



**Communication/
Language**

Exploring Sounds

Option 1 (OO) A young infant listens to a song while being gently rocked in a caregiver’s arms.

Option 2 (OO) An infant listens to a song while being gently rocked in a caregiver’s arms or rocking alongside a caregiver.



Cognitive

Exploring Objects

Option 1 (OO) An infant participates with a caregiver in open-ended play with two similar toys of different sizes.

Option 2 (OO) An older infant engages in guided play with different sizes of stacking rings.



Self-Regulation

Paying Attention

Option 1 (OO) A young infant focuses on a caregiver’s finger actions during a rhyme.

Option 2 (OO) An infant focuses on a silly rhyme with corresponding finger actions.



Social-Emotional

Interacting with Others

Option 1 (OO) A young infant participates in open-ended play with a familiar toy while a caregiver sits close by.

Option 2 (OO) An older infant participates in independent open-ended play with toys within view of a caregiver.



Physical/Health

Moving Our Bodies

Option 1 (OO) A young infant practices reaching for a ball.

Option 2 (IG) Infants with early mobility participate in a guided activity of getting a ball.

Option 3 (IG) Older infants practice rolling a ball.

(OO)=One-to-One, (IG)=Informal Gathering



Birth–12 Months

Option 1 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Receptive language

Expressive language

Awareness of differences
in sounds

A young infant listens to a song while being gently rocked in a caregiver's arms.



Key Concepts

Song

Listen



Materials Needed

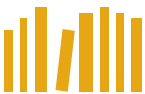
None



Also Promotes

Physical/Health

Cognitive



Optional Reading

Row, Row, Row Your Boat by
Annie Kubler

Be Prepared: Be familiar with the lyrics and tune of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

BEGIN: [*Hold the infant in your arms with his/her head well supported in the bend of your arm, ensuring the infant can clearly see you. Smile and make eye contact.*]

I have a song to sing with you! We will move a little bit while I sing our song.

Our song is about a boat going down a stream. You can listen to me sing the words. We can move together during the song.

ACT: [*Make eye contact with the infant and sing the song slowly. Gently rock your body back and forth or from side to side with the infant securely in your arms.*]

Watch the infant's reactions. Rock slower, or not at all, if the infant shows signs of distress.

After one round of the song, pause and describe the infant's reactions. Example: “You are smiling and cooing! I think you like listening and moving to this song.”

If the infant remains engaged, repeat the song once or twice with rocking movement.]

RECAP: [*Describe what happened. Example: “I sang a song about a boat. You listened to the words of the song. You smiled when we swayed back and forth. Thank you for letting me sing with you!”*]

Birth–12 Months

Option 2 One-to-One



Skill and Goal
Receptive language
Expressive language
Awareness of differences in sounds

An infant listens to a song while being gently rocked in a caregiver's arms or rocking alongside a caregiver.



Key Concepts

Song
Move



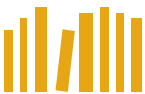
Materials Needed

None



Also Promotes

Cognitive
Physical/Health



Optional Reading

Row, Row, Row Your Boat by Annie Kubler

Invite an infant to sit close to you or on your lap for a song. Explain that you are going to sing a song and we can move our bodies to the song. The song is about a boat floating on water. Demonstrate moving your upper body from side to side. Example: "Sometimes floating on water can feel like this."

With one arm around an infant sitting next to you or both arms around an infant sitting on your lap, sing one round of the song slowly while gently swaying your upper body. Watch the infant's reactions carefully and move slower or stop if the infant shows distress. After one round of the song with movement, pause and describe the infant's reactions. Example: "You are moving your head back and forth. I think you want to sing the song again!"

If the infant remains engaged, invite him/her to participate in a second round of the song. An infant sitting next to you might like to sway his/her body independently, without your arm around him/her. Sing the song again and gently sway your upper body, encouraging an infant sitting next to you to follow along. Infants may want to repeat the song and movement several times.

Recognize the infant's participation in the experience. Example: "You smiled while I sang our song. We moved our bodies from side to side. Thank you for helping me have fun with our song!"

