



**Communication/
Language**

Exploring Words

Option 1 (IG) Toddlers participate in a book sharing about a hungry caterpillar.

Option 2 (IG) Toddlers participate in a book sharing that focuses on names of food items, including “feeding” food items to a pretend caterpillar.



Cognitive

Solving Problems

Option 1 (IG) Toddlers explore taking apart and putting together small connecting blocks.

Option 2 (OO) A toddler practices putting together items that connect.



Self-Regulation

Focusing and Remembering

Option 1 (OO) A toddler watches how a caregiver matches identical pictures.

Option 2 (OO) A toddler matches identical pictures with caregiver guidance.



Social-Emotional

Interacting with Others

Option 1 (IG) Toddlers participate in a book sharing focused on the different activities of members of a bear family.

Option 2 (IG) Toddlers participate in a book sharing focused on the different activities of members of a bear family, with opportunities to engage in pretend play related to the story.



Physical/Health

Using Our Hands

Option 1 (OO) A toddler practices putting large buttons into the hole of a button box.

Option 2 (OO) A toddler practices putting big and small buttons into big and small holes of a button box.

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

Revision: 7/14/2020



12–24 Months

Option 1
Informal Gathering

Skill and Goal

Receptive language
Expressive language

Toddlers participate in a book sharing about a hungry caterpillar.



Key Concepts

Caterpillar
Food



Materials Needed

The Very Hungry Caterpillar
by Eric Carle



Also Promotes

Cognitive

BEGIN: [*Invite several toddlers to join you to read a story about a hungry caterpillar. Greet toddlers by name.*]

Our book is about an animal called a caterpillar. The caterpillar in our book is very hungry. He eats and eats until he gets big! Our book is about all the different foods he eats. After the caterpillar eats all the food, something special happens to him!

EXPLAIN: [*Show book cover. Point to the caterpillar.*]

Here is the very hungry caterpillar. What do we think he is going to eat?

[*Pause for and acknowledge toddlers' responses.*]

Let's read our book and find out what happens to the hungry caterpillar in our story!



ACT: [*Use the following strategies to engage toddlers in the book:*

- *Supplement the book text with your own words to describe illustrations. Point to things you describe. Example: "A tiny caterpillar popped out of the egg! Here is the tiny caterpillar."*
- *Acknowledge and build on toddlers' pointing and comments. Examples: "You are pointing to the moon, Talia. The moon is shining in the night sky." "Hayley said 'big'. The caterpillar ate all the food. Now he is a big caterpillar!"*
- *Promote anticipation of what happens next in the book. Example: "The big caterpillar built a house around him. His house is called a cocoon. He is inside his cocoon. What is going to happen next?"*
- *Read the text with enthusiasm. Show excitement when the beautiful butterfly is revealed at the end of the book.*]

RECAP: Our book told us about a tiny caterpillar who was very hungry. He ate lots of different foods. The caterpillar grew big! He made a small house around him called a cocoon. What happened to the caterpillar when he came out of his cocoon?

**Option 1 continued****👁️ What to Look For—Option 1**

Some toddlers will be familiar with this book but are likely to again enjoy hearing the story of a unique animal and looking at the bold illustrations. What happens to the caterpillar at the end of the story is an exciting development that you can enhance with enthusiastic reading. This book includes counting food items, but counting is not expected at this stage of development. Approach the book sharing as a language experience that helps toddlers strengthen their awareness of food names.

📈 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1

Extra support ■ Skip some of the food item names on the “Saturday” page if time or toddler interest is limited. Comment on all the food the caterpillar ate that gave him a stomachache!

Enrichment ■ Help toddlers connect the food items to their own experiences. Ask if they have eaten some of the foods or whether we sometimes have the food at our center. A toddler may have had a stomachache from eating too much food at a birthday party or family celebration.

12–24 Months

Option 2 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Receptive language
Expressive language

Toddlers participate in a book sharing that focuses on names of food items, including “feeding” food items to a pretend caterpillar.



Key Concepts

Feed
Food



Materials Needed

The Very Hungry Caterpillar
by Eric Carle
Toy food items (see Be Prepared)
Container (see Be Prepared)

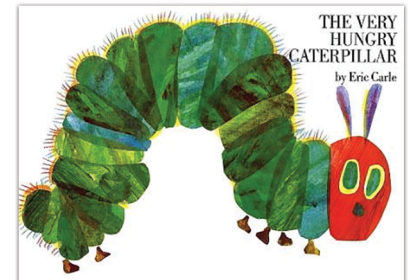


Also Promotes

Cognitive
Physical/Health

Be Prepared: Secure toy food items that correspond to foods described in the book. The container is a pretend caterpillar. You may wish to use a large round container covered with green construction paper.

