

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

# Skill-Building Activities

for Groups of Caregivers and  
Their Infants/Toddlers



**The  
Basics™**

Fun, Simple, and Powerful!



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# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

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## Hands-On Skill-Building

The Basics Principles are five fun, simple, and powerful ways to help all our children get a strong start in life. The activities in this guide extend The Basics Principles through hands-on skill building. The guide is designed for use by leaders of adult-child playgroups and workshops. Caregivers should participate along with their infants and toddlers (though a number of the activities can also be adapted for older children). After you have introduced families to The Basics Principles and shared why they matter, use activities from this document to provide fun ways for families to put the principles into action! If your group will consist of adults only, see *Skill-Building Activities for Groups of Parents and Caregivers* in the [Basics Community Toolkit](#).

## A Menu of Activities

For each of the five Basics Principles, you will find one icebreaker and three or four caregiver-child activities. Think of this document as a menu: you can choose icebreakers and activities to suit your own goals, the size and location of your group, the ages of the children, and your timeframe. Modify the activities as needed; and please share your ideas with us at [info@thebasics.org](mailto:info@thebasics.org).

## Tips

- **Settings.** Consider a variety of settings where you might integrate these activities, particularly times and places where caregivers and children already come together, for example, playgroups, workshops, or other community gatherings.
- **Introducing The Basics Principles.** Give some thought to how you will introduce The Basics Principles before diving into the activities. Make sure caregivers know what the principles are and why they matter. Refer to the general talking points on the following page, as well as the sample introductory remarks provided for each principle. Showing one or more videos from [TheBasics.org](http://TheBasics.org) or your community's local Basics website is also good way to set the stage.
- **Adapting activities for children of different ages.** Some of the activities in this document are suitable for both infants and toddlers; some are geared more toward a specific age group (noted in the activity). You will also find suggestions for adaptations. Modify the activities and offer support to parents and children as needed.
- **Resources for families.** Look in The Basics Community Toolkit for handouts that participants can take home to reinforce the activities, such as downloadable tip sheets for each Basic Principle.

## General Talking Points

Use the sample language below to explain, in your own words, why The Basics Principles are important.

- **Science shows that a huge amount of brain growth—around 80%—happens by age three.** Beginning from birth, young brains develop like little muscles, getting bigger and stronger the more you and your family interact with your infant or toddler.
- This early development lays a **foundation for learning and wellbeing that lasts a lifetime.**
- That means we have a **big opportunity** to give all our kids a strong foundation for school and life right from the start.
- The Basics Principles are **five simple and powerful ways to boost children’s brain development and learning** that are based on the latest science.
- Doing The Basics Principles is free. It does not require any fancy toys or adding hours to your day. It’s all about the way you interact **during the time you already spend together.**
- When **everyone in a child’s life** uses The Basics Principles from the very beginning, the child arrives at school ready to succeed and thrive.

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# 1. MAXIMIZE LOVE, MANAGE STRESS

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*Infants and toddlers thrive when their world feels loving, safe, and predictable. When you express your love and respond to their needs, you teach them that they can count on you. Over time, showing love and responding to your child helps them learn to manage their feelings and behavior. As they grow, feeling secure in their relationships gives them the confidence they need to explore, learn, and take on life's challenges.*

*Young children are affected by your emotions, whether you are happy or upset. So, it's important to find practical ways that help you cope with stress. Caring for yourself helps you care for your child.*

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## Ice Breaker: Stand Up! Sit Down!

5 minutes

Begin with all participants sitting down. Give the following instructions, or make up others to fit your group.

- ✓ If you are wearing (blue) today, stand up.
- ✓ If you are wearing (socks) today, sit down.
- ✓ If you are happy to be here, stand up.
- ✓ If you have a brother or a sister, sit down.
- ✓ If you gave someone a hug today, stand up.
- ✓ If you gave someone a kiss today, sit down.

**Note:** *Italics* are used to indicate sample comments. Feel free to use your own words to adapt them.

## 1a. Activity: Kiss, Bounce, and Tickle

**Age Group: Infant/Toddler**  
**15 minutes**

- **Introduce:** *Playing with your children and giving loving touches—kissing, hugging, bouncing, cuddling, and tickling—helps them feel safe and secure. It shows that you love them.*
- **Kiss:** *Kiss your child on a favorite part of his or her body. Then look in their eyes, smile, and tell your child why you love their (hand, foot, nose, etc.). I love your hand. It’s so soft and delicious!*
- **Bounce You Here:** Ask parents and caregivers to put their children on their knees. Lead them in this bouncing exercise. Caution them to be very gentle and to make sure babies’ necks are fully supported.

I bounce you here, I bounce you there, (bounce child on knee)

I bounce you, bounce you, everywhere.

I tickle you here, I tickle you there, (gently tickle child)

I tickle you, tickle you, everywhere.

I hug you here, I hug you there, (hug child)

I hug you, hug you, everywhere!

- **One, Two, Three, Tickle Your Knee:** Parents and caregivers with toddlers can modify this by eliminating the tapping and just tickling. If babies don’t like to be tickled, just tap.

One, two, three, (tap on child’s knee)

Tickle your knee. (gently tickle child’s knee)

Four, five, six, (tap on child’s tummy)

Pick up sticks. (gently tickle child’s tummy)

Seven, eight, nine, (tap lightly on child’s chin)

You’re all mine! (hug child)

- **Debrief:** *What did you notice about the way you felt during this activity? What did you notice about your child’s responses? How do these activities benefit your child? How do they help your relationship? What specific times of day would it be helpful to do “kiss, bounce, and tickle” activities with your child?*

- ⇒ **Take It Further—Trot to Boston:** Have parents and caregivers hold their babies securely on their knees. You can model with a baby doll or teddy bear.

