

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Skill-Building Activities

for Groups of Parents and Caregivers



The Basics™

Fun, Simple, and Powerful!



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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

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 individuals who facilitate workshops and group sessions for parents and caregivers of infants and toddlers (it is also relevant for those with older children). After you have introduced participants to the five principles and shared why they matter, use activities from this guide to foster peer-to-peer learning and hands-on practice. If your group will include caregivers along with their children, see *Skill-Building Activities for Groups of Caregivers and Their Infants/Toddlers* in [The Basics Community Toolkit](#).

A Menu of Activities

For each of the five Basics Principles, you will find one icebreaker and three group 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, and your timeframe. Modify the activities as needed; and please share your ideas with us at info@thebasics.org.

Tips

- **Settings.** Consider a variety of settings where you could integrate these activities, particularly times and places where parents and caregivers already come together, such as parent breakfasts, workshops, or other family engagement events.
- **Introducing The Basics Principles.** Give some thought to how you will introduce The Basics Principles before diving into the activities. Make sure participants 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](#) or your community's local Basics website is also a good way to set the stage.
- **Adapting activities for participants with children of different ages.** The activities in this document are designed to model practices that parents and caregivers can use at home with their children from birth to age three. Some are geared more for infants, some for toddlers. All caregivers can benefit from practicing the core principles addressed in each activity, regardless of their children's ages. However, when you debrief following an activity, spend some time helping participants consider ways they might adapt the activities for use with their children.
- **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 Basics 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.*

1. MAXIMIZE LOVE, MANAGE STRESS



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.

Ice Breaker: Stand Up! Sit Down!

5 minutes

Begin with all participants sitting down. Give the following instructions (or create others) to help participants get to know each other and discover what they have in common.

- ✓ If you have a child under the age of three, stand up.
- ✓ If you have more than one child, sit down.
- ✓ If it was hard to get here today, stand up.
- ✓ If you speak a language other than English, sit down.
- ✓ If you felt stressed out 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: What's the Weather Like Inside of You?¹

10 minutes

- **Introduce:** *The first step in managing stress—for both adults and children—is to name and understand how we are feeling in the moment. We're going to do an exercise to explore how we are feeling right now.*
- **Visualize:** Ask participants to close their eyes. Offer prompts to help them paint a mental picture of how they feel. *How are you feeling inside? Are you feeling sunny? Cloudy? Stormy? Breezy? Rainy? Warm? Hot? Cold? Imagine you are painting a picture of how you feel. What colors will you use? What details will you include?* Give participants time to relax, tune-in to their feelings, and visualize their weather pictures.
- **Turn and Talk:** Invite participants to turn to a person sitting next to them and share what they noticed. Have them describe, in detail, the weather picture they imagined.
- **Share Out:** Invite volunteers to share their feelings and their weather pictures with the group.
- **Debrief:**
 - Explain that the goal of this activity is to recognize and accept the way we feel, *not* to change the way we feel. The way we feel can affect our children. Even young infants are affected by our emotions.
 - Encourage participants to pause during the day to do a “weather check” to recognize how they are feeling. *When would be a good time to do a “weather check”? How might this benefit you or your child?* Participants may want to try this exercise with their school-age children, too.
- ⇒ **Try This—Before and After:** Do a “weather check” at the beginning of your group session and then again at the end, so participants have an opportunity to compare their feelings at two points in time.

¹ This activity is adapted from *Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and Their Parents)* by Eline Snel. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2013.

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

1b. Activity: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5: Breathe

10 minutes

Materials: Chart paper, markers

- **Introduce:** *What can we do when we are feeling stressed, when the storm clouds are building inside of us? Science tells us that pausing to belly breathe is an effective way to calm down and reduce stress and anxiety.*
- **Count Breaths:**
 - Have participants sit with their backs straight. Let them know that during the breathing exercise, they might find it helpful to rest their hands on their belly so they can feel it expand when they inhale and deflate when they exhale. You can demonstrate for a round or two of inhales and exhales.
 - *Take a slow, deep breath through your nose. Expand your belly as you inhale, and hold it for a few seconds.*
 - *Exhale slowly through your mouth and count “one” silently to yourself.*
 - *Take another deep breath. Hold it in your belly. Exhale slowly through your mouth and count “two.”*
 - Repeat up to five deep breaths (on the third breath, count “three,” etc.).
 - Repeat the cycle together one or two more times.
- **Debrief:**
 - Ask participants to sit for a moment and just notice how they feel. Then ask: *Do you notice any difference in the way you feel? What else do you notice?*
 - *What times of day would it be helpful to do this breathing exercise?* Emphasize that pausing to breathe can help us cope with stressful moments. And it can be done anywhere! You may want to share how you use this strategy during your day.
 - *What other strategies can you use to keep calm in stressful situations?* Use the chart paper to record participants’ responses. Emphasize that *our goal is not to be stress-free. That’s impossible! Our goal is to find ways to cope with and get through stressful times.*

