

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

Infant Nursery Rhymes and Fingerplays

Sound Awareness

Games that include rhymes and other repetitions help infants become familiar with sounds and words. This practice guide includes ways you can use fingerplays and nursery rhymes to help infants become “talkers.”

What is the practice?

Age-old and well-loved fingerplays and nursery rhymes provide infants many different kinds of opportunities to hear sounds and be part of fun and enjoyable activities. The activities in this practice guide include ideas for how to introduce simple fingerplays and nursery rhymes and use them with a child to encourage her to learn sounds and to become part of the storytelling.

What does the practice look like?

Long before infants learn to say words, they use gestures and other movements to tell us what they want and what they enjoy. Infant fingerplays and simple nursery rhymes are especially enjoyable ways of adding sounds and words to movements in fun ways. Made-up fingerplays—as well as many you can find on the Web by searching **infant fingerplays**—are likely to get the child into the game.



How do you do the practice?

This practice is simple and straightforward. Find different kinds of movements and gestures the child enjoys and incorporate short, repetitive nursery rhymes into the movements and gestures.

- Start by identifying the movements and gestures the child makes in response to being touched. Does the child like to be tickled? Will she let you put her hands together like clapping? Does she like having raspberries blown on her tummy?
- Be sure the child is in a comfortable position. Lying on her back is often best when first using fingerplays and nursery rhymes. If she is a sitter, that position will work just as well.
- Fingerplays and nursery rhymes that involve body parts are generally the easiest and best to do. Play *Pat-a-Cake* by gently putting the child's hands together and saying the nursery rhyme. *This Little Piggy* is a good game for infants because they get to see a parent touch their toes while hearing the nursery rhyme. A baby's first fingerplays and nursery rhymes should be short and very repetitious.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child try to make any movements when she hears the nursery rhyme?
- Does the child try to get you to play the game again?
- Does she make sounds more often while hearing the rhymes?

Take a look at more rhymes and fingerplays

Tickled by Rhymes

Five-month-old Mary loves to be tickled when playing games with her teacher, Britt. Britt uses tickling as the climax to nursery rhymes that she sings to Mary. One of Mary's favorites is *Jack and Jill*. As soon as Mary hears the words, she smiles and vocalizes. Britt uses her fingers and pretends to be walking up Mary's legs, then her chest, and ends by tickling Mary's neck as she says, "...and Jill came tumbling after." Brett asks Mary if she wants to hear *Jack and Jill* again. Mary shakes all over to tell her yes.



Happy Hands

Eight-month-old Mack has "happy hands!" He reaches for and touches everything in view. With the help of his home visitor, Mack's father has turned reaching toward him into a game of *Pat-a-Cake*. His dad holds his hands out for Mack to grab at as he reaches toward him. His dad begins the game by saying the *Pat-a-Cake* rhyme while gently moving Mack's hands together in a clapping motion. When saying "roll it," his father wraps his arms around Mack's hands, and when saying "pat it," he takes Mack's hands and touches his son's tummy. At the end of the nursery rhyme, when saying "Put it in the oven for Mack and me," he blows raspberries on Mack's tummy. Mack has started initiating games of *Pat-a-Cake* by grabbing anyone's hands and pushing them together!

This Little Piggy . . .

Ten-month-old Mandy's visual impairment does not stop her from enjoying fingerplays. Her favorite game is *This Little Piggy*. Her teacher knows that all she has to do is mention the game, and Mandy starts kicking to 'say' that she wants to play the game. Her teacher has turned this well-liked nursery rhyme into a special game for Mandy. She grabs and wiggles each of Mandy's toes as she recites the nursery rhyme. When saying "wee, wee, wee, all the way home," she tickles the bottom of Mandy's feet. This starts the baby kicking and "talking," and the game begins again.

