floor with the child facing you, hold her hands and rock backward and forward)

Stretching

When I stretch up, I feel so tall (Reach high)
When I bend down, I feel so small (Bend over)
Taller, taller, taller, taller (Reach up high)
Smaller, smaller, smaller, smaller Into a tiny ball
(Get low on the floor)

Ring Around the Rosies

Ring around the rosies
A pocket full of posies (Hold hands and go around in a circle for the first two lines)
Ashes, ashes, we all fall down! (Fall to the ground)

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your toddler participate more in these action rhymes?
- Is your toddler smiling and laughing while doing the action rhyme?
- Does your toddler try to change or make up new action rhymes?

Take a look at more fun with fingerplays

Tuneful Fingerplays

Knowing that fingerplays are often fun for young children, Lynette's home visitor asks her mom if they ever do fingerplays together. Mom says that she has never tried fingerplays but thinks Lynette might enjoy them because she likes to sing. Mom mentions that she knows Eensy Weensy Spider, or at least parts of it. The home visitor suggests that Mom do the fingerplay with her daughter. She tells her that she will chime in if Mom forgets the words. With Lynne settled next to her on the couch, Mom helps Lynne do the hand motions while both adults sing the rhyme. Lynne enjoys the fingerplay, lifting her arms and smiling to show she wants to do it again.



A Way To Wait

Noah spends much of the day in a childcare center with the other children in his class of 2-year-olds. Noah's early childcare provider is always looking for ways to provide early literacy development. One of the things she often does is use fingerplays with the children when they have to wait. If children are waiting for others to clean up and join the group, she will ask: "Who has a fingerplay they'd like us to do?" She has been introducing new fingerplays to the children since the beginning of school, so the children have a large repertoire. She lets the children make the choices and take the lead.

Moving Together

Kai is a 32-month-old with some motor skill issues that cause him to have trouble moving his fingers in certain ways. Kai's home visitor understands the importance of rhymes for supporting early literacy development. She talks with Kai's dad about the fingerplays he knows, and which ones he thinks Kai might like. Together they identify several, including Eensy Weensy Spider, that they think Kai would like. The adults talk about how to modify the finger motions for each rhyme so that Kai can do them. Dad tries one with Kai, and although he needs help with the motions, Kai really tries to do both the words and the motions.



Take a look at more rhymes and rhythm

Rhymes Are Fun!

A home visitor comes to visit with Noah and his mom regularly. The home visitor knows that 32-month-old Noah and his mom enjoy looking at books together. She asks if they have a children's book that uses lots of rhyming words. They look through their book shelf and find they only have two with rhyming text. Noah and his mom read both books, and Noah clearly enjoys saying the rhymes over and over. Mom realizes that rhyming books are not only fun, but they are also a pre-literacy activity. Mom says she will be sure to borrow several each time she and Noah go to the public library.



Transition Rhymes

Aleta is the lead teacher in a classroom of 2-year-olds. An early childhood specialist is talking with her about how she is incorporating rhyming into the children's routine activities. Aleta says she uses rhymes during group time and is also using them when the children are making transitions. For example, when children are outside playing and it is time to come inside, she says, "First we play outside, then we play in. Now it's time to go inside. Let's begin!" She uses another one when it is time to clean up and go to lunch, singing "I have a hunch it's time for lunch. Come on, everybody! Let's munch!" The children repeat the rhyme while cleaning up and getting their lunch.

Rhyming Directions

Michaela is in a classroom of 2½-year-olds and sometimes has a hard time following directions. Her teacher likes to use rhymes that include directions, but does not want Michaela to get confused. She sings, "Heigh-ho, away we go! Turn down the lights all 'round. Heigh-ho, away we go! Let's have fun on the playground!" as her signal for going outside. When she begins to sing, Daphne, Michaela's friend, has a special job. She finds Michaela and they go out the door, holding hands and singing the rhyme together.



Especially for practitioners working with toddlers! 

Sounds Good

 *Sound and Phonemic Awareness*

Toddlers are starting to understand the many uses for language. They enjoy experimenting with the different noises they can make and the different results they get from adults around them. Join the toddlers in your care in their verbal play. This will motivate them to pay attention to and use language more readily.