Trot, trot to Boston. Trot, trot to Lynn (bounce baby gently on knees)

Look out (baby’s name), don’t fall in. (open knees and gently place baby on ground)

Trot, trot to Boston, Trot, trot to Dover, (bounce baby on knees)

Look out (baby’s name), don’t fall over. (gently lean with baby to one side)

Trot, trot to Boston, Trot, trot to Town (bounce baby on knees)

Look out (baby’s name), don’t fall down. (lower baby’s legs to floor while gently holding baby)

## 1b. Activity: Breathe Like a Baby

**Age Group: Infant/Toddler**  
**15 minutes**

- **Introduce:** *Did you know that when we slow our breathing we can relax our bodies and reduce our heart rate and stress? There are two ways we breathe: 1) chest breathing, which is fast and shallow, and 2) abdomen or belly breathing, which is slower and deeper. Have you ever noticed how newborn babies breathe? Yes, newborns belly breathe! We are going to do some belly breathing exercises that you and your children can do to calm down and reduce stress.* Participants with infants can do the first exercise with their babies in their laps. The second exercise is for caregivers to do with toddlers.
- **Belly Breathing**
  - **Model:** Ask participants to watch as you demonstrate. Put your hand on your belly and take a deep belly breath, feeling your belly get bigger. Then slowly exhale. *That felt great!*
  - **You Try:** *Put your hand on your belly. Now take a deep breath. Do you feel your belly get bigger? Now breathe out. Do you feel your belly get smaller? Let's try that again!* Repeat three times.
  - **Debrief:** *How did that feel? What specific times of day would it be helpful to stop and belly breathe? How would it benefit you? Your child?* Emphasize that deep breathing is good to do before bedtime and anytime we are feeling anxious or stressed. Simply pause and take a minute to breathe.
- **Blow Out the Birthday Candles:** Parents and caregivers can do this with their toddlers, blowing out the “candles” on their child’s hand. Let’s try another fun deep breathing exercise. *Have you ever blown out birthday candles?*
  - *Hold up one hand. Let's count your fingers. One, two, three, four, five. Let's pretend that your five fingers are five candles on a birthday cake! We are going to blow them out together.*
  - *Take a deep breath. Fill up your belly. Now blow out the first candle (exhale from mouth). Curl your finger down as you blow. Did the candle go out?*
  - *Take another deep breath. Blow out the second candle. Remember, curl your finger down as you blow out the candle.*
  - Repeat the process for the rest of the fingers. Toddlers can also take turns blowing out the candles.
  - **Debrief:** *How did that feel? What specific times of day would it be helpful to do this? How would it benefit you? Your child? How could it help your relationship?* Once children are old enough to practice taking deep breaths, do this type of exercise with them when they are calm. The more you practice with them when they are calm, the more likely they will one day be to use these strategies when upset.

## 1c. Activity: Good Night!

Age Group: Toddler  
15 minutes

**Materials:** A read aloud book that models a loving routine such as *Kiss Good Night* by Amy Hest or *Peekaboo Bedtime* by Rachel Isadora; props such as stuffed animals, blankets, and books for acting out bedtime routines (optional)

- **Introduce:** *Consistent daily schedules and routines help young children feel safe and secure and help us manage stress by giving a predictable structure to our day. Are there particular times of day when you think it would be helpful to have a routine?*
  - **Show the Cover:** Show the book cover and ask participants to describe what they see. *Does the cover remind you of (your child's) bedtime? Explain.*
  - **Interactive Read Aloud:** You may want to dim the lights. Read with expression, using different voices for the characters. Show the illustrations so everyone in the room can see them. Pause at several points to ask caregivers and toddlers if they can make any connections to their own routines, or how they think the characters in the book feel. For example: *How is your bedtime like Sam's? How is it different? How do you think Sam feels when Mrs. Bear gives him a goodnight kiss?*
  - **Debrief:**
    - Talk about how the steps of a good daily routine show children how much we love them (e.g., a good night hug or kiss), and help them feel safe and secure (e.g., reading a book or telling a story before turning off the lights). Routines also help children learn about sequence—what comes first, next, and last.
    - *Are there any other routines that you enjoy with your child?*
    - Emphasize the importance of sticking with a routine once you find one that works. *As your child grows, modify the routine to fit his or her developing skills and needs.*
- ⇒ **Take It Further—Act It Out!** You may want to have participants act out the bedtime routine in the book, or their own favorite bedtime routine. If possible, make available props such as stuffed animals, blankets, and books. Circulate and talk to caregivers and children about each step of the routine and its benefits. Ask caregivers how the routine affects their relationship with their child.

## 1d. Activity: Feelings Charades

Age Group: Older Toddler/Preschool

(See “Take It Further” below for adaptation for infants and younger toddlers)

15 minutes

**Materials:** One or two paper or plastic bags; strips of paper with emotion words; books about feelings or baby faces books (optional, see examples in “Take It Further—The Way I Feel” at the

- **Prepare:** Make a list of emotions you think would work well for this activity. Write each emotion on a strip of paper. Put the emotion strips in a bag. Emotions can include: happy, sad, excited, angry, tired, scared, surprised, etc. You could also print out pictures of faces displaying different emotions.
  - **Introduce:** *Before young children learn to manage their emotions, they need to be able to name their emotions and to understand how they are feeling. We are going to play a game of charades to practice recognizing and naming different emotions.*
  - **Model:** Introduce the game. Put your hand in the bag and pull out slip of paper. Don’t read the emotion out loud. Make facial expressions and gestures that show the emotion. For example, if you are excited, you might smile, jump up and down, and raise your hands in the air. Invite children to guess how you are feeling (*Yes, I’m excited!*).
  - **You Try:** Invite parents and caregivers to choose a strip from the bag and act out the emotion for children to guess. If they need help, you can whisper some suggestions. You may want to give children a try at acting out an emotion. Have them choose an emotion strip from the bag and show it to you. Whisper the emotion in their ear. If the child is having trouble coming up with what to do, you can whisper suggestions.
  - **Debrief:** *How can we talk to our children during the day about how they are feeling?* Emphasize the importance of validating or affirming a child’s emotions so they feel understood. *Instead of saying, “Don’t be angry,” you might say “I see that you are feeling angry right now. Do you want to take a break and belly breathe with me?”*
- ⇒ **Take It Further—The Way I Feel:** Read aloud a picture book or board book that features children showing a wide range of feelings. Point to the boy or girl on each page and ask: *How do you think the boy/girl is feeling? Why? Let’s read the page and find out.* With infants, you can point to and talk about the pictures instead of reading the text aloud. If available, you can also give parents and caregivers baby faces board books to explore with their infants. Babies will be fascinated!

