

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

Fingerplays and Rhymes with a Punch

 *Sound and Phonemic Awareness*

For most toddlers, exploring the world of language while moving their fingers, arms, and whole bodies is motivating and exciting. Fingerplays and action rhymes provide an opportunity for young children to combine fun with language exploration in a way that enhances a toddler's word skill and vocabulary, both of which are important for emergent literacy.

What is the practice?

Fingerplays and action rhymes are very brief stories that may rhyme and that include finger or body motions. Fingerplays and action rhymes help toddlers learn about rhyming and poetry, provide opportunities for listening and speaking, and encourage the coordination of words with physical actions.

What does the practice look like?

Every time your toddler says or sings a rhyme and uses his fingers, hands, or body to "act it out," he is doing a fingerplay or action rhyme. Depending on the particular fingerplay or action rhyme, toddlers can do them in a car, at a bus stop, in the yard, or on a walk. A toddler singing and doing the motions to "Eensy Weensy Spider" is an example of a fingerplay.



How do you do the practice?

Fingerplays and action rhymes can be done frequently, offering toddlers the opportunity to have fun playing with language and moving their bodies. The opportunities for fingerplays and action rhymes can occur while waiting for a table at a restaurant, watching a brother play in a soccer game, or with friends when they come to visit. Though there are resources on the Internet for fingerplays and action rhymes, if you feel the urge to make one up, do so.

- Fingerplays and action rhymes can be about any subject that interests a young toddler (such as animals, trains, food). The sillier and more fun they are to the toddler, the more he will enjoy doing the rhyme over and over.
- If the fingerplay or action rhyme is a new one, demonstrate it with excitement. It doesn't matter if you get it *right*. Your excitement will capture the toddler's attention.
- Repeat the fingerplay or action rhyme slowly, helping the child make the finger or hand movements.
- After leading or demonstrating the fingerplay or action rhyme a couple of times, encourage the toddler to do the rhyme with you if he has not already begun to.
- Let him lead the fingerplay or action rhyme as

much as possible, even if he makes mistakes. Let him direct the rhyme and watch how proud he is.

- Adding new fingerplays or action rhymes is always fun for the toddler, but don't forget the old favorites. Using children's favorites repeatedly is important for toddler learning, so remember to play previously learned fingerplays or action rhymes along with the new ones.
- Encourage the child's attempts at doing fingerplays or action rhymes by smiling and commenting on his successes. Your encouragement and participation in the activity will go a long way toward sustaining the child's involvement.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the toddler do fingerplays or action rhymes more often?
- Is the toddler enjoying doing the fingerplays or action rhymes?
- Does the toddler try to make up his own fingerplays or action rhymes?

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 notices 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 appropriate. 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, and Dora helps them get their fingers moving in the correct ways.

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Join Us!

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

Even More Fun!

When Shante attends her childcare program, she uses a wheelchair to get around. Her classroom teacher uses a lot of action rhymes. Since Shante's early interventionist knows this, she visits in the classroom when the teacher introduces action rhymes. The early interventionist helps Shante participate in *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*. Instead of sitting on the floor, Shante's classmate Hasam sits in a chair, they hold hands, and pull each other back and forth. They have a great time because as they "row, row, row," Shante's chair moves with them, making it even more fun.

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