1c. Activity: Sharing Routines

20 minutes

Materials: Chart paper, markers, picture book that models a loving routine such as *Kiss Good Night* by Amy Hest or *Peekaboo Bedtime* by Rachel Isadora (optional)

- **Introduce:** *Daily routines help young children feel safe and know what to expect. Consistent daily routines and schedules also help parents and caregivers 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? Why? We are going to tap the wisdom in this room and share daily routines that have helped our children feel safe and loved.*
- **Model:** Begin by sharing a favorite daily routine that has worked for you (or a family you serve). Be sure to include when and where you did the routine and details about each step. After the demonstration, ask: *How do you think a child would benefit from this routine? What steps show love? What steps help a child feel safe? How do you think caregivers would benefit from this routine?* You may also want to share how you modified the routine in response to the child's reactions. What worked? What didn't work?
- **Turn and Talk:** Have participants turn to a person sitting next to them and share a favorite daily routine. Pairs should designate one person to be the speaker and one to be the listener. Have the speaking partner share answers to the following questions: *Where and at what time do you do this routine? What are the steps of the routine?* Ask the listening partner to identify how the child might benefit from the routine and how the parent or caregiver might benefit. Then have partners switch roles.
- **Share Out:** Invite volunteers to share their routines and the time of day they use them with the whole group. Chart the responses. *Does anyone see a routine they want to try at home?*
- **Debrief:**
 - Talk about how the steps of a good daily routine show children how much we love them (e.g., a goodnight 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.
 - Emphasize the importance of sticking with a routine once you find one that works. *As your baby or toddler grows, modify the routine to fit his or her developing skills and needs.*
- ⇒ **Take It Further—Bedtime Read Alouds:** Read aloud a favorite picture book that models a loving routine (e.g., bedtime routine or making dinner). As you read, ask participants to notice and name each step of the routine and how the child in the book responds to it. *What steps show love for the child? What steps help the child feel safe and secure? How might the caregiver benefit?*

2. TALK, SING, AND POINT



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: Sing a Round

5 minutes

Singing a round is a great way to build community and make beautiful sounds together. The classic “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” works very well for rounds.

Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream

- Organize participants in small groups. Each group will sing the song two full times.
- Instruct the first group to start singing.
- After the first group sings the first line (“Row, row, row your boat...”), signal the second group to start in while the first group moves onto the second line (“Gently down the stream...”).
- Continue to have the groups join in until everyone is singing.
- Each group should stop singing after they have completed the song for the second time.

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

2a. Activity: Share Fingerplays, Songs, and Lullabies

15 minutes

- **Introduce:** *Children love to sing and listen to music and rhymes. When you sing and recite rhymes to your baby or with your toddler, you are bonding with them and helping them develop attention, language, and social skills. In this activity, we are going to share and teach each other our favorite songs, fingerplays, and lullabies.*
- **Model:** Choose a favorite song, fingerplay, or lullaby. Explain why it's a favorite. Share what time of day you sing or recite it (e.g., bedtime, mealtime, bath time, changing diapers, etc.). Then teach the song, lullaby, or fingerplay to the group. Explain how the fingerplay, song, or lullaby benefits young children.
- **Partner Share:** Organize the group into partners. Have each partner teach a favorite song, fingerplay, or lullaby. Encourage participants to use the language they feel most comfortable with. Participants should explain what time of day they sing the song or do the fingerplay and how it benefits them and their child.
- **Debrief:**
 - Ask participants to notice and share how they feel when they are singing to and with their child. *How does your child respond when you sing?* Emphasize that singing songs and reciting rhymes are fun ways to connect with young children, and to help them hear the sounds in words and to learn new words.
 - The joy of singing and music also helps us manage stress. *Did you ever hum while you were doing a tedious task? Or smile when you heard your favorite song on the radio? Make singing and music a part of your day!*