### Baby Faces Books

[Baby Faces](#) by Margaret Miller

[My Face Book](#) by Star Bright Books

[Smile](#) by Roberta Grobel Intrater

### Books About Feelings

[The Feelings Book](#) by Todd Parr

[The Way I Feel](#) by Janan Cain

[When I Am/Cuando Estoy](#) by Gladys Rosa-Mendoza

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## 2. TALK, SING, AND POINT

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*Babies are learning language from the very beginning (starting before they are even born!). They begin by listening to the sounds when family members and caregivers talk to them. So, connect with eye contact and a loving tone of voice and talk to your child as you go about your day together. Go back and forth, responding to their facial expressions, coos, babbles, and eventually, words. Every time you talk, sing, or point to what you are talking about, you provide clues to the meaning of what you are saying. As your child gets older, talking to them and answering their questions teaches them about the world, and helps you get to know the fascinating person they are becoming!*

### Ice Breaker: Roll the Ball

10 minutes

**Materials:** Ball for rolling on the floor (e.g., a rubber playground ball)

- Have the group remain in the circle. Introduce yourself—say your name and something you love to do. *I love to sing in the shower!*
- Hold up a ball and tell the group that you are going to roll it to someone in the circle. Say: *If I roll the ball to you, catch it, and say your name and something you love to do. Then gently roll the ball back to me.*
- Gently roll the ball to a grown-up. After the grown-up has shared, say: *Now roll the ball back to me.*
- Gently roll the ball to a toddler. Prompt the toddler to say his or her name and share something he or she loves to do. Many toddlers are shy or may not understand your question. If the child doesn't reply after a moment, ask the caregiver to supply the child's name. Then say, *That's ok. Maybe (name) can share later!* Prompt the toddler to gently roll the ball back to you. Invite parents and caregivers to introduce their infant and something the infant loves to do.
- Repeat the process until all adults and toddlers have had a turn.

Note: *Italics* are used to indicate sample comments. Feel free to use your own words to adapt them.

## 2a. Activity: Action Rhymes

Age Group: Infant/Toddler  
20 minutes

**Materials:** Baby doll for demonstrating action rhymes (optional)

- **Introduce:** *Babies and toddlers love rhymes. Singing or chanting rhymes is a great way to support their language and attention skills. And by adding in pointing or other actions, you help them learn new words.* This activity is intended for infants, but can be adapted for toddlers as well.
- **Get Ready:** Have caregivers with infants sit on the floor, with their knees bent and the soles of their feet on the floor. Have them lay their babies down with their backs resting on their thighs so adults are looking directly at their babies' faces. Participants can support their backs against a wall.
- **Model:** Teach one or more of the action rhymes below. Chant each line of the rhyme and demonstrate the motions. You may want to use a baby doll for this. Encourage caregivers to notice how their babies respond to their voice, eye contact, and touch throughout the activity.

### These Are Baby's Fingers

These are (baby's) fingers.	(touch child's fingers)
These are (baby's) toes.	(touch child's toes)
This is (baby's) belly button.	(tap child's tummy)
Round and round it goes.	(gently tickle child's tummy)

### Two Little Eyes

Two little eyes to look around.	(point to eyes)
Two little ears to hear each sound.	(point to ears)
One little nose to smell what's sweet.	(point to nose)
One little mouth that likes to eat.	(point to mouth)

### Una Boquita (A Little Mouth)

Yo tengo una boquita para comer.	(point to mouth)
Yo tengo una naricita para oler.	(point to nose)
Yo tengo dos ojitos para ver.	(point to eyes)
Yo tengo dos oídos para oír.	(point to ears)
Y yo tengo mi cabecita para pensar y dormir.	(rest head on hands, as if to sleep)

- **All Together:** Repeat the action rhyme, inviting participants to do it with their babies and toddlers.
- **Debrief:**
  - Ask participants what they noticed. *How did your baby respond to your voice? Your touch? When you made eye contact? Did your baby make any sounds?*
  - *How do you think this activity benefits your baby? How might it benefit your relationship with your baby? How might you modify an action rhyme for your child?*

Note: *Italics* are used to indicate sample comments. Feel free to use your own words to adapt them.

## 2b. Activity: Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes

Age Group: Infant/Toddler  
10 minutes

**Materials:** *From Head to Toe (De la cabeza a los pies)* by Eric Carle (optional)

- **Introduce:** *Let's all stand up! I'm going to say a part of your body. When you hear a body part, tap it on your body.* Have adults and toddlers face one another as they learn this action rhyme. Parents and caregivers can also perform the rhyme for their infants. For a video of the song, visit: <http://bit.ly/SVKypo>.

- **Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes:** Slowly demonstrate the rhyme with the corresponding actions.

Head	(tap head)
Shoulders	(tap shoulders)
Knees	(reach down and tap knees)
Toes	(reach down and tap toes)

(Repeat)

Eyes	(point to eyes)
Ears	(point to ears)
Mouth	(point to mouth)
Nose	(point to nose)

Repeat first verse, with actions, again. *Now let's sing the song, with the actions. Follow me!*

Head, shoulders, knees, and toes. Knees and toes.  
Head, shoulders, knees, and toes. Knees and toes.  
And eyes and ears and mouth and nose.  
Head, shoulders, knees, and toes. Knees and toes.

Sing the song again, but speed it up. Try it a third time, extra slow or even faster.