What to Look For—Options 1–2

The activity options encourage a responsive and enjoyable song experience with an infant. In addition to hearing words and a tune, the infant experiences a corresponding body movement that will require some muscle accommodations. Most infants will enjoy the experience and likely ask for a repeat. Many infants may be familiar with the song, but may not have had the experience of body movements paired with the words.

Pay attention to an infant's muscle tension during the activity. Tightened muscles may mean the infant is not comfortable with the body movement. Reduce or stop your swaying actions, as suggested in activity plans. The song has benefit without the body movement.

Most infants will not have a mental image of a boat moving on water or understand most of the words in the song. The lyrics include phrases that make sense mostly to adults, such as "life is but a dream." The activity can be meaningful to an infant at a more general level, helping develop awareness of the concept of a song having words and a tune and sometimes movement of part of our body.

More Scaffolding Tips—Options 1–2

Extra support ■ Offer a gently swaying body movement first. You could say “sway” each time you move your body. Then offer the swaying movements with the song. ■ Humming the tune may help an infant pay attention to differences in sound.

Enrichment ■ For an older infant, show and describe in your own words selected pictures in the Optional Reading book.



Interest Area

Materials Needed: two large boxes or laundry baskets

Place the boxes in an open area for infants to explore during floor time. Sing songs that incorporate boxes, such as pretending the box is a bus and singing “Wheels on the Bus.” Infants who can crawl or walk may enjoy climbing in and out of the boxes, crawling or walking around the boxes, or putting toys in and taking toys out. Describe infants’ actions with the boxes.



Family Child Care

Materials Needed: several toy boats, water table

Older children will connect with the boat and rowing elements of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.” Invite older toddlers and preschool-age children to gently sway their bodies back and forth during the song. Older children may sing some of the familiar words with you. After the song, invite several older children to explore the toy boats in the water table. You may wish to softly sing the song while the children play.



Birth–12 Months

Option 1 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Object inquiry skills

An infant participates with a caregiver in open-ended play with two similar toys of different sizes.



Key Concepts

Big
Small



Materials Needed

2 soft toys (see Be Prepared)



Also Promotes

Physical/Health
Communication/Language

Be Prepared: This activity is for an infant who can sit independently or with support. Secure two similar soft toys that clearly differ in size. The activity plan uses a large bear and a small bear.

Invite an infant to sit next to you on the floor. Hold the larger soft toy where the infant can see it. Speak clearly as you describe the toy and point to features you describe. Example: “This is a big bear. Here are the bear’s eyes. Here is the bear’s nose.”

Encourage the infant to touch or hold the toy. Wait and observe the infant’s reaction to the toy. Describe his/her actions. The infant may hug or pat the bear, put part of the bear to his/her mouth, and/or shake the toy.

Next, show the infant the smaller bear. Explain: “This is a small bear.” Describe and point to the small bear’s characteristics. Example: “Here are the small bear’s eyes. Here is the small bear’s nose.” Hold the small bear within the infant’s reach. If the infant is still holding the big bear, he/she may drop the big bear to hold the small bear or attempt to hold both bears.

Support the infant’s play with one or both toys. Generally, infants are interested in pretend actions that represent familiar routines, such as feeding or sleeping. Engage in parallel play with a bear or serve as a helpmate for the infant’s play with one or both bears. There will be an opportunity for you to hold a bear if the infant drops the big bear or hands a bear to you. Use the bear to participate in the play. Example: If the infant hands a bear to you, ask “Do you want me to play with the bear?” and wait for a nonverbal response, such as a look.

Describe the infant’s actions with the toy(s). Also describe your actions. Example: “I am holding the small bear. I give her food. Yum, yum. The small bear likes this food.” Describe characteristics of a toy that the infant is touching or looking at. Example: “Denari, you are touching the bear’s nose. Now you are putting the bear’s nose next to your nose!”

As part of the infant’s play, point out differences between the two bears when appropriate. Examples: “You have the small bear. I have the big bear.” “Do you want to play with the big bear now?” Use gestures to help communicate your meaning.

You might conclude your participation in the play by indicating it is time for your bear to go to sleep. Example: “Small bear is tired. Night night bear.” Lay the bear on the floor and pat it with your hand.