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

2b. Activity: Rhymes for Important Times

20 minutes

Materials: Chart paper, markers

- **Introduce:** Suggest to participants that they can make up their own rhymes and chants to help with transitions, and to teach their children important daily routines. *Putting words to actions is a great way to help children build language and understand sequence—what comes first, next, and last. And babies and toddlers naturally like and pay attention to rhymes.*
- **Model:** Lead the group in making up a bath time rhyme. Chant a first line, such as *Soapy Samantha in the tub*. Invite participants to add a second line that rhymes with the first (e.g., *Rub-a-dub-rub-a-dub-rub-a-dub-dub*). Or try a mealtime chant. *Eat, eat, eat your lunch. Eat it up today. /After you eat your lunch, we'll go out and play.*
- **Create a Rhyme:** Organize participants in small groups of three or four. Give each group one or two sheets of chart paper and some colored markers. Have each group create at least one short rhyming chant for a transition time or daily routine. Ask groups to write their chants on chart paper and post their charts on a wall. If there is time, some groups may want to illustrate their charts.
- **Gallery Walk:** Invite groups to travel around the room, silently reading all the charts. Then ask groups, one by one, to stand by their chart and recite their rhyming chant together. When they are done, ask: *What time of day would you recite this rhyming chant with your child? How do you think this chant could benefit you and your child?*
- **Debrief:** Congratulate participants on their creativity! Ask if participants want to try any of the rhyming chants at home with their infants or toddlers. You could ask:
 - *How do you think these chants would help with daily routines?*
 - *Would using these chants affect your relationship with your child?*
 - *What will your child learn from rhymes and chants?*

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

2c. Activity: Which Would You Rather Be?

15 minutes

Materials: Chart paper (optional), markers (optional)

- **Introduce:** *Asking questions and having conversations with your toddler are terrific ways to build language and thinking skills. In fact, science shows that having back-and-forth conversations with babies and toddlers is one of the most important factors for language development. And talking with your child is a great way to find out fascinating, and sometimes hilarious, information about them!*
- **Model:** *Raise your hand to answer this question: Which would you rather be: a dog or a cat? Call on a volunteer. Repeat his or her answer. So, you'd rather be a dog than a cat. Encourage the participant to elaborate on the answer. Why would you rather be a dog? What kind of dog would you like to be? What would you do if you were a dog?*
- **Partner Share:** Organize participants into pairs. Have each participant think of a "Which would you rather be?" question they would like to ask their child. Then have partners pose their questions to each other. Encourage the asking partner to repeat their partner's answers and to ask follow-up questions that encourage elaboration. Partners should ask each other at least three follow-up questions.
- **Share Out:** If there's time, invite partners to share some of their "Which Would You Rather Be" questions with the group. You may want to record the questions on chart paper.
- **Debrief:** Ask questions such as:
 - *What did you notice about this activity? Was it fun? What did you learn about your partner?*
 - *What time of day do you think you might do this activity with your child? (It's a great way to pass time on the bus or when you're waiting for an appointment.) How do you think it would benefit your child?*
 - *How can you have back-and-forth exchanges with babies or toddlers who don't talk yet or who only say a few words? How do they communicate with you? How do they answer questions? How can you respond to keep the back-and-forth going? Remember, children typically understand many more words than they are able to say. You might want to record responses on chart paper.*
 - Encourage participants to think of other ways they could enhance the activity. For example, parents and caregivers can **point** to pictures, animals, or objects to clarify the meaning of their questions. Emphasize that pointing helps babies interpret words that represent objects.

3. COUNT, GROUP, AND COMPARE

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.

Ice Breaker: Concentric Circles

10 minutes

- Have participants arrange themselves in an inside circle and an outside circle, with the inside circle facing out, to form face-to-face pairs.
- Pose a question, such as, *How many children (or siblings) do you have?* Ask the face-to-face pairs to discuss their answers.
- Then ask the **inside circle** to move clockwise, forming new pairs. Pose another question for the new pairs to discuss, such as, *How do you feel about math?*
- Repeat the process. Ask a few more questions that help participants see how they are the same or different. Here are some examples:
 - *How far did you travel to get here today? Which of you traveled farther to get here today?*
 - *When is your birthday? Whose birthday is coming up first?*
 - *What time do you start your day? Are you a morning person or a night owl?*

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

3a. Activity: Counting Songs and Games

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 and rhymes 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. It's also a great opportunity to look into their eyes and connect face-to-face.*
- **Ten Little Fingers:** *Let's start with a favorite song called "Ten Little Fingers."* See lyrics below in both English and Spanish.

