

Especially for practitioners working with infants!

Nursery Rhymes for Play and Learning

Sound Awareness

What is the practice?

Nursery rhymes that include repetitious sounds accompanied by adult hand movements often have tremendous child entertainment value! Rhymes can be used to provide infants opportunities to listen to and hear sounds that are similar and different.

What does the practice look like?

Infant nursery rhymes are short, nonsensical poems that entertain the child and have long been used to introduce infants to the world of sounds. They encourage a child's active involvement in getting you to repeat the rhymes. Infant nursery rhymes inspire a child to try to do part of the hand movements himself and to make sounds and try to repeat words that he hears.

How do you do the practice?

Here are a few nursery rhymes that any child will find fun and enjoyable. Pick a nursery rhyme that you think will capture the child's interest. Nursery rhymes are best played when you and the child are facing one another.

Bumble Bee, Bumble Bee

Bumble bee, bumble bee,
Straight from the farm. (Move your index finger in circles and "make it fly" toward your child.)
Bumble bee, bumble bee, (Repeat the index finger movements)
Flies under your arm. (Tickle the child under the arm while making a bee sound).

Little Fishes

Little fishes in a brook.
(Make hands move like fish.)
Baby caught them with a hook.
(Pretend to hook a fish on a fishing rod.)
Fry them, fry them in a pan.
(Pretend to make a frying motion.)
Eat the fish as fast as you can.
(Pretend to eat the "fish.")

Rock a Bye Baby

Rock a bye baby on a tree top.
(Cradle the baby in your arms.)
When the wind blows, the cradle will rock.
(Rock the baby back and forth.)
When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall.
(Gently put the baby on a sofa or bed.)
And down will come baby, cradle and all.
(Tickle or kiss the child after placing him down.)



How do you know the practice worked?

- Is the child particularly attentive to the different hand movements?
- Does he anticipate the "punch line" in the nursery rhyme?
- Does he squeal and get excited as part of hearing the nursery rhyme?

Take a look at more fun with nursery rhymes

Your Turn/My Turn

Nine-month-old Chloe is sitting on the floor facing her caregiver, Greg. Greg asks Chloe if she wants to play Bumble Bee. Chloe immediately starts moving her hands and fingers in a back-and-forth motion. Bumble Bee is a nursery-rhyme game Greg has played with Chloe for many months. He knows her parents use it at home with her as well. Greg recites the words of the nursery rhyme while using his index fingers to simulate the movements of some bees. While reciting the last verse of the rhyme, he tickles Chloe under her arms while saying “Buzzzz!” Chloe smiles and laughs. Greg says, “It’s Chloe’s turn.” Chloe tries to make bee movements and sounds as Greg recites the nursery rhyme. She tries to tickle Greg while saying something that sounds like a bee sound. The back-and-forth your-turn/my-turn game is played over and over.



Gone Fishin’

Six-month-old Ethan is sitting in his bouncy chair while his mom is making him some lunch. His home visitor, Louisa, teaches Ethan’s big sister, Andi, to entertain Ethan with Little Fishes. “Does Ethan want to hear Little Fishes?” Andi asks. Louisa encourages Ethan’s mom and sister to do nursery rhymes with him regularly. Ethan smiles and starts slapping his seat’s tray. Louisa starts the nursery rhyme and puts her hands around Ethan’s to make a back-and-forth motion to simulate a fish swimming. Andi and Mom join in with the words. When Louisa says “Ethan caught them with a hook” she pretends to catch a fish, which Ethan tries to imitate. Soon she comes to the last verse of the nursery rhyme. Both she and Ethan pretend to eat the fish by putting their hands up to their mouths and making “eating” sounds.

Do It Again!

Ten-month-old Ananda has limited mobility and has difficulties making the kinds of physical movements that are part of nursery rhymes. Ananda’s early interventionist has helped Ananda’s mom find a way for Ananda to participate in nursery rhyme play. They have collected a number of stuffed animals that recite nursery rhymes when they are touched or squeezed. Mom shows Ananda one of the animals that Ananda has learned to “activate” to hear the nursery rhyme. As the nursery rhyme is playing, Mom makes the movements associated with the nursery rhyme for Ananda. Mom waits for Ananda to “tell her” she wants to hear the nursery rhyme again by vocalizing or trying to reach for the stuffed animal.