Option 1 continued What to Look For—Option 1

This activity extends prior curriculum support for helping infants notice differences between objects, such as the Block 21 activity in which an infant is offered a choice between two toys. In the current activity, look for ways to point out differences between the two toys without turning the play into a teaching situation. Example: As part of the infant's interactions with the toys, there may be an opportunity to hold the two bears side by side to emphasize their differences in size. But avoid imposing this comparison on the infant's interests and actions.

More generally, watch for ways to support the infant's interests in the toy(s). Focus your attention on actions or toy characteristics that occupy the infant's attention. You may find a way to incorporate play with the bears into the infant's other interests. Example: If the infant crawls to a mirror, bring the toy bears to the mirror and playfully reintroduce the bears. If the infant ignores the toy bears, simply put the bears aside and focus on what the infant wants to do.

 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1

Extra support ■ Assist the infant with challenging manipulations of the toys, such as trying to hold or hug both bears at the same time. ■ Acknowledge the infant's vocalizations.

Enrichment ■ Point to a bear's nose and ask "Where is your nose?" ■ While the infant is looking at you, point to your eyes and to the bear's eyes. Explain: "My eyes. The bear's eyes." ■ If an infant shows strong interest in a specific feature of a toy bear, such as its nose or ears, point out the difference in size of the feature on the two bears.



Birth–12 Months

Option 2 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Object inquiry skills

An older infant engages in guided play with different sizes of stacking rings.



Key Concepts

Ring
On
Off
Big
Small



Materials Needed

Stacking rings toy



Also Promotes

Physical/Health
Communication/Language

Invite an infant to join you on the floor to play with stacking rings. Sit facing the infant and place the assembled stacking rings toy in front of the infant. Point to and name the rings, including the size differences. Example: “This is a ring. We have many rings. Some rings are big. Some rings are small.” With hand gestures and a supportive facial expression, encourage the infant to remove the rings from the post. Emphasize that the infant is taking the rings off of the post.



Provide a minute or two for the infant to manipulate the rings, if interested. Then explain that you will line up the rings. Arrange the rings in a line with the largest ring on the infant’s left side. The smallest ring will be the last in the line, on the far right. Describe what you are doing. After the rings are in a line, point to the largest ring and explain it is a big ring. Point to the smallest ring and explain it is a small ring.

Point to the largest ring and invite the infant to put it back on the post. Pause for the infant to respond. If the infant seems unclear about what to do, carefully put the largest ring on the post. Then remove it from the post so the infant can place the largest ring on the post. Emphasize that the infant is putting a ring on the post.

Encourage the infant to continue putting rings on the post, using the order in which they are placed on the floor. Offer guidance, if appropriate, by simply pointing to which ring goes on next. Emphasize again that the infant is putting rings on the post.

It is not necessary for the infant to place all rings on the post. Enthusiastically acknowledge the infant’s efforts. Example: “Hurray for you, Max! You took all the rings off, and you put the big ring back on the post!”

👁️ What to Look For—Option 2

The activity provides a focused approach to supporting an infant’s awareness of differences in the size of objects. Although a stacking rings toy is familiar to most infants, specific size differences are not obvious to many infants. The activity is more challenging than prior ELM activities on this topic, and should be offered to an older infant. In addition to intended cognitive benefits, the activity supports the fine motor skills involved in manipulating the rings.

Option 2 continued

Because we read and write in English from the left side to the right, it is helpful for the infant to see objects arranged by size lined up in the same fashion. The activity is not intended to focus on specific differences in ring sizes. The visual display, from largest to smallest, is sufficient at this age. As infants become more familiar with the rings, their attention to size differences will increase.

Some infants may welcome your help in identifying the order of rings to be put on the post. You could take turns with the infant in putting a ring on the post. Other infants may be fine with your arrangement of rings by size on the floor and proceed in their own way. You may wish to simply observe. The common stacking rings toy has a post that is wider at the bottom. The rings will only fit onto the post in the correct order. This provides a self-correcting element for a child. There are stacking ring toys with a uniform-sized rod, allowing a child to stack rings out of order. This type of post supports mostly a fine motor skill, with minimal attention to size.