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. (make a fist with each hand)

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 6, then 7, then 8 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.

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

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

- **This Little Piggy:** *Have you ever played the finger game, "This Little Piggy," with your child? Let's do it together, and turn it into a counting game! Everyone, hold up your right hand with your palm facing in toward your face. Watch as I demonstrate. Then do it with me.*

This little piggy went to market.	(softly squeeze pinky and say "That's one!")
This little piggy stayed home.	(softly squeeze a 2nd finger 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 move pointer finger down side of finger and up side of thumb)
all the way home!	(softly squeeze thumb and say "That's five!")

When you do this at home with your toddlers, have them recite the rhyme with you. Pause when you get to the number and encourage your child to chime in "That's one"!

- **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.*

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: Mystery Bag—Sort It Out

20 minutes

Materials:

Paper, pens/pencils, chart paper, markers

Materials for Mystery Bags

- Paper lunch bags (one for each small group of two, three, or four participants, depending on total size of group)
- An assortment of small objects to sort by shape, size, color, etc. for each bag, such as Legos, magic markers, crayons, toy cars and other vehicles, buttons, plastic spoons, pencils, paper clips, cotton balls, etc.

- **Prepare:** Fill each Mystery Bag with an assortment of objects. You can put the same objects in each bag or vary the contents depending on what you have on-hand.
- **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**. Sorting helps children make sense of their world. Let's do a fun sorting activity that shows how many ways there are to sort.*
- **Get Ready:** Distribute Mystery Bags to pairs or small groups. Pass out paper and pencils or pens.
- **Dump and Sort:** Have participants dump out their bags. Then have them work together to sort the objects in different ways, such as color, shape, size, texture, things we use to write, things that have wheels, etc. Ask participants to describe and record all their different sorts on the paper.
- **Share Out—Many Ways to Sort:** Call on each group to share all the different ways they sorted the objects. Record responses on chart paper. If a sort category (e.g., color) is repeated, put a checkmark next to it.
- **Debrief:**
 - Together, review the chart. *How many different ways did we find to sort the objects? What were the most common ways to sort? What kinds of words did we use when sorting (for example, words to describe the features of the objects, spatial words)?*
 - Point out that this is a good activity to do with toddlers as well as school-age children. *What types of sorting activities could you do using everyday objects?* Record ideas on chart paper. Emphasize that toddlers can sort blocks, Legos, toys, and other household objects by color, size, and shape.
 - *How could you use these same objects to talk about math ideas with younger children?* Babies will enjoy touching and examining objects of different sizes, shapes, colors, and textures. While they concentrate on and explore an object, you can describe its features and compare it to other objects. Use words like “soft,” “hard,” “smooth,” “rough,” “big,” “small,” etc.