Use strategies suggested in Option 1 to share the book with toddlers. After the story, introduce the toy food items and container. Explain that the container is a pretend caterpillar. Place the food items on a low table or floor in front of toddlers. We are going to feed the caterpillar!



Invite each toddler, one at a time, to pick a food item to “feed” the caterpillar. Say the name of the food item and encourage toddlers to repeat the name with you. Example: “Martin picked a pear. Let’s say the word pear together. Martin is feeding the caterpillar a pear. Yum. I think the caterpillar likes eating the pear!” Alternatively, if you anticipate the toddler knows the name of the food item, invite him/her to say the name and then encourage toddlers to repeat the name. Ensure each toddler gets at least one turn. Conclude the activity with a brief summary of what happened. Example: “Each of us fed some food to the hungry caterpillar. Look at the food our hungry caterpillar ate! Now our caterpillar can grow bigger!”

👁️ What to Look For—Option 2

Focusing on the names of food items can strengthen toddlers’ vocabulary and general understanding that each item has a specific name. In general, toddlers are not expected to know or be able to say the names of the food items independently, although some toddlers may know the name of the item they selected, as suggested in the activity description. Instead of repeating a food name with you, some toddlers may offer a related response, such as saying the word “yummy” or making a face that communicates dislike. Most toddlers will enjoy feeding the caterpillar. Some toddlers may prefer to hold a food item and watch the activity. Acknowledge different types of participation. Example: “You are holding an orange, Joaquin. Would you like me to feed the orange to the caterpillar, or would you like to hold it?”

📊 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2

Extra support ■ If a toddler seems uncertain about what food item to feed the pretend caterpillar, point to one or two of the foods, say the name(s) of the food, and ask if he/she would like to feed this item to the caterpillar. Some toddlers may point to a food but prefer that you put it in the pretend caterpillar container.

**Option 2 continued**

Enrichment ■ At the end of the activity, invite a toddler to dump all food items on the floor. To support recall, encourage toddlers to pick up the toy food item they feed to the pretend caterpillar. Then briefly review by inviting each toddler to hold his/her food item next to the picture of the item in the book. Example: "This is a toy strawberry. This is a picture of the strawberry in our book." Point out shape and color. ■ Use a descriptive word in front of the food name, making a two-word utterance with each food put into the container. Examples: red strawberry, round orange, or yummy ice cream. ■ As a one-to-one follow-up activity, invite a toddler to sort the toy food items into two piles—one for foods he/she has eaten and one for food items he/she has never eaten.

**Interest Area**

Materials Needed: *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, toy food items, and container used in Option 2

Place the book, toy food items, and container on a low table so toddlers can repeat or expand the Option 2 activity. Emphasize the concepts of in and out as toddlers put food items in the container and take them out by dumping the container or removing one item at a time. Provide a container for each toddler to use as a pretend caterpillar.

**Family Child Care**

Materials Needed: *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, large sheet of paper taped to a low table, assortment of age-appropriate crayons and markers

Involve all children in the book sharing. Older children can count the fruit as you read the story. Younger children can point to named food items. Infants can hold and manipulate a toy food item during the activity. After the book sharing, invite toddlers and older children to draw pictures of foods they have eaten that are featured in the book. Offer to write their words near their pictures.



12–24 Months

Option 1 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Problem-solving Object inquiry skills

Toddlers explore taking apart and putting together small connecting blocks.



Key Concepts

Take apart
Put together



Materials Needed

Grip and Stay Blocks



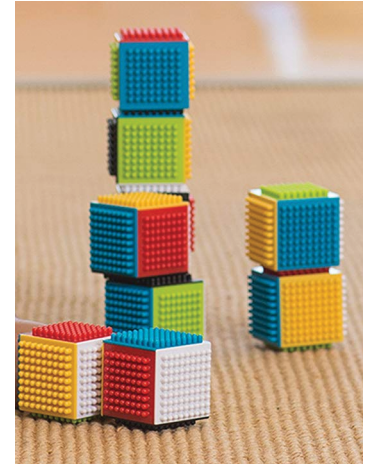
Also Promotes

Physical/Health
Social-Emotional
Communication/Language

Be Prepared: Put together up to four simple block creations, such as a short tower and a row of several blocks. Use no more than half of your available blocks for all creations, so there is an ample supply of unconnected blocks for the activity.

