

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

Rhyming Games for Toddlers

Sound and Phonemic Awareness

Nursery rhymes help toddlers become aware of the rhythms and rhymes in language. This practice guide focuses on how you can use old favorite nursery rhymes or create new rhymes to develop a toddler's sensitivity to the sound of letters and words.

What is the practice?

This practice guide includes nursery rhymes and rhyming activities that help toddlers learn to distinguish between sounds and recognize that, though two words sound similar, the change of just one letter changes meaning (as in *cat* and *hat*). Chanting a silly ditty full of rhyming words is a fun activity for young children.



What does the practice look like?

Making the connection between sounds and words happens every time there is repetition of identical or similar sounds in two or more words. This is called a rhyme. Word rhymes that are created for young children are often referred to as nursery rhymes. A child repeating a rhyme such as, "Hickory, dickory, dock; a mouse ran up the clock," is an example of a nursery rhyme.

How do you do the practice?

Everyday life presents many opportunities for playing rhyming games. These include repeating, singing, or making up rhymes as part of the daily routine. By searching the Internet for rhymes for toddlers or pre-school rhymes, or your library's item catalogue, you will locate rhymes for various activities (for example, bath time) and occasions (for example, birthdays).

- Start by identifying rhymes that are about things the toddler is interested in or enjoys. For example, if the child likes animals, "Hey Diddle Diddle, the Cat and the Fiddle" might be one he would enjoy. The more the child enjoys the content of the rhyme, the more likely that he will say the rhyme with you.
- Rhymes can happen anywhere. You can make them up as you walk down the street (for example, "Step one, step two, look at my shoe"). You and the toddler can make up or repeat rhymes during daily activities, like "Rub-a-dub-dub, three men in a tub" while washing hands.
- Don't worry about getting the rhymes "right." Young children just enjoy the sounds they are making—and the sillier the rhymes are, the better!
- As the toddler gets used to saying rhymes with you, let him pick or start the rhyme he wants to do next. Let the child make up a rhyme all alone or with a little help from you. Remember, it is the fun of rhyming, not whether it makes sense that encourages him to continue rhyming.
- Encourage the toddler's efforts to participate in rhymes with you or to make them up.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is the toddler saying the rhymes with you?
- Does the toddler smile or laugh when rhyming?
- Does the toddler want to make up new rhymes?

Take a look at more rhymes and rhythm

Rhymes Are Fun!

A home visitor comes to visit with Noah and his mom regularly. Knowing that 32-month-old Noah and his mom enjoy looking at books together, the home visitor 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. After realizing that rhyming books are not only fun but 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

An early childhood specialist was talking with Aleta, a teacher of a classroom of 2-year-olds, 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, finds Michaela and they go out the door, holding hands and singing the rhyme together.