3c. Activity: Math Talk All Day Long

30 minutes

Materials: Chart paper, markers

- **Introduce:** *You can help your child become a problem-solver by using “math talk” during your day. Your normal routine is full of fun opportunities to talk math. You use “math talk” when you count the steps as you climb the stairs, tap and count the beats in a song, measure how many cups of flour you use to make cookies, compare things that are big and little, and sort laundry. We are going to work in small groups (or pairs) to create role plays of daily scenarios where we can use “math talk” with our kids.*
- **Assign Activities:** Organize participants into small groups or pairs. Assign each group one of the following everyday activities.
 - ✓ Mealtime
 - ✓ Bath time
 - ✓ Laundry
 - ✓ Grocery shopping
 - ✓ A walk around the neighborhood
- **Brainstorm Scenarios:** Provide chart paper and markers to each group or pair. Have each group spend a few minutes brainstorming different ways to use “math talk” during their assigned everyday activity. Then have them choose one scenario and work together to create a role play that shows how to incorporate “math talk.” Have one participant play the parent or caregiver and another play the child. Groups with three or four participants can add another adult or child to the scenario.
- **Act It Out:** Invite small groups or pairs to enact their “math talk” scenarios. Ask them to begin by identifying the setting and time of day. After the role play, have the audience identify the different types of math they observed (e.g., counting, measuring, comparing, grouping, sorting, patterns, shapes, etc.).
- **Debrief:** Invite participants to reflect on what they learned from creating and observing the role plays. What other ideas do they have for weaving “math talk” into their everyday activities? Emphasize that “math talk” doesn’t take any extra time and does not require any materials. It’s simply adding talk that helps children describe what they see and do using math.
- ⇒ **Try This—Math Talk Posters:** If participants are hesitant to role play, have small groups or partners brainstorm different ways to use “math talk” during the assigned activity or time of day. Groups can create posters of specific examples of math talk in order to encourage and remind parents and caregivers to use math talk with their children during the day. Display the posters and invite participants to walk around the room and read each poster. Convene the group and ask questions to prompt discussion: *What did you notice about the posters? What different types of math activities did you see? Did you see an idea you would like to try at home with your child?*

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: Ball-Toss Name Game

10 minutes

Materials: Ball

- **Version 1**
 - Have participants stand in a circle. Go around the circle and have each person introduce him or herself.
 - Call someone's name and toss the ball to them. Instruct them to say, "Thank you (your name)."
 - Then have the recipient call out another person's name and toss the ball to that person. The new recipient will say, "Thank you (name)" to the person who tossed the ball to him or her.
 - Repeat the process until everyone has been tossed the ball once. Tell participants to remember the name of the person who they tossed the ball to, as well as the name of the person who tossed the ball to them.
 - Have the group toss the ball around the circle in the original order again. Make sure people throw the ball to the same person they did the first time around, continuing to state that person's name. Recipients should thank, by name, the person who tossed them the ball.
- **Version 2**
 - You may prefer a different ball-toss game. Throw a ball to a participant in the circle. Ask him or her one of the following questions:
 - ✓ What kind of sport or physical activity did you like to do as a child?
 - ✓ What kind of sport or physical activity do you like to do now?
 - ✓ What is a type of play that your child enjoys?
 - ✓ What is something that interests your child?
 - After the recipient answers the question, have him or her toss the ball to another person in the circle, who will answer the same question. Repeat until everyone has had a turn.

4a. Activity: Yoga

15 minutes

- **Introduce:** *Yoga helps build strength, flexibility, coordination, and balance. It also helps us to focus, to relax, and to de-stress. We are going to do some yoga, beginning with belly or deep breathing.*
- **Deep Breathing**
 - Have participants sit comfortably on the floor or in chairs with both feet on the ground.
 - *Place your right hand on your chest and your left hand on your belly.*
 - *Inhale through your nostrils, and feel your breath expand your chest, then your belly.*
 - *Exhale, deflating first the belly and then the chest.*
 - Repeat 3-5 times, gradually deepening the breath.
- **Left-Right Twist**
 - *Stand with your feet wide apart and parallel to each other.*
 - *Inhale as you bring your arms up and extend them to the side (at shoulder level).*
 - *Exhale as you twist your body and bring your left hand down as close to your right foot as you can.*
 - *Inhale as you un-twist your body upward again, arms extended to the sides.*
 - *Exhale as you twist your body and bring your right hand as close to your left foot as you can.*
 - Repeat one more time on each side.
 - Repeat once more on each side, this time holding the posture for a few seconds, reaching the opposite arm up toward the ceiling.
- ⇒ **Take It Further—SuperBrain Yoga:** *Doing this simple exercise for 3-5 minutes a day may help you focus and improve your concentration.*
 - Ask participants to stand straight with their hands at their side. First model, then have participants do the activity with you.
 - *Bring your left hand across your chest and grab your right ear lobe.*
 - *Bring your right hand across your chest and grab your left ear lobe.*
 - *Inhale as you bend your knees, still holding your earlobes.*
 - *Exhale as you straighten your knees and stand back up again.*
 - Repeat several times.
- **Debrief:**
 - *How do you feel after doing those movements? What did you notice about these yoga movements? Did you notice that they required you to cross your hands or feet to the other side of your 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.*
 - *What time of day could you do yoga with your child? In what ways do you think your child could benefit from simple yoga? How might you engage a baby in simple movement? How could you make yoga more fun for your child? (Tickle their imagination by naming yoga postures after animals and even bugs!)*