Invite 2–4 toddlers to join you in playing with blocks on a large low table or on the floor. Provide a block creation for each toddler. Draw attention to how the creations are different. Demonstrate and describe how a block can be removed from a creation. Explain that we can take apart a creation. Provide time for toddlers to explore the creations you provide. Describe toddlers' actions.

Then demonstrate and describe how 2–3 blocks can be put together. Encourage toddlers to put together some blocks. Give each toddler some unconnected blocks or put all unconnected blocks in a central location for toddlers to use. Describe each toddler's actions. Focus on their efforts, not possible outcomes of their work with the blocks.





12–24 Months

Option 2 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Problem-solving Object inquiry skills

A toddler practices putting together items that connect.



Key Concepts

Put together



Materials Needed

A set of items that connect (see Be Prepared)



Also Promotes

Physical/Health

Communication/Language

Be Prepared: Secure a set of items that are made for putting together and taking apart. Possibilities include Builder Blocks or Animal Chains (links). The activity description assumes blocks or links are used.

Invite a toddler to join you to play with blocks (or links). Give the toddler 4–5 items and keep 4–5 items for demonstration, all unconnected. Provide time for the toddler to touch and manipulate the items. Draw attention to a key feature of an item that helps put items together, such as the raised part of a block or the curved part of a link. Encourage the toddler to feel the feature with his/her finger.



Explain that we can put together the blocks (or links). Put together 2–3 of your items as you describe your actions. Focus on the process of connecting the items, not the anticipated outcome (what you are creating). Encourage the toddler to put together some of his/her items. Offer verbal guidance, as necessary, without telling the toddler what to create. The links are generally more challenging to connect than the blocks, and the toddler may benefit from your hands-on assistance, such as a holding a link while the toddler connects another link to it.



A toddler may wish to take apart what he/she has put together.

12–24 Months

Option 3
Informal Gathering

Skill and Goal

Problem-solving

Toddlers put together and take apart fit-together blocks.



Key Concepts

Put together
Take apart



Materials Needed

Fit-together blocks (see Be Prepared)



Also Promotes

Physical/Health
Social-Emotional

■ **Be Prepared:** One material possibility is Mega Bloks® by Fisher Price.

Invite 3–4 toddlers to join you in playing with blocks that can be put together and taken apart. You may wish to put the collection of blocks in a central location of the activity space or provide each participating toddler with a 5–7 blocks as a starter. Draw attention to the part of a block that enables blocks to connect. Encourage toddlers to use their fingers to feel this part of a block.



Watch toddlers' early engagement of the materials to determine whether it would be useful to demonstrate and describe putting together some blocks. The activity focuses on connecting the blocks, but toddlers may wish to disconnect blocks while they are building something, or take apart what they create. Describe each toddler's actions with the material without asking or commenting on what the toddler may be creating.

Anticipate that some toddlers may wish to take some building blocks to another part of the room. A toddler might put and carry blocks in a toy wheelbarrow, for example. Taking things from one place to another place is a keen interest of toddlers and has cognitive and motor development benefits.

 What to Look For—Options 1–3

The activity options build on prior curriculum activities, such as Block 10, focused on connecting and disconnecting items that fit together. Together, the activity options in the current block move from simpler to more complex opportunities to work with different materials that can be pulled apart and attached.

It is generally easier for toddlers to take apart an item than to put it together. For this reason, Option 1 begins with the presentation of simple creations toddlers can take apart. Also, Option 1 uses materials that are easy to pull apart and attach. The blocks do not need to be perfectly aligned to make a good connection. They can be used to build up or out (sideways), and are uniform in size and shape. Option 2 begins with the more challenging task of attaching fit-together items and suggests a caregiver demonstration to initiate toddler explorations of the items. The option is for a one-to-one setting. Option 3 is for an informal gathering and involves putting together (and potentially taking apart) a different set of items. A caregiver demonstration is



suggested to initiate toddler exploration of the materials. For some toddlers, playing alongside peers can add some challenge to this activity.

Toddlers will benefit from your presence in each activity, contributing in ways suggested in the activity descriptions. Focus your descriptions of toddler actions on the process of working with the materials, not on a possible outcome. Resist asking a toddler what he/she is building. Creative exploration of materials does not require a plan for an end product.

Options 1 and 3 are structured to support parallel play, although there may be opportunities for you to suggest several toddlers work together in sharing blocks or forming a common creation. Two toddlers may want to connect or put together their respective creations.

The materials have textures, such as the soft and squishy characteristics of a builder block, that will appeal to toddlers and may prompt some exploration of an individual item in addition to taking apart or connecting them. The activities promote object inquiry skills along with problem-solving on how to connect and disconnect the fit-together materials. Eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills are also emphasized in the activities.

