

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

Toddler Fingerplays

 Sound and Phonemic Awareness

Fingerplays provide an opportunity for young children to combine fun and language exploration in a way that enhances word skills and increases the number of words toddlers know—both important for developing their emergent literacy skills.

What is the practice?

Children who tell very brief stories using their fingers or hands are doing fingerplays. Fingerplays often use rhymes to 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 a toddler says or sings a rhyme and uses his fingers or hands to “act it out,” it is a fingerplay. A toddler singing “Eensy-Weensy Spider” and imitating a spider with his fingers and hands in the air is an example of a fingerplay. You can find many other fingerplays by searching on the Internet with **fingerplays** or **preschool fingerplays**.



How do you do the practice?

Fingerplays can be done frequently, offering toddlers the opportunity to have fun playing with language and the movements of their body. Fingerplays can allow squirming toddlers to become active when they are required to sit and wait.

- Fingerplays and action rhymes can be about any subject that interests the toddler (such as animals, trains, or food). The sillier and more fun they are to the toddler, the more he will enjoy doing the rhyme again and again.
- 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!

Bunny Puppet

Here is a bunny, with ears so funny. *(Raise two fingers.)*
And here is a hole in the ground. *(Make hole with fingers of the other hand.)*

At the first sound she hears, she pricks up her ears.
(Straighten “ear” fingers.)

And pops right into the ground. *(Put fingers in hole.)*

Homes

A nest is a home for a bird. *(Cup hands to form a nest.)*
A hive is a home for a bee. *(Turn cupped hands over.)*
A hole is a home for a rabbit. *(Make a hole with hands.)*
And a house is a home for me. *(Peaked hands like roof.)*

Where Is Thumbkin?

(Start with hands behind back.)

Where is Thumbkin? Where is Thumbkin?

Here I am. *(Bring right hand to front, with thumb up.)*

Here I am. *(Bring left hand to front, with thumb up.)*

How are you this morning? Very well, I thank you.

(Wiggle thumbs as if they are ‘talking’ to each other.)

Run away. *(Hide right hand behind back)*

Run away. *(Hide left hand behind back)*

(Repeat rhyme with each finger: “pointer,” “tall man,” “ring man,” and “pinkie.”)

How do you know the practice worked?

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

Take a look at more fingerplays with toddlers

Bunny Puppet—Again!

Sometimes the home visitor goes with Miranda and her mom to the park not far from her home. After playing hard on the playground equipment, Miranda gets tired. While resting on the bench, Miranda sees a bunny run across the grass. Her mom remembers the **Bunny Puppet** fingerplay and begins to show Miranda and her home visitor how to do it. Miranda and her mom do it together several times. On the walk home, Miranda wants them to play *Bunny Puppet* again and again. She clearly enjoys this activity.

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Taking the Lead

When the home visitor comes to visit Victor and his Mom, they always play games to encourage Victor's language development and early literacy skills. One of the things Victor likes to do most is fingerplays. Since **Where Is Thumbkin?** is one of his favorites, the home visitor will often start with it, asking Victor if he would like to be the leader. They do the rhyme and finger movements together. The home visitor and Victor's mom know how much Victor enjoys this activity because he always wants to do another fingerplay.

It's Easy To Adapt!

Luke has cerebral palsy, which sometimes makes it hard for him to get his fingers to make all the motions for some fingerplays, though he 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," and 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, and with "The eensy-weensy spider climbed up the spout again," they touch their hands together as they lift them up high.