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

4b. Activity: Action Charades

20 minutes

Materials: One or two paper or plastic bags, strips of paper with action words

- **Prepare:** Make a list of action words you think would work well for this activity. Write each action word on a strip of paper. Put the strips in a bag. Action words can include: skip, stretch, hop, spin, tie a shoe, wash hair, etc.
 - **Introduce:** Ask participants if they have ever played charades. *Did you play with adults or with kids?* Explain that you are going to play a type of charades that is great to play with older toddlers or preschoolers.
 - **Model:** Hold up the bag with the action words inside. *I'm going to pick a word from the bag and act it out. Can you guess what I'm doing?* Pick a word from the bag and, without speaking, act it out in front of the group. Invite participants to guess what you are doing.
 - **Your Turn:** Invite a participant to pick a word from the bag and act it out. Repeat until everyone has a chance to act out a word.
 - **Debrief:**
 - Congratulate participants on a great game of charades. Ask them what all of the words have in common. *They each describe an action. How would your child benefit from playing this kind of game? How could you adapt it for younger children (e.g., show them a picture to act out or tell them a word to act out). Young children will also enjoy acting like different animals. When and where could you play this type of game? What other types of guessing games could you play with your child?*
 - Emphasize that action charades activates children's bodies **and** their minds. It not only gets them moving, it also helps them name and describe actions which is a powerful way to learn and use new words.
- ⇒ **Try This—Team Up:** If you want to add some healthy competition to the game, divide the group into two teams. Make duplicate sets of cards. Which team can correctly guess all the action words first?

4c. Activity: Musical Murals

20 minutes

Materials: Phone, mp3 player, or other device for playing music; 2-4 large sheets of mural-sized paper (e.g., chart paper); tape; markers and crayons

- **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. Depending on the size of your group, tape two or four large, mural-sized pieces of paper to a wall or to the floor.
 - **Introduce:** *Drawing to and dancing to music are delightful ways to engage the senses, to encourage creativity, and to build coordination. Switching between slow and fast music also develops listening skills and self-control.*
 - **Get Ready:** Divide participants into small groups. Each group will create two murals, so will need two pieces of mural paper. Position groups of participants in front of their mural paper and distribute coloring supplies.
 - **Slow Music Murals:** Play the slow song you have chosen. Encourage participants to choose colors that they feel go with the music and to draw to the sound of the music. Each group will draw together on one sheet of paper to create a mural.
 - **Fast Music Murals:** Stop the music and ask participants to move to the second piece of mural paper. Change the tempo and invite participants to create a second mural to the sounds of high-energy music. Again, encourage participants to choose colors that go with the music and to draw to the sound of the music.
 - **Debrief:**
 - Display the murals and congratulate the artists on their creations. Ask questions such as: *What do you notice about the slow music murals? The fast music murals? How are they alike? How are they different?*
 - *How did you feel while you were listening and drawing to the music? What else did you notice?*
 - *Would you do this activity with your children? How do you think your children would benefit? What time of day would be a good time to do this activity with your children?* Let participants know that toddlers will scribble randomly, and that’s fine. They are developing coordination and the understanding that objects can be represented on paper.
- ⇒ **Try This—Individual Drawings:** Instead of creating group murals, you can give each participant two 8.5” x 11” pieces of paper for creating their own drawings.

5. READ AND DISCUSS STORIES



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

30 minutes

Materials: A book to read aloud, props (optional), chart paper, markers

- **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 interest and encourage your child to interact with the pictures and the words.*
- **Turn and Talk:** *Before I begin reading, turn to the person sitting next to you and share something you do or could do to capture your child's curiosity and interest as you read aloud.*
- **Set a Listening Focus:** *As I read, notice what I do **before, during, and after reading**. What do I do that captures your curiosity and engages you in the words, story, and pictures?*
- **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 red or hold a stuffed animal llama. Hold up the book cover so that everyone can see it and share your enthusiasm for 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 emotion of the characters.
 - ✓ **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 the 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. Ask questions such as: *How does Baby Llama feel when Mama Llama leaves? How does Baby Llama feel when Mama Llama comes back? Does the story remind you of your child's bedtime? In what ways? Would you want to read this story with your infant or toddler? Why or why not?*
- **Turn and Talk:** *What did you notice about the way I read the story? What did I do **before, during, and after** reading to engage you and keep you interested?* Have participants turn and talk to a partner. Encourage partners to jot down their observations.