 **More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2**

Extra support ■ In the opening segment of the activity, remove the first ring from the spool if the infant seems uncertain about your request to remove the rings. ■ A small encouragement to “put on one more” may help an infant to persist. Avoid coaxing an infant to finish and positively recognize any efforts.

Enrichment ■ Repeat the activity if the infant shows strong interest. This time, invite the infant to find the biggest and smallest rings as part of your lining up the rings by size.

 **Interest Area**

Materials Needed: small toys, unbreakable jar, texture mat, pairs of toys made of different materials, open ball, cloth squares—such as a washcloth, silk fabric, denim, or corduroy

Place a few small toys inside an unbreakable jar. Infants who crawl will be pleased to find a toy inside a container and get it out. Place a texture mat on the floor and arrange no more than three infant toys for exploration.

In different areas of the room, arrange play materials that are similar but different in some important way, such as two balls of different sizes or animal figures made of different materials. Collect several cloth squares with different textures, such as a washcloth, a square of a light, silky fabric, and a square of denim or corduroy. Push the fabric into an open ball and encourage infants to feel the variety of soft textures. Some infants will be interested in removing the fabric. On another day, place several items of different shapes and textures into a basket for crawling and walking infants to explore.

 Family Child Care

Materials Needed: rattles, soft and hard objects, basket, animal and people figures, pairs of matching items

You may find time to present a rattle to an infant who is seated in a high chair before or after a meal or snack. Toddlers will enjoy exploring a variety of soft and hard objects in a basket. Provide soft and rigid animal and people figures. Talk with toddlers about similarities and differences. Preschool-age children may enjoy reaching into a bag and finding two matching objects using the sense of touch only. Items for the bag could include two small animal figures, two small blocks, two spoons, and/or two small socks.



Birth–12 Months

Option 1 One-to-One



Skill and Goal Concentration

A young infant focuses on a caregiver's finger actions during a rhyme.



Key Concepts

Watch
Feet



Materials Needed

None



Also Promotes

Communication/Language
Physical/Health

Be Prepared: Be familiar with the “This Little Piggy” rhyme. Sources are available online.

BEGIN: *[Place the infant on his/her back and remove the infant's shoes, if necessary. You may wish to leave socks on the infant. Ensure the infant can clearly see you. Smile and make eye contact as you gently touch the infant's feet and toes.]*

These are your feet. These are your toes.

I am going to say a silly rhyme and touch your toes!

[Display and move your fingers on one hand.]

These are my fingers. I am going to use my fingers to touch your toes when I say our silly rhyme.

Are you ready?

ACT: *[Starting with one foot, gently touch each of the infant's toes while reciting the rhyme. Avoid grasping or pulling on the infant's toes. As the rhyme ends, gently walk your fingers up the infant's leg to his/her stomach. Avoid tickling the infant at any time during the activity.]*

After reciting the rhyme with the first foot, pause and describe the infant's response. Examples: “You are looking at me! You laughed when I touched your toes. Would you like me to touch your other foot?” “You are moving your foot away. I don't think you want me to touch your toes. I will stop now. Let's find another activity.”

If the infant remains interested, recite the rhyme with his/her second foot. Describe the infant's responses throughout the activity. Example: “You are watching me touch your feet. You are giggling. You are having fun with the silly rhyme!”

Transition out of the activity when the infant shows signs of disinterest, such as looking elsewhere or pulling his/her foot away.]

RECAP: *[Smile as you describe what happened. Example: “You watched me touch your feet. You laughed when the little piggy went all the way home! We had fun together.”]*



Birth–12 Months

Be Prepared: Be familiar with the “This Little Piggy” rhyme. Sources are available online.

Option 2 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Concentration

An infant focuses on a silly rhyme with corresponding finger actions.



Key Concepts

Watch
Toes



Materials Needed

None



Also Promotes

Communication/Language
Physical/Health

Invite an infant to sit next to you or on your lap for a rhyme. If the infant is comfortable, remove his/her shoes and socks. Show and move your fingers. Point to and name the infant’s toes. Explain that you are going to touch the infant’s toes during our silly rhyme. Example: “These are your toes. I am going to touch your toes and say a silly rhyme! Are you ready?” Pause and acknowledge that the infant is ready. “You are wiggling your toes. You are smiling. I think you are ready for the rhyme!”

