

Especially for practitioners working with toddlers! 

Fingerplays and Rhymes with a Punch

 *Sound and Phonemic Awareness*

For most toddlers, exploring the world of language while moving their fingers, arms, and whole bodies, is motivating and exciting. Fingerplays and action rhymes provide opportunities for young children to combine fun with language exploration. These entertaining activities enhance a toddler's word skill and vocabulary, both of which are important for emergent literacy.

What is the practice?

Fingerplays and action rhymes are very brief stories that may rhyme and that include finger or body motions. Fingerplays and action rhymes help toddlers learn about rhyming and poetry. They provide opportunities for listening and speaking, and encourage the coordination of words with movements.

What does the practice look like?

Lots of toddlers like to say or sing rhymes while using their fingers, hands, or bodies to "act it out." Everytime they do this, they are doing a fingerplay or action rhyme. A toddler singing and doing the motions to "Eensy Weensy Spider" is an example of a fingerplay.



How do you do the practice?

Fingerplays and action rhymes can be done frequently, offering toddlers the opportunity to have fun playing with language and moving their bodies. Depending on which fingerplay or action rhyme is being done, toddlers can perform them in many locations. In a car, at a bus stop, in the yard, or on a walk are just some of the places you can engage a toddler in fingerplays and action rhymes. They can be done while waiting for a table at a restaurant, watching a brother's soccer game, or with friends when they come over. Fingerplays allow squirming toddlers to become active when they are required to sit and wait. There are resources on the Internet for fingerplays and action rhymes. If you feel the urge to make one up, do so.

- Fingerplays and action rhymes can be about any subject that interests a young toddler. They can be about animals, trains, food, or anything else. The sillier and more fun they are, the more the toddler will enjoy doing the rhyme over and over.
- If the fingerplay or action rhyme is a new one, demonstrate it with excitement. It does not matter if you get it right. Your excitement will capture the toddler's attention.
- Repeat the fingerplay or action rhyme slowly, helping the child make the finger or hand movements.
- You can lead or demonstrate the fingerplay or action rhyme a couple of times. Then, encourage the toddler to do the rhyme with you if he has not already begun to do so.
- Let him lead the fingerplay or action rhyme as much as possible, even if he makes mistakes. Let him direct the rhyme and watch how proud he is.

Adding new fingerplays or action rhymes is always fun for the toddler, but do not forget the old favorites. Using children's favorites over and over is important for toddler learning. Therefore, try to play previously learned fingerplays or action rhymes along with the new ones.

Homes

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

Where Is Thumbkin?

(Start with hands behind back.)
Where is Thumbkin? Where is Thumbkin?
Here I am. (Bring right hand to front, with thumb up.)
Here I am. (Bring left hand to front, with thumb up.)
How are you this morning? Very well, I thank you. (Wiggle thumbs as if they are "talking" to each other.)
Run away. (Hide right hand behind back.)
Run away. (Hide left hand behind back.)
(Repeat rhyme with each finger: "pointer," "tall man," "ring man," and "pinkie.")

How do you know the practice worked?

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

Take a look at more fingerplays and action rhymes

Fingers on the Move

Dora, an early childhood specialist, consults in a classroom of 2-year-olds. She sees a teacher with a group of three children in the free play area looking a little lost. With permission from the teacher, Dora suggests playing a new game. As she starts wiggling her fingers, Dora asks the children if they like to play games with their fingers. The toddlers start wiggling their fingers too. She puts her hands behind her back and starts singing "Where Is Thumbkin?" She brings out her thumbs when it is time. As she does this fingerplay, two of the toddlers pick up the idea and start doing the motions. When they finish, the children want to do it again. As they start the fingerplay over, Dora helps them get their fingers moving in the correct ways.



Join Us!

Jay's home visitor comes to visit him and his mom weekly. At 20 months of age, Jay enjoys spending his time running, being chased, and using his body. Jay also has a sister who is 3 years old and just as active. One summer day when she arrives, the home visitor watches them running around in the yard. She suggests that their mother teach the children some action rhymes. Mom knows Ring Around the Rosies, so they decide to try it. The children keep on chasing each other around. Their mom suspects that if she asks them to stop they will just get more energized. The home visitor and Mom decide to just start doing the activity by themselves. The two children notice by the second time the adults go through the rhyme. Both Jay and his sister come over to see what they are doing and join in the action rhyme.

Even More Fun!

Luke has cerebral palsy, which sometimes makes it hard for him to get his fingers to make all of the motions for some fingerplays. Still, he very much likes to do them. His mom knows the importance of fingerplays in encouraging the development of language and rhyming. With Luke's home visitor, Mom modifies the finger motions so that Luke can do them. For Eensy-Weensy Spider, instead of touching each finger together, Luke and his mom just touch their hands together as they raise their arms. They bring down their arms when they say "Down came the rain." They swing their arms in front of them when they say "And washed the spider out." With "Out came the sun and dried up all the rain," they lift their arms high in a circle. Next, with "The eensy-weensy spider climbed up the spout again," they touch their hands together as they lift them up high.