### Spanish Lyrics

Cabeza, hombros, rodillas, y pies. Rodillas, y pies.  
Cabeza, hombros, rodillas, y pies. Rodillas, y pies.  
Ojos y, orejas y, boca, y nariz.  
Cabeza, hombros, rodillas, y pies. Rodillas, y pies.

- **Debrief:** Ask parents and caregivers what they notice. *How does this action rhyme benefit your child? What times of day might you do this action rhyme with your child? Why?*

⇒ **Take It Further—*From Head to Toe/De la cabeza a los pies* by Eric Carle:** Read aloud this fun picture book, available in English and Spanish, which invites children to move their body parts like animals.

## 2c. Activity: Point and Talk Around the Room

Age Group: Infant/Toddler  
15 minutes

**Materials:** Cut out photos from magazines or other photos showing diverse families at various activities such as eating a meal, celebrating, having a picnic, playing music, etc.; interesting objects such as plastic alphabet letters

- **Prepare:** Place interesting and detailed photographs or pictures around the room at tables or on the walls, low enough for toddlers to see. Include culturally diverse families engaged in celebrating a holiday, walking in the park, having fun at the playground, eating a meal, playing music, etc. Or place the photographs, along with interesting objects, including plastic alphabet letters, on low tables around the room.
- **Introduce:** *When you go on outings with your child, do you point to and talk about the people, things, and signs that you see? Having conversations about the things you see teaches children about the world around them and helps them learn new words.*
- **Model:** Ask for a toddler to be your helper. The parent or caregiver can help, too! Together, walk to a photograph or an object on a table. Point to it. You might say: *Look, I see a family.* As you point to each person in the photo say: *I see a mom, a dad, a grandpa, and a baby. Who else do you see? What is the family doing? I see a guitar (point). Who is playing the guitar? Do you see any other instruments the family is playing? Show me. Do you and your family play music at home?*
- **Point and Talk:** Have parents and caregivers move around the room with their toddlers and infants, stopping to look at, point to, and discuss the pictures and/or objects. *Look, here's a letter B. That's the first letter in your name, Briana! Do you see any other letters? Show me.* Emphasize that pointing helps babies interpret words that represent objects.
- **Debrief:**
  - Ask parents and caregivers what they noticed. *What are some strategies you used to focus your child's attention and engage him or her in conversation?*
  - *How does the activity benefit your child?*
  - *How could you do an activity like this on a walk through the neighborhood, at the grocery store, or on a bus ride?*

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## 3. COUNT, GROUP, AND COMPARE

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1  
2 3

*Becoming good at math begins long before a child enters school. Each one of us is born to be a “math person.” Even babies can do simple math, such as noticing amounts and patterns. Toddlers love learning math concepts and games, such as comparing sizes and shapes. These concepts help them make sense of the world. You can help your child learn math as you play and talk together during everyday moments. By building on their natural skills and interests, you will be boosting their brain development and preparing them to do well in school.*

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### Ice Breaker: Big and Small

5 minutes

Ask toddlers and grown-ups to stand. Recite the following rhyme as you do the actions. Invite participants to do them with you. Caregivers can also do the movements with their infants.

I can make myself really BIG	(stand up on toes)
By standing up straight and tall	
But when I’m tired of being BIG	
I can make myself get real small.	(bend your knees and stoop down)

*Great work! What did you do with your body to make it big? What did you do to make it small?*

*Note: Italics are used to indicate sample comments. Feel free to use your own words to adapt them.*

### 3a. Activity: Counting Songs and Games

Age Group: Infant/Toddler  
15 minutes

**Materials:** Phone, mp3 player, or other device for playing music (optional)

- **Introduce:** *Singing to or with your child is a great way to introduce numbers, even before your child understands what numbers mean or knows how to count. Songs that count a baby's fingers and toes are a great place to start. In addition to teaching numbers, they help babies become aware of their bodies.*
- **Ten Little Fingers:** *Let's start with a favorite song. Watch as I do it, then we'll do it together a second time. Remember to capture your baby's attention before you begin singing. (Note: Depending on your group, do this in English, Spanish, or both.)*

Don't know the tune? To watch José-Luis Orozco sing this counting song in Spanish and English, visit: <http://bit.ly/2FCOdSV>.

#### Ten Little Fingers

Two little hands, ten little fingers, (wave your two hands back and forth)  
Two little hands, ten little fingers,  
Two little hands, ten little fingers,  
Count them all with me. (wave your two hands back and forth)

One, two, three little fingers, (hold up 1, then 2, then 3 fingers)  
Four, five, six little fingers (hold up 4, then 5, then 6 fingers)  
Seven, eight, nine little fingers, (hold up 7, then 8, then 9 fingers)  
And one more makes ten. (hold up all 10 fingers and wave both hands back and forth)

#### Diez Deditos

Dos manitas, diez deditos,  
dos manitas, diez deditos,  
dos manitas, diez deditos,  
cuéntalos conmigo.

Uno, dos, tres deditos,  
cuatro, cinco, seis deditos,  
siete, ocho, nueve deditos,  
y uno más son diez.

### 3a. Activity: Counting Songs and Games (cont'd)

- **This Little Piggy:** *Have you ever played the finger game, "This Little Piggy?" Let's turn it into a counting game! Hold up your right hand with your palm facing in toward your face. Watch as I demonstrate. Then we'll do it together.* Grown-ups can recite this to their child using their own hand or they can use their child's hand.

This little piggy went to market.	(softly squeeze pinky and say, "That's one!")
This little piggy stayed home.	(softly squeeze a 2nd finger and say, "That's two!")
This little piggy had roast beef (or substitute another favorite food).	(softly squeeze a 3rd finger and say, "That's three!")
This little piggy had none.	(softly squeeze a 4th finger and say, "That's four!")
This little piggy cried "Wee, wee, wee,"	(gently slide pointer finger down side of finger and up side of thumb)
all the way home!	(softly squeeze thumb and say, "That's five!")