Begin reciting the rhyme, gently touching each of the infant’s toes on one foot. Ensure you do not grasp, tickle, or pull on the infant’s toes. As the rhyme ends, gently walk your finger up the infant’s leg to his/her stomach. Avoid tickling the infant at any time during the activity. Pause after the first foot to acknowledge and describe the infant’s reaction. Examples: “You watched me touch your toes. You smiled when the little piggy went all the way home. Would you like me to touch your other foot?” “I can see you are frowning. You do not like me touching your toes. I will hold you and say the rhyme without touching your toes.” If the infant remains engaged, recite the rhyme with his/her second foot.

Conclude if the infant begins to lose interest. Acknowledge the infant’s focus during the activity. Example: “We had fun with the little piggy rhyme, Matias. You listened to the rhyme. You watched me touch your toes. Thank you for playing with me.”

What to Look For—Options 1–2

Both activities encourage infants to focus on their feet and on your gentle touches of their feet. Ensure the activity is enjoyable for each infant. Avoid any touch that may be uncomfortable for the infant. Watch the infant’s responses at all times during the activity and quickly make adjustments if there are signs of distress or dislike.

Young infants typically enjoy discovering their own feet and toes. Most infants will be delighted with the gentle touches and surprise ending of the rhyme. Infants who are familiar with the rhyme may anticipate the little piggy going “all the way home.” Some infants may prefer to hear the rhyme without having their toes touched. You may wish to hold their feet gently yet firmly during the activity instead.

A small icon of a staircase with three steps. **More Scaffolding Tips—Options 1–2**

Extra support ■ An infant may prefer to keep socks on. ■ Recite the rhyme slowly and quietly if you anticipate an infant may become overly excited during the rhyme. ■ Gently hug the infant at the end of the rhyme instead of walking your fingers up the infant's leg.

Enrichment ■ Vary your voice for each foot/set of toes by changing your tone, volume, and speed of words. ■ Invite the infant to touch his/her own toes during the activity.

**Interest Area**

Materials Needed: several pieces of cloth with different textures

During floor time, invite one or several nearby infants to explore different cloth textures with their hands and feet. Cloth is a good material as it is unlikely to tickle the infants' feet. Help infants touch the cloth with their hands. Gently rub the cloth on infants' feet. Talk with infants about what they are feeling during the activity.

**Family Child Care**

Materials Needed: large piece of paper, several crayons or markers in bright colors

Create a mural of the feet of children in your care. Invite each child to stand on the paper and help trace the outline of each foot. Older children may be able to trace their own feet and may enjoy helping trace the feet of their younger peers. Provide assistance for infants and toddlers to place their feet on the paper. Trace their feet quickly. Ensure there is little waiting by having supplies ready for several children to trace their feet at the same time. Write the names of children near their feet. Toddlers and older children may enjoy decorating their traced feet with crayons and markers. Display the mural for children and families to enjoy.



Birth–12 Months

Option 1 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Social interaction skills

A young infant participates in open-ended play with a familiar toy while a caregiver sits close by.



Key Concepts

Play



Materials Needed

Soft rattle or other favorite small toy



Also Promotes

Physical/Health
Cognitive

BEGIN: *[Place the infant on his/her back on the floor or in a comfortable and secure reclining position.]*

Smile and begin talking with the infant. Example: “Hello, Josie! You had a nice nap. You are all rested. Would you like to play with a toy?”]

ACT: *[Hold the rattle or favorite toy about eight feet from the infant. Move it slightly from side to side, and then move it within reach of the infant’s hand(s). Encourage the infant to hold the toy. Hold the toy if the infant wants to touch it but not grasp it. If the infant grasps and then drops the toy, pick it up for the infant. If the infant does not show interest in the toy, offer a different toy or close the activity and try again at another time.]*

Remain close to the infant. Constantly watch his/her actions with the toy, and offer smiles. Continue to hold the toy for the infant if he/she wishes to touch it but not hold it. If the infant looks at you, acknowledge his visual contact. Example: “Hi, Sam. I am watching you play with your toy.” Do not actively participate in the play unless the infant makes a bid for your involvement, such as reaching toward you or handing you the toy.]