What is the practice?

Encourage and gently direct your toddlers' play with words and sounds. Imitate and expand on their words. Join them in songs and rhymes. Show appropriate use of language in your classroom. Caregivers' positive responses to toddlers' verbal output will help them learn about the sounds and uses of language.

What does the practice look like?

Support your toddlers' verbal play and speech. Join in with their invented songs and replace words in familiar songs or nursery rhymes with children's names. Imitate animal noises together. Use toddlers' gestures to interpret and expand on a child's meaning.

How do you do the practice?

There are many opportunities each day in a classroom for children to playfully interact with you or their peers. Use words and sounds and play games that support these skills.

- Recite nursery rhymes or sing rhyming songs with children, letting them fill in the rhyming words on their own. Point out which words "go together" or "sound the same." You can increase interest in these songs and rhymes by making up versions about the children in your class.
- When children are playing with animals, trucks, baby dolls, or anything else, elicit their ideas about what sounds those objects would make. Most toddlers enjoy these activities. They help children think about the nature of sounds. For example, would a truck have a deep, loud sound, or a high-pitched squeak?
- During a group activity such as snack time, encourage toddlers to think of words that describe what they are eating. You can model appropriate choices, like sweet, salty, cold, hard, crunchy, in order to give them some ideas. Variations on this game can be played any time. As a group, come up with words that describe a particular toy (big, soft, brown) or event (fun, loud, stinky). This helps children pay attention to the world around them and increases their vocabularies.
- Teaching children songs and rhymes can be made more enjoyable and effective by accompanying them with hand or body movements. This can increase toddlers' understanding of the words as well as motivate them to participate and limit fidgeting.



How do you know the practice worked?

- Do children in your care enjoy playing with words and sounds?
- Do they attempt to use words in a variety of contexts, such as requesting something, singing, and describing their experience?
- Do they show a gradual shift from using primarily gestures to using more words?

Take a look at more verbal play with toddlers

Rhyming Fingerplay

It is almost Halloween. Mr. Tom, an early interventionist, decides to teach a fingerplay about pumpkins to the children he visits at their homes. At Bradley's house, he sits on the living room floor with the toddler and his mother. They look at pictures of pumpkins and jack-o-lanterns. Bradley's mom explains that he is going to be a fireman for Halloween. Then, Mr. Tom shows them how each of his five fingers can be a pumpkin in the fingerplay. Bradley and Mom practice bending and unbending their fingers like Mr. Tom does. "I'm going to read it to you first," Mr. Tom says. "Listen for words that rhyme, or that sound the same." After reciting it once, he encourages Bradley and his mom to join in by moving their hands as he does. He asks them to guess what words might come next at the end of each line. The gestures that accompany the words help Bradley make the connection between what he hears and real objects. They also help him remember what comes next in the sequence.



What's She Saying?



Ms. Lynn's class took a recent field trip to a farm. She collaborates with Bev, her center's early interventionist, to encourage her toddlers' continuing interest in the animals they saw. They stock the blocks and dramatic play centers of her classroom with farm animal toys of different sizes and breeds. Some of the toddlers in the blocks center are working at building "barns" and "fences" for the animals they find there. "Look, you've got that cow all fenced in," Ms. Lynn tells one child. "What's she saying?" The boy grins and gives a loud moo. "That cow sounds mad!" Bev says. "How would she sound if she was scared?" Another child offers a quiet, uncertain moo. The children laugh. "Hungry?" one child asks the child with the lion. Ms. Lynn plays alongside the toddlers, inventing appropriate sounds to go with the feelings and thoughts of their animals.

Imitating Sounds

In Ms. Lauren's inclusive toddler class, she and the early interventionist use songs and rhymes to engage children in verbal play. Ms. Lauren has the children at tables playing with play dough. Rita, the early interventionist, sits down with Luke, who has been diagnosed with speech and language delay. "What are you making, Luke?" she asks, and when he does not respond, Rita imitates Luke's motions. "I'm doing that too," she says, waiting for him to look at her play dough. When he does, he points and vocalizes. Ms. Lauren imitates the same sounds he is making, and adds to it: "I'm rolling this out flat." Luke pounds his play dough flat too, then looks expectantly at Ms. Lauren. "What should we do next?" Rita asks him. Luke vocalizes again. Although the adults do not understand what he is saying, they both imitate his sounds and he laughs. They take turns imitating each other's noises and movements. Ms. Lauren and Rita interpret and expand on Luke's attempts at speech.