*We are going to do this one more time. This time, kids, you say the number each time a grown-up squeezes one of your fingers.*

- **Toddler Action Song—Five Little Monkeys:** *Do you know the action song, "Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed?" Watch as I demonstrate. Then let's do it together. Kids, if you know the words, sing along. Remember to say NO MORE MONKEYS JUMPING ON THE BED in a BIG voice.*

#### **Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed**

Five little monkeys jumping on the bed	(hold up hand with palm facing away from you)
One fell off and bumped his head	(hold up one finger and rub your head with other hand)
Mama called the doctor and the doctor said	(hold hand up to ear to mimic talking on the phone)
NO MORE MONKEYS JUMPING ON THE BED.	(wag pointer finger from side to side)

Four little monkeys jumping on the bed	(hold up hand with thumb down)
One fell off and bumped his head	(hold up one finger and rub your head with other hand)
Mama called the doctor and the doctor said	(hold hand up to ear to mimic talking on the phone)
NO MORE MONKEYS JUMPING ON THE BED.	(hold hand up to ear to mimic talking on the phone)

(Repeat with three little monkeys, two little monkeys, and one little monkey.)

- **Debrief:**
  - *These are just three of many counting games and songs. What other counting games and songs do you sing and play with your children?*
  - *What time of day do you think you might do these with your child? How do you think counting games and songs benefit your child?*
  - *How is "Five Little Monkeys" different from "Diez Deditos" and "This Little Piggy?" What math skills does "Five Little Monkeys" teach (counting backward, subtraction)?*

### 3b. Activity: Building Blocks

Age Group: Infant/Toddler  
20 minutes

**Materials:** Blocks in various shapes and sizes (as well as other items suitable for stacking, such as plastic cups); chart paper, markers

- **Introduce:** *You can help your child become a problem-solver by using “math talk” during your day. You use “math talk” when you count the steps as you climb the stairs, measure ingredients in the kitchen, or compare things that are big and little. Today we’re going to practice using math talk while we play with blocks, which offer opportunities to use many different kinds of math talk.*
- **Get Ready:** Distribute the blocks (and any other stacking items you have brought) to the children, so they can start to start to build and play with them.
- **Group Brainstorm:** Engage the parents and caregivers in brainstorming ways to use math talk while playing with blocks, recording their ideas on chart paper. *How might you incorporate math talk while your child plays with blocks? What are some words you could use?* Help the group come up with a list that includes multiple categories of math words. Categories include size (big/little/short/tall/skinny/wide), shape (square/curved/straight), color (red/yellow/darker/lighter), and position (over/under/next to/on top of/through). Caregivers and children can also count their blocks, and compare groups that have “more” or “fewer” items.
- **Build Away:** Have caregivers join their children, and challenge them to find ways to incorporate the math words that the group came up with (leave the list posted on the wall so they can refer to it). Infants and younger toddlers will have fun exploring the blocks and trying to stack one or two. Older toddlers will enjoy seeing how high they can stack the blocks. Circulate and point out good uses of math talk. You can also model ways that caregivers can respond to and build on their child’s interests and experimentation.
- **Debrief:**
  - *What did you notice about using math talk? Was it easy or hard?*
  - *How will your child benefit?*
  - *Can you think of ways to incorporate “math talk” into your everyday routine with your child? What are some examples?*
- ⇒ **Take It Further—Block Patterns:** Have participants put blocks or other items in a pattern. *Big block, big block, little block; big block, big block, what’s next? Or, red Lego, blue Lego, red Lego; red Lego, blue Lego, what’s next?*

### 3c. Activity: Color Sort

Age Group: Older Toddler/Preschool  
20 minutes

**Materials:** One set of red, blue, and yellow colored paper for each parent or caregiver; blocks and Legos of different colors, shapes, and sizes

- **Introduce:** *There's so much more to math than numbers and counting. Sorting is an important early math skill. When children sort, they understand that things are alike and different and that objects can be organized into groups. In other words, they **group** and **compare**. It helps them make sense of the world.*
- **Get Ready:** Distribute large sheets of red, blue, and yellow colored paper to grown-ups, as well as red, blue, and yellow blocks and Legos. You can add other red, blue, and yellow objects as well. Ask the grown-ups to arrange the colored sheets in a row in front of them. *We are going to sort our objects by color.* Hold up a red sheet of colored paper and say to the toddlers, *This is the color red. Who can tell me what this color is? Yes, it's red.* Repeat the process with the colors blue and yellow.
- **Model:** *I'm going to sort my objects by color. I'm going to put all my red objects on my red paper, all my blue objects on my blue paper, and all my yellow objects on my yellow paper. I'll show you.* Hold up a red object and ask, *What color is this? Yes, it's red. I'm going to put it here on the red paper.* Repeat with a blue and a yellow object.
- **Your Turn:** *Now it's your turn! Sort your blocks. Put your red blocks on the red paper, your blue blocks on the blue paper, and your yellow block on the yellow paper.*
- **Debrief:**
  - Congratulate children on their sorting skills. Ask parents and caregivers what time of day they might do a color sort with their child. *How could you adapt this activity to fit your day? What other things could you sort?*
  - *How could you use these same objects to talk about math ideas with younger children?* For example, letting babies explore objects of different shapes and textures and talking about the differences.
  - Suggest that families go on color walks, looking for red, blue, and yellow things in their neighborhood. Or try a shape walk: look for circles, squares, and triangles.
- ⇒ **Take It Further—Shape and Size Sorts:** Sort objects by shape (circle/square) or size (little/big). Have toddlers organize blocks from the biggest to the smallest.