After 2–3 minutes, talk with the infant about his/her play. Participate if the infant seems interested in sharing with you.]

RECAP: *[Affirm the infant’s exploration of the toy. Example: “You had fun playing with the rattle. You moved the rattle around. You put the rattle to your mouth. I watched you play with the toy. Now we can do something else.”]*



Birth–12 Months

Option 2 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Social interaction skills

An older infant participates in independent open-ended play with toys within view of a caregiver.



Key Concepts

Play
Blocks
Balls



Materials Needed

5 balls
5 blocks
2 baskets



Also Promotes

Physical/Health
Cognitive

Be Prepared: This activity is for a mobile infant who can sit independently. Put the blocks in one basket and the balls in the other basket. Arrange the baskets in an activity space that can be used by an infant independently. Identify a location 6–8 feet from the activity space where you can be based during the infant’s play and the infant can see you without any obstructions.

Invite an infant to play on the floor with the blocks and balls. Introduce the toys and encourage the infant to begin playing. The open-ended materials and containers provide a variety of ways for the infant to explore on his/her own. Once the infant is engaged with the toys, explain that you will be nearby while he/she plays for a short time. Point to or show the area where you will be located.

Maintain visual contact with the infant from your temporary location. If the infant carries toys to another area of the room, continue to maintain a distance of about 6–8 feet from the infant and watch his/her play. Go to the infant’s play space after 3–4 minutes or at any sign of distress or fussiness. Affirm the infant’s independent play when you return. Example: “You had fun playing with the blocks and balls! You played all by yourself! I watched what you were doing. You watched me to make sure I was close.”

What to Look For—Options 1–2

Both options support an infant’s (a) trust in himself/herself to play without the minute-to-minute guidance of a caregiver, and (b) trust in his/her ability to secure a caregiver’s attention if desired. The options are different than most other ELM activity plans in which the caregiver is an active guide. In the current plans, the caregiver is an active observer and fully available supporter if the infant needs help. Being physically present and attentive, but not highly talkative, is a valuable way to support close connections with a child.

In both options, an infant may check in with you by vocalizing, reaching toward you, or crawling or walking to you. Provide reassurance that you are watching and available. If an infant in Option 2 brings some of the toys to your “watch out” location (6–8 feet away), warmly acknowledge his/her presence and assume the behaviors recommended for Option 1. It is not necessary or appropriate to urge the infant to return to his/her play area. Follow the time parameters closely.



More Scaffolding Tips—Options 1–2

Extra support ■ If an infant in Option 2 does not look at or interact with the toys while you are 6–8 feet away, remind the infant you are watching him/her. Example: “Justin, I am watching you from here. I am close by.” Provide a reassuring smile and eye contact every few moments while the infant plays. Shorten the amount of time for independent play if these strategies do not prompt the infant to engage with the materials.

Enrichment ■ In Option 2, replace the two containers with two muffin pans. The infant may like to place the balls and blocks into the muffin cups.



Interest Area

Materials Needed: ball and blocks, baskets or muffin pans

Provide additional opportunities for infants to independently explore the materials offered in Option 2. Arrange the toys and containers on the floor. You may wish to place a few toys in the containers or muffin pans to generate interest in the materials. Infants may enjoy exploring the toys individually, or they may practice filling and dumping the containers. Infants may enjoy watching their peers engage with the materials in similar ways. Describe infants’ actions with the materials as they play.



Family Child Care

Materials Needed: learning centers

Interesting and engaging learning centers are valuable resources for children to explore on their own. Provide daily opportunities for the children to play freely at learning centers while maintaining close proximity to provide support, reassurance, and prompts to extend play. Rotate items in the centers and include materials of interest to all children.



Birth–12 Months

Option 1 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Fine motor development

A young infant practices reaching for a ball.