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

- **Share and Chart:** Invite partners to share what they noticed. Write their observations on a chart entitled “Read-Aloud Tips.” Use the headings “Before,” “During,” and “After” reading.
- **Debrief:**
 - *Which strategies did you notice that you do when you read aloud to your child?*
 - *Which strategy would you like to try next time you read aloud to your child? What do you like about the strategy? What other strategies have you used that you didn’t notice me doing?*
 - *How might you adapt what I did to read with an infant?*
 - You can also talk about what you like about the read aloud book and why you chose it.
- ⇒ **Take It Further—Picture Walk:** *You don’t need to read all the words on the page, or even any—there is a lot to talk about in the pictures. When you do a picture walk, you flip through the pages of a book and point to the illustrations without reading the words. You can talk about colors, shapes, and what the characters are doing.* Demonstrate pointing to and talking about the illustrations with the first few pages of a board book that is appropriate for infants. Emphasize that doing a picture walk is an especially good approach when reading with an infant.

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

5b. Activity: Read to Each Other

20 minutes

Materials: A variety of board books and picture books², Read and Discuss Stories tip sheet downloaded from [The Basics Community Toolkit](#) (optional)

- **Prepare:** This activity builds on the previous activity, “Interactive Read Aloud” (pages 21 and 22). In this activity, participants will choose a book to read to a partner, 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). Each of you is going to choose a book and read it to a partner, actively engaging them as if they were your child.*
- **Choose a Book:** *Choose a book that you think would interest your child.* Give participants time to make their choice. You may want to organize the group into smaller groups and give each group a selection of books to choose from. If you sense that some parents or caregivers are uncomfortable reading aloud or cannot read, you may want to create small groups, with a reader in each group. You may also want to pair or group participants who speak the same home language.
- **Ready, Set, . . . :** Before reading the book aloud, give participants time to read the book to themselves and to plan how they will read the book aloud. Encourage them to look at the Read-Aloud Tips Chart from the previous “Interactive Read Aloud” activity and choose at least one strategy they haven’t used before. Alternatively, you could have them choose a strategy from the Read and Discuss Stories tip sheet downloaded from The Basics Community Toolkit. Ask: *What read-aloud strategy or strategies will you use **before reading?** **During reading?** **After reading?*** When participants are ready, have pairs choose which partner will read aloud first. Encourage partners to find a spot where they can comfortably read aloud to each other.
- **Read:** Once participants are settled, signal the first partner to begin the read aloud. Remind them to try to use at least one new strategy before, during, or after reading. When the first partner is done reading, encourage pairs to talk about the story. Then have the partners switch roles. If time is limited, suggest that the second reading partner do a picture walk instead of reading aloud.
- **Partner Share:** Have partners discuss their read-aloud strategies with each other. Which strategies helped bring the story alive?

² 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.

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

- **Debrief:**

- Have participants share their read-aloud experiences with the group. What new strategies did they try? Were they effective? Why or why not? Which strategies would they like to try at home when reading aloud to their infants or toddlers?
- Ask participants what times they like to read with their children. Encourage participants to 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 to the local library and look for story time hours. Remind caregivers that reading a book is a good activity during transition times or to help kids settle down before naptime or bedtime.

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

5c. Activity: Once Upon a Time—Group Story

15 minutes

- **Introduce:** *Not all stories come from books. We are going to work together as a group to create our own story!*
- **Once Upon a Time:** Begin a story with one sentence, such as: *Once upon a time, there was a little shaggy dog who couldn't find his way home.* Invite the person next to you to add a sentence that tells what happens next in the story, or that adds and describes characters. Keep going around the circle until the group decides that the story is over.
- **Debrief:** Ask participants how they felt about the activity.
 - *What did you notice? Would you like to do this activity at home with your family? Why or why not?*
 - *What could you do to modify the activity to make it more fun for your family? Suggest adding sound effects, hand gestures, and facial expressions. You could also start the storytelling with a prop, such as a stuffed animal!*
 - *How could you adapt it for younger children? (Make up a story to tell them; tell stories inspired by family photographs, pictures in magazines, or your own drawings.)*

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