## 4. EXPLORE THROUGH MOVEMENT AND PLAY



*There are many different kinds of play: imaginative and pretend play, creative activities such as drawing, all sorts of games, and physical play, such as rolling a ball or dancing. Movement and play are good for children’s bodies and brains. Movement and play keep children healthy and build their coordination and strength. Children also explore and learn about the world through movement and play. Each stage of development comes with new opportunities for learning. An infant might explore by touching, grasping, banging something, or crawling. A toddler might explore by walking or climbing. Young children are like scientists—curious and excited to learn about their surroundings. See where your child’s curiosity takes them, and build on their interests.*

### Ice Breaker: Shake Your Sillies Out

10 minutes

**Materials:** Phone, mp3 player, or other device for playing music

Sing or play the song, “Shake My Sillies Out” by Raffi. To hear Raffi sing the song, visit: <https://bit.ly/2T8bVOg>. Invite participants to stand up and shake their sillies out! Parents and caregivers can hold their infants as they wiggle their waggles away.

#### Shake My Sillies Out

I've gotta shake, shake, shake my sillies out  
Shake, shake, shake my sillies out  
Shake, shake, shake my sillies out  
And wiggle my waggles away

I've gotta clap, clap, clap my crazies out  
Clap, clap, clap my crazies out  
Clap, clap, clap my crazies out  
And wiggle my waggles away

I've gotta jump, jump, jump my jiggles out  
Jump, jump, jump my jiggles out  
Jump, jump, jump my jiggles out  
And wiggle my waggles away

I've gotta yawn, yawn, yawn my sleepies out  
Yawn, yawn, yawn my sleepies out  
Yawn, yawn, yawn my sleepies out  
And wiggle my waggles away

I've gotta shake, shake, shake my sillies out  
Shake, shake, shake my sillies out  
Shake, shake, shake my sillies out  
And wiggle my waggles away  
And wiggle my waggles away

## 4a. Activity: Get Moving

Age Group: Infant/Toddler  
15 minutes

**Materials:** Baby doll or teddy bear for demonstrating action rhymes (optional); [\*Jonathan and His Mommy\*](#) by Irene Smalls (optional)

- **Introduce:** *Babies and toddlers love rhymes. They are a great way to connect with infants and help them become aware of their bodies. For toddlers, action rhymes are a fun way to develop coordination and to practice remembering and following directions.*
- **Get Ready:** Have caregivers with infants sit on the floor, with their knees bent and the soles of their feet on the floor. Have them lay their babies down with their backs resting on their thighs so adults are looking directly at their babies' faces. Participants can support their backs against a wall. Caregivers with toddler can stand and do the actions alongside their children.
- **Model:** Teach one or both of the action rhymes below. Chant each line of the rhyme and demonstrate the motions. You could use a doll or teddy bear for this. Show caregivers with infants how to adapt the actions for their babies.
- **Two Little Feet Go Tap**

Two little feet go tap, tap, tap.	(tap feet)
Two little hands go clap, clap, clap.	(clap hands)
A quick little leap up from my chair,	(stand up from chair)
Two little arms reach high in the air.	(stretch arms)
Two little feet go jump, jump, jump.	(jump)
Two little hands go thump, thump, thump.	(pound fists)
One little body turns round and round.	(turn around)
One little child sits quietly down.	(sit down)
- **Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear**

Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn around	(turn around)
Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch the ground.	(touch the ground)
Teddy bear, teddy bear, tie your shoe.	(pretend to tie shoe)
Teddy bear, teddy bear, I love you!	(give yourself a hug)
Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn out the light.	(pretend to turn out light)
Teddy bear, teddy bear, say "Good night!"	(blow a kiss)
- **All Together:** Repeat the action rhyme, inviting participants to do it with their babies and toddlers.
- **Debrief:** *How did your child respond? How do they benefit from this type of activity?*
- ⇒ **Take It Further—Read Aloud Role Play:** Read *Jonathan and His Mommy* by Irene Smalls, inviting participants to act out the various ways that mom and son move through their neighborhood.

## 4b. Activity: Yoga for Infants and Toddlers

Age Group: Infant/Toddler  
15 minutes

**Materials:** [\*Yoga Bug: Simple Poses for Little Ones\*](#) by Sarah Jane Hinder (optional); [\*Good Morning Yoga: A Pose-by-Pose Wake Up Story\*](#) or [\*Good Night Yoga: A Pose-by-Pose Bedtime Story\*](#) by Mariam Gates (optional)

Below is a sequence of yoga postures for infants and toddlers. Teach the infant yoga activity first and have parents and caregivers practice with their infants while you do the Yoga Bug activities with toddlers and their caregivers.

- **Introduce:** *Yoga helps build strength, flexibility, coordination, and balance. It also helps us to focus, relax, and sleep better. We are going to do some fun yoga moves together, starting with the infants.*
- **Infant Yoga: Criss-Cross**
  - *Sit on the floor with your knees slightly bent.*
  - *Rest your baby gently on his or her back along your thighs.*
  - *Cross your baby's legs at the tummy, alternating legs so that one, then the other, crosses over the top.*
  - *Smile and talk to your baby as you do the activity. Practice and notice your baby's responses while I do some yoga moves with the older kids.*
- **Toddler Yoga: Buzz Like a Bee:** Have toddlers and grown-ups sit on the floor. Begin with belly breathing, and then do one or both of the following Yoga Bug poses.
  - *What sound does a bee make? Bzzzzzzzz. We are going to buzz like bees when we breathe.*
  - *Sit cross-legged like me.*
  - *Stretch your arms out wide.*
  - *Take a big breath in through your nose. Smell the flowers!*
  - *Breathe out. Make a humming sound like a bumblebee!*
  - Repeat three times.
- **Toddler Yoga: Be a Butterfly**
  - *Have you ever seen a butterfly flap its wings? Show me how they flap their wings. (Flap your arms up and down.) Now we are going to flap our knees like a butterfly!*
  - *Sit nice and tall.*
  - *Bring the bottom (soles) of your feet together like this.*
  - *Hold your feet with your hands like this.*
  - *Now gently flap your knees up and down like the wings of a butterfly!*

**Note:** *Italics* are used to indicate sample comments. Feel free to use your own words to adapt them.

- **Toddler Yoga: Be a Grasshopper**

- *Have you ever seen a grasshopper? Did you notice how their back legs are always bent? We are going to bend and twist our legs like grasshoppers!*
- *Sit up. Place your feet flat on the floor in front of you and bend your knees.*
- *Place your hands flat on the floor behind you.*
- *Lift your right leg off the floor and place your right foot so it crosses your left thigh like this. Your right knee will stick out to the side.*
- *Reach across your body with your right arm.*
- Repeat on the other side.