Key Concepts

Reach

Touch



Materials Needed

Small ball



Also Promotes

Cognitive

This brief activity is for a non-mobile infant. Place the infant on his/her back, and sit or kneel next to the infant's feet. Hold the ball about eight inches from the infant's chest. Talk with the infant as you slowly move the ball from side to side several times and then stop the ball at the midline. Lower the ball so the infant can touch it. Encourage the infant to touch or reach for the ball. Example: "Jacob, you see our ball. You are reaching your arms up to our pretty ball. I will move the ball so you can touch it." Support the infant's efforts to reach toward and touch the ball. If the infant grasps the ball, provide support for holding and feeling the ball. Avoid putting the ball in the infant's hands. Smile and describe the infant's actions. Conclude the activity when the infant loses interest.

👁️ What to Look For—Option 1

The activity is intended to foster coordination between seeing and reaching. In the opening segment of the activity, repeat slow movements of the ball from side to side if the infant shows signs he/she is enjoying looking at the ball, such as moving his/her head slightly as you move the ball to one side. Some infants may reach toward the ball with feet or hands. An infant may make swiping actions. An infant who rolls to his/her tummy may have the skills to raise head and torso and reach for the ball. If the infant moves to his/her tummy, place the ball in front of the infant for exploration. Keep the ball within the infant's reach if the ball rolls when the infant touches it.

📈 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1

Extra support ■ If the infant shows little interest in the ball, present a toy with a simple face.

Enrichment ■ Provide support for reaching in a different position. Hold the infant in your lap so his/her head and back are supported by your body. Hold a ball about eight inches from the infant and then move it closer to the infant so he/she has an opportunity to reach for it and touch it. Again, avoid putting the ball in the infant's hands unless he/she grasps it.



Birth–12 Months

Option 2 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Gross motor development

Infants with early mobility participate in a guided activity of getting a ball.



Key Concepts

Roll
Push



Materials Needed

Variety of small balls—1 per infant and caregiver



Also Promotes

Cognitive
Communication/Language
Self-Regulation

Be Prepared: This activity is for infants who can creep on their tummy or crawl on hands and knees, and have the emerging skill to grasp a small item, such as a ball. Clear the activity space of materials so there is plenty of room for infants to move around. Use balls made for infants.

BEGIN: [*Sit on the floor close to several infants. Place the balls in front of you.*]

Our balls can roll. Let's get the balls and play!

ACT: [*Invite infants by name to look at or move toward you and the balls. Example: (while holding up a ball) "Sonja, here is a bumpy ball."*]

Gently roll balls toward specific infants. Push a ball with one finger. Example: "Our ball is rolling to you, Mateo." Rolling a ball slowly helps an infant focus his/her vision on the ball as it moves closer.

Describe infants' actions. Examples: "Lucy, you are sitting up with a ball that rolled close to you. You are tapping the ball with two hands!" "Yeah, Mateo! You crawled over to the ball. You pushed the ball with both hands. Oh, there it goes! It rolled to the chair."

Give little cheers and clap your hands to recognize infants' efforts. Use your voice to foster lively play.

Encourage individual infants to pursue their interests. Example: "All right, Christine! You turned around to go after a ball!"

Move closer to an infant who does not have a ball. Sit facing the infant and show him/her one ball. Ask "Are you ready?" When the infant reacts by looking, vocalizing, or gesturing, explain "I will roll a ball to you. Here it comes." Move the ball gently so it stops in front of the infant.]

RECAP: [*Use a calmer voice to close the activity. Stay with infants on the floor to support those who are excited or tired from the activity. Hold an infant who needs extra support for getting calm, or move next to two infants to give them reassuring touches. Give each infant a gentle touch on his/her back.*]



**Option 2 continued****👁️ What to Look For—Option 2**

You might think of the activity as “open gym time” for infants! It is an opportunity for infants to explore and practice important motor coordination skills, including the anticipation of reaching out to touch a ball moving in the infant’s direction (motor planning).

Infants will participate in different ways: watching, holding a ball, reaching out to touch a ball, attempting to put a ball into his/her mouth, pushing a ball, following a ball by creeping or crawling. There will be differences in the use of one versus two hands. Some will focus on a ball, whereas others may be mostly interested in interaction with you.