Especially for practitioners working with toddlers! 

Sound Ideas

 *Sound and Phonemic Awareness*

In order for a child to read, he must have an understanding of how sounds go together to make different words. This practice guide includes early word games to help toddlers understand how sounds combine to form words. This is an important building block for later reading.

What is the practice?

You can help toddlers “make the connection” between sounds and words. Playing sound and word games helps toddlers develop an early understanding of how sounds go together to form words.

What does the practice look like?

Toddlers experiment with sounds (such as ma-ma and da-da) to make “new” words or silly sounds. This helps them understand that letters have different sounds and can be combined into different words. A toddler learns that these sounds can be put together in different ways to create new words. This is an important emergent literacy skill.



How do you do the practice?

There are many different opportunities for learning about sounds in words as a child plays with toys, eats lunch, or takes a walk.

- Start by thinking about what he enjoys doing and saying. Often young children have a word or sound that they say repeatedly. For example, some toddlers really like to make animal sounds such as “baa,” “meow,” or “woof.” Other children may like to make up silly names for their animals, dolls, or family members. Get your toddler’s attention by saying the sounds the toddler likes to make. After he repeats the sound, change the first letter to make a new silly word: “baa baa” becomes “ha ha.”
- Word play can be done with toddlers in lots of different situations and often happens spontaneously. For example, if while in the yard you see a worm on the ground, get the toddler to say “worm.” Make up a little rhyme like “Wormy, wormy, squiggly, squirmy.” Say it together as you watch the worm.
- As the toddler’s skills strengthen, begin to put words together in short sentences with the same sound. For example, “Did the doggie dig?” Laugh about the funny sound of “doggie dig” and encourage the toddler to repeat the phrase.
- Show the toddler that he did well by smiling and commenting on his efforts. A little encouragement will keep him playing longer, but be sure to stop when he tires of the game.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is the toddler starting to “play” with individual sounds or words?
- Does the toddler seem pleased when he tries to make or copy your sounds?
- Has the toddler shown interest in trying new sounds and words?

Take a look at more fun and games with sounds

Hop Drop Game

Janice is an early childhood specialist in a class full of energetic children. She remembers a game she has used before to engage active toddlers. Janice tells the teacher about the Hop Drop Game. First, the teacher introduces the words drop, hop, top, and pop to the children. She shows them the action that goes with each word—Hop up and down; drop to the floor; put hands on top of their heads; and pop hands together in a clap. After all the children know the motions, she calls out one word after another while the children do the movements. After the children get the idea, she lets them take the lead. It becomes a class favorite, with someone always asking for the Hop Drop Game and wanting to be the leader.



Rearranging Sounds

A home visitor regularly visits with Gareth and his mom. Gareth, who is 19 months old, makes lots of sounds, some of which are “real words” and some just sounds. The home visitor is helping Mom figure out ways to rearrange these sounds and to make them fun to play with. Gareth often sits in his seat in the kitchen near Mom while she cooks dinner. Gareth begins cooing, and Mom comes close, cooing back at him. Gareth coos again and Mom repeats his cooing. Mom goes back to her cooking task. In a few minutes she returns to start the game with a new sound like ma-ma. The next time she changes the sound to baa-baa. Gareth smiles and responds to his mom, showing how much he enjoys the game.

Tickle Game

Sean is just learning to say single words though he is almost 3 years old. His favorites are “Mama,” “Dada,” and “baha” (for “ball”). To encourage him to play with the sounds, his mom and their home visitor have made a tickle game. It has become a favorite activity for Sean. Mom and Dad take turns with him. First Mom leans in close and wiggles her fingers to encourage Sean to say “Mama, Mama.” When he does, she tickles him, resulting in loud laughter. Then it is Dad’s turn to get Sean to say “Dada, Dada.”