⇒ **Take It Further—Yoga Books:** Bee, Butterfly, and Grasshopper are yoga poses from the board book *Yoga Bug: Simple Poses for Little Ones* by Sarah Jane Hinder. Read the book aloud and try all the buggy yoga poses. Or read aloud from *Good Morning Yoga: A Pose-by-Pose Wake Up Story* or *Good Night Yoga: A Pose-by-Pose Bedtime Story* by Mariam Gates and do some of the poses with toddlers and caregivers.

- **Debrief:**

- *What did you notice about these yoga moves? Did you notice that in Criss-Cross (infant yoga) and Grasshopper, kids cross their hands or feet to the other side of their body? This is called crossing the midline. Crossing the midline is a very important skill that helps children learn to crawl and to walk, and later on to read and to write.*
- *How do children benefit from these yoga moves? When might be a good time to do them?*
- *These are activities that you can do **inside** with your children. What are some activities that you do **outside** with your children?* Ask participants to turn and talk to a partner and share their ideas. Toddlers can share too.

## 4c. Activity: Dancing and Drawing to Music

Age Group: Toddler  
20 minutes

**Materials:** Phone, mp3 player, or other device for playing music; a selection of colored streamers or scarves; chart paper and drawing supplies (optional)

- **Prepare:** Select two pieces of music. One piece should be slow and soothing. Try a classical song, like “[Clair de Lune](#)” by Claude Debussy, or a soothing selection from the album [Marc Anthony for Babies](#), such as “[Tu Amor Me Hace Bien](#)” or “[No Me Ames](#).” The other piece should be a fast, energetic song, like “[Happy](#)” by Pharrell Williams.
- **Introduce:** *Dancing is a delightful way to engage the senses, encourage creativity, and build coordination. Moving to different types of music also builds listening skills and self-control.*
- **Get Ready:** Invite each caregiver and child to choose at least one streamer or scarf.
- **Slow Music Dance:** Play the slow song you have chosen. Encourage participants to move to the rhythm and mood of the music. They can make patterns and shapes in the air with their streamers.
- **Fast Music Dance:** Change the tempo and have participants move to the sounds of high-energy music. Again, encourage participants to move their bodies and streamers or scarves to the mood of the music.
- **Switch It Up:** Switch the tempo a few more times, from slow, to fast, to slow again.
- **Debrief:** Complement caregivers and children on their moves!
  - *How did you feel while you were listening and dancing to the slow music? What about the fast music? What else did you notice?*
  - *How do you think your children benefit from this activity? What time of day would be a good time to do this activity with your children?*
- ⇒ **Try This—Musical Murals:** Have participants draw to slow and fast music. Tape large pieces of chart paper to a table or the wall. Play a slow, soothing piece of music. Encourage participants to choose colors that they feel go with the music and to draw to the sound of the music. Then do the same thing with a faster, higher-energy song. Talk about how the two murals are the same or different.

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## 5. READ AND DISCUSS STORIES

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*It is never too early to begin reading to your child—even babies enjoy it and benefit! Reading aloud from the very beginning is one of the most important things you can do to prepare your child to do well in school. Reading and talking to your child about the story builds their language skills and sparks their imagination. Reading, looking at books, or sharing stories is also a special time to snuggle up and connect. Reading together creates bonds and cherished lasting memories for parents and children. Read aloud every single day and, as you do, talk about what you read with your child.*

### Ice Breaker: One Word

10 minutes

- Have participants think about their experiences of reading aloud with their children. What is one word that best describes their experience? Participants can also think back on their experiences being read to when they were a child. You may want to add that the one word can range from “cozy” to “difficult.”
- Give participants time to think. Then have them share their one word with the group.
- If you have time, invite participants to talk about their one-word choices and to describe their experiences reading aloud with their children in more detail.
  - *What time of day do you read to your infant or toddler?*
  - *What do you do to make the experience warm, pleasant, and fun?*
  - *What are some challenges or barriers you encounter that we can address today?*

## 5a. Activity: Interactive Read Aloud

Age Group: Infant/Toddler  
20 minutes

**Materials:** A read aloud book, props (optional)

- **Introduce:** *How you read aloud to your child is just as important as **what** you read. I'm going to read aloud one of my favorite children's books and demonstrate strategies that you can use to capture your child's attention and interest.*
- **Set a Listening Focus:** *Grown-ups, as I read I want you to notice what I do **before, during, and after reading** and how your child responds.*
- **Before Reading:** You may want to use props to engage your audience. For example, if you are reading [\*Llama, Llama, Red Pajama\*](#) by Anna Dewdney, you might dress in something red or hold a llama stuffed animal. Hold up the book cover so that everyone can see it. Share your enthusiasm about the book. *I just LOVE this book. I'm so excited to read it with all of you! I found out about it from the Basics Read and Discuss Stories video.* Point to the title and author as you read them aloud. Then point to something on the cover to talk about. *Look, this is a baby llama! What is Baby Llama wearing? What color are Baby Llama's pajamas? And look (pointing), what is Baby Llama holding in his arms? Do you think Baby Llama wants to go to sleep? Let's read the book and find out!*
- **As You Read:** Read slowly, with expression. If you are reading a rhyming book like *Llama, Llama, Red Pajama*, have fun reading the words with lots of rhythm.
  - ✓ **Use different voices** for each character and **change your tone** to match the characters' emotions.
  - ✓ **Use facial expressions and gestures** to show emotions and act out action words (e.g., fret, whimpers, moans, pouts). You can encourage participants to act them out, too.
  - ✓ **Use sound effects.** For example, when Baby Llama hums a tune, hum a quick tune. When a phone rings, make a ringing noise.
- **Pause, Point, and Talk:** As you read, pause to ask questions about the story and to point to and talk about the pictures. *What are Baby Llama and Mama Llama doing? They are reading a story, just like us! Do you think Mama Llama will come back soon?*
- **After Reading:** Talk about the book. *How does Baby Llama feel when Mama Llama leaves? How does Baby Llama feel when Mama Llama comes back? How do you feel at bedtime? Do you want a good night kiss, like Baby Llama?*
- **Debrief:** Ask **kids** if they liked the story. *Would you like to read this story at home?* Ask **grown-ups:** *What did you notice about the way I read the story? What did I do to engage you **before reading**? **During reading**? **After reading**? Did you notice any strategies that you do when you read to your child? Which ones? Which strategy would you like to try next time you read to your child? What other strategies have you used that you didn't notice me doing? How would you read with an infant?*