Watch each infant’s involvement to ensure there is engagement in the activity. In addition to actions suggested in the activity plan, there may be opportunities for you to foster reaching skills by placing a ball close to an infant who has learned to creep with his/her tummy on the floor. The desire to get ahold of the ball may generate keen interest. Creeping on the tummy toward a ball is fun for some infants. A lightweight ball will roll easily when a creeping infant touches it.

If an infant creeps or crawls to a ball and touches it, the ball may roll out of reach. Describe the situation and encourage him/her to persist in getting the ball. Assist the infant in getting the ball before the infant becomes discouraged or distressed.

Games or rules for ball play are not appropriate for the age of infants involved in the current activity. In general, the ability to roll a ball back to an adult develops around an infant’s first birthday. Some infants may have the coordination to intentionally roll a ball by nine months.

Self-regulation skills are fostered in a lively play period with balls. Help infants who may get too excited during the play. Support for calming down may be needed at the conclusion of the play, as suggested in the activity description.

📈 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2

Extra support ■ An infant who is new to ball play may benefit from your gently handing a ball to him/her for exploration before then rolling the ball to the infant.

Enrichment ■ Show an infant how to use both hands to push a ball.



Birth–12 Months

Option 3 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Gross motor development

Older infants practice rolling a ball.



Key Concepts

Roll

Push



Materials Needed

Small ball



Also Promotes

Cognitive

Self-Regulation

This activity is for infants who can walk. Invite two infants to play a game of rolling a ball back and forth. Demonstrate how to roll a ball by pushing it with two hands. Emphasize a slow roll. Some infants will be most comfortable sitting down to roll a ball back and forth.

There are several ways to arrange the activity. You may wish to support the two infants in rolling a ball between them. You may wish to roll a ball back and forth with each infant, one infant at a time, or be a third player in ball rolling.

Describe what is happening and help infants anticipate a ball coming their way. Examples: “Serena got the ball.” “Here is a ball rolling to you, Robert.” Positively recognize an infant’s effort and persistence. Encourage infants to push the ball with two hands, whether they are sitting or standing. Examples: “Use both hands. Push the ball.” “Great! You pushed the ball with both hands. It is rolling.”

Sometimes a ball may roll past an infant and stop out of reach. The unreachable ball is a problem for the infant to solve. Offer time and encouragement. Point to a ball if it seems the infant is not clear on its location. Describe infants’ actions. Examples: “You are watching our ball. You are pointing at the ball that rolled away. How can we get it?” “You are walking to the ball. You know how to get the ball!”



👁️ What to Look For—Option 3

The activity involves many motor coordination skills plus the logistics of ensuring each infant has good opportunity to participate. Keep a close eye on each infant’s involvement so you can provide verbal guidance and hands-on help when needed. Helping an infant anticipate a ball coming his/her way is an important contribution. Be flexible about the activity so the infants’ needs, rather than a desire to keep the ball rolling, are your primary focus.

📊 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 3

Extra support ■ If you support two infants rolling a ball back and forth (versus you serving as a play partner), move around so you can coach each infant. It may be helpful to sit behind an infant when it is his/her turn to push a ball or to watch and capture a ball coming in his/her direction. ■ You may prefer to help one infant at a time practice rolling a ball.

Enrichment ■ Although a gentle, slow roll is appropriate for practicing how to roll a ball, infants’ skill levels may support some variation in the speed at which a ball is rolled.



Interest Area

Materials Needed: balls, unbreakable bowl, laundry basket

For young infants who are beginning to lift their heads or learning to roll over, arrange colorful balls on the floor where they can see them. Place small (3–4 inch) balls in a unbreakable bowl for creeping and crawling infants to discover. Provide lightweight balls for crawling and walking infants. Place a laundry basket next to a wall and encourage walking infants to drop balls into the basket.



Family Child Care

Materials Needed: balls

Introduce balls to infants when toddlers and preschool-age children are not present. Older children will not readily understand the reason for not throwing a ball to or at an infant. It is a good idea to have one ball for each child when playing with balls. Toddlers and preschool-age children typically enjoy lively interactions with a caregiver while playing with one ball for every child and caregiver. Ball games with teams and rules are not suggested for preschool-age children. Encourage older children to practice existing skills, such as throwing, catching, and bouncing.