

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

# Action Rhymes

*Sound and Phonemic Awareness*

Exploring the world of language while getting to move 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, which 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 to tell a story. A toddler singing the rhyme **Ring Around the Rosie** while walking in a circle and then falling down when the rhyme says "...We all fall down" is an example of an action rhyme. 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, such as 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, and 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 gathered by the door, waiting for others to put away toys 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 choice and take the lead.

## *Moving Together*

Kai is a 32-month-old with some problems with motor skills that cause him to have trouble moving his fingers in certain ways. Kai's home visitor, who understands the importance of rhymes for supporting early literacy development, 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.