Note: *Italics* are used to indicate sample comments. Feel free to use your own words to adapt them.

## 5b. Activity: Reading Aloud with Your Child

Age Group: Infant/Toddler  
20 minutes

**Materials:** : A variety of board books and picture books,<sup>1</sup> pillows or other items to make cozy reading spots

- **Prepare:** This activity builds on the previous activity, “Interactive Read Aloud” (page 23). In this activity, participants will choose a book to read to their child, using one or more of the read-aloud strategies modeled during “Interactive Read Aloud.”
- **Introduce:** *Now we are going to practice using the read-aloud strategies we’ve talked about (this refers to the “Interactive Read Aloud” activity on the previous pages).*
- **Choose a Book:** *Grown-ups, each of you is going to choose a book to read or talk about with your child.* Give participants time to make their choices. If the group is large, you may want to organize into smaller groups and give each group a selection of books to choose from. You may also want to recommend board books that are especially good to read with infants.
- **Choose a Spot:** Point out cozy reading spots around the room (you may also want to assign spots to save time). Encourage grown-ups to quickly browse through the book and choose at least one read-aloud strategy that they haven’t used before. *What read-aloud strategy or strategies will you use before, during, and after reading to make the book come alive for your child?*
- **Read:** Circle around the room, noticing the before, during, and after read-aloud strategies participants are using. Also observe children’s responses. Show parents and caregivers of infants how they can let their baby hold the book and turn the pages. If you sense that some grown-ups are uncomfortable reading aloud or cannot read, encourage them to describe and talk about the pictures with their child. They can still use most of the read-aloud strategies covered earlier.
- **Debrief:** Share some of your observations. Praise grown-ups for specific read-aloud strategies that you noticed. Praise toddlers for being good listeners and any other positive behavior you observed.
  - Ask toddlers: *Did you like reading with your grown-up? What did you like best about it?*
  - Ask grown-ups: *Which new read-aloud strategies did you try before reading? During reading? After reading? What did you notice? Which strategies would you like to try at home?*
  - *What time of day do you usually read to your kids? What other times of day could you read with your kids?* Encourage participants to regularly keep a book or two in their bags so they can read while waiting for appointments, on the bus or train, and so on. Also encourage participants to visit the local library and look for story time hours. Remind participants that reading a book is a good activity during transition times or to help kids settle down before naptime or bedtime.

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<sup>1</sup> Consider story books, informational books, and concept books (ABCs, numbers, colors), and books with flaps or textures. Feature diverse cultures and families. You will need at least one book per person.

## 5c. Activity: My Sticker Story

Age Group: Toddler  
20 minutes

**Materials:** Stickers and/or pictures cut out from magazines that show diverse families engaged in various activities, animals, and interesting objects; chart paper; tape; drawing supplies

- **Introduce:** *Not all stories come from books. Telling stories to and making up stories with your child are great ways to help them develop their imagination and language skills. We are going to use some things toddlers love—stickers and photos—as inspiration for our own stories!*
- **Get Ready:** Have caregivers and toddlers pair up and sit at tables or on the floor. Give each pair a piece of chart paper and some drawing supplies. Then distribute stickers and/or pictures cut out from magazines that include culturally diverse families, animals, and interesting objects.
- **Model:** Ask participants to watch as you demonstrate. *Think of a place where you and your child like to spend time. It could be the park, playground, zoo, or any other place that you enjoy. My story is going to be about a family spending the afternoon at the zoo. Kick off your story by placing a sticker on the chart paper or taping up a picture from a magazine (e.g., a picture of a family). Once upon a time, there was a family having fun at the zoo. Here they are. Now it's the kids' turn to add to the story. Kids, what happens next? What animals are they going to see?* You can draw animals in response to their suggestions, or add more pictures or stickers to flesh out the scene.
- **You Try:** Invite pairs to create their own stories. Adults and children can take turns drawing or adding stickers and pictures. If a child has trouble adding to the story, you can model ways for the adult to engage them in conversation. For example, instead of asking, “What happens next?” caregivers can ask, “What do you think is he/she doing at the zoo?” They can point to and talk about their drawings or stickers. For example, “What animals do you want to see at the zoo? A tiger? Let’s draw one together.” Toddlers will scribble randomly, which is fine.
- **Debrief:** Congratulate parents and toddlers on their stories. Share some of your observations.
  - Ask toddlers: *Did you like creating a story? Would you like to do this activity at home?*
  - Ask grown-ups: *What time of day do you think you might do this activity with your child? What are some strategies you used to focus their attention and engage them in conversation?*
  - *How does creating a story help build language skills? What other benefits does this type of activity have (for example, it helps develop listening and cooperation skills)?*
- ⇒ **Take It Further—Sharing Your Story:** Have participants share their stories with each other. They can also share the strategies they used to engage their child. If time allows, have participants take pictures of each other holding their artwork.