More Scaffolding Tips—Options 1–3

Extra support ■ Demonstrate and describe how to use fingers to manipulate the materials if a toddler consistently grasps an item with his/her entire hand. Use of fingers is especially helpful if links are used in Option 2.

Enrichment ■ In Options 1 and 3, gently draw toddlers' attention to what some other toddlers are doing with the materials without directing their uses of items.



Interest Area

Materials Needed: see activity description

Provide the materials offered in one or more of the activity options for toddlers to explore independently or together. Offer materials that toddlers have already explored with your guidance in an activity option or related activity. Monitor toddlers' access to the materials so you can prevent disputes over use of particular items. Example: A toddler might move a substantial number of items to his/her play space. Offer comments on each toddler's use of materials. The materials suggested for each activity option are powerfully appealing to toddlers and they will enjoy having more time to spend with the materials.

 Family Child Care

Materials Needed: see activity description

Although the materials suggested for each activity option are designed for children under three years of age, preschool-age and older children will find creative ways to use each set of items. The links suggested as a possibility for Option 2 are more challenging to put together than the other materials, and may be of special interest to preschool-age children.



12–24 Months

Option 1 One-to-One



Skill and Goal Executive function

A toddler watches how a caregiver matches identical pictures.



Key Concepts

Look
Same
Different



Materials Needed

3-piece wooden knob puzzle (see Be Prepared)



Also Promotes

Cognitive
Physical/Health

Be Prepared: The activity uses a three-piece wooden knob puzzle with a picture under each piece. One possibility is the Melissa and Doug Barnyard Animals Wooden Puzzle. The activity description assumes a farm animal puzzle is used.

BEGIN: *[Invite a toddler to join you at a table to watch you match some pictures. Put the fully assembled puzzle in front of the toddler. Sit next to the toddler.]*

Look at this puzzle! It has pictures of animals that live on a farm.



EXPLAIN: *[Point to each puzzle piece as you say the name and offer a brief description of the pictured animal. Example: "Here is a picture of a cow. The cow is wearing a bell."]*

Remove the piece from the puzzle board after you describe it. Put the puzzle piece to the side of the puzzle board, in front of the toddler.

Continue this procedure for the remaining two puzzle pieces.

Then draw attention to the empty puzzle board.]

Look at what is on our puzzle board. There are pictures of farm animals here, too!

[Point to each picture as you say the name and briefly describe the pictured animal. Example: "Here is another picture of a cow! This cow is wearing a bell."]

Continue this procedure for the remaining two pictures on the puzzle board.]

There are pictures of farm animals on our puzzle board. There are pictures of farm animals on our puzzle pieces. Some of the pictures are the same!

I want to put together the pictures that are the same.

[Hold one of the puzzle pieces with its knob in front of the toddler.]

This is a picture of a cow. I want to remember where I saw the other picture of a cow. The pictures are the same. I want to put the pictures together.

**Option 1 continued**

[Point to pictures of animals on the puzzle board as you name each. Begin with the pictures that are different.]

Here is a picture of a horse. A horse and a cow are different animals.

Here is a picture of a sheep. A sheep and a cow are different animals.

Here is the other picture of a cow! These two pictures are the same. I am going to put these two pictures together.

[Put the puzzle piece over its identical picture on the puzzle board. Continue this procedure for the remaining two pictures. Each time, emphasize the pictures are the same. Example: "Cow and cow go together. Horse and horse go together."]

RECAP: *[Point to your eyes.]*

I used my eyes to look at pictures on our puzzle. You watched me look at the pictures. Some of the pictures are the same. I put together the pictures that are the same.



12–24 Months

Option 2 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Executive function

A toddler matches identical pictures with caregiver guidance.



Key Concepts

Look
Same



Materials Needed

3-piece wooden knob puzzle



Also Promotes

Cognitive
Physical/Health

Be Prepared: The activity uses a three-piece wooden knob puzzle with a picture under each piece. One possibility is the Melissa and Doug Barnyard Animals Wooden Puzzle. The activity description assumes a farm animal puzzle is used. This activity is designed for a toddler who previously participated in Option 1.

Invite a toddler to join you at a table to work on a puzzle. Put the puzzle fully in front of the toddler. Sit next to the toddler. Explain that you will help the toddler take the puzzle apart and then put it back together. Then point to your eyes. Explain that we use our eyes to look carefully at pictures on our puzzle. Encourage the toddler to point to his/her eyes. Use the following steps:



- Invite the toddler to remove each piece from the puzzle board, one piece at a time. After the toddler removes a piece, encourage the toddler to hold and look at the picture on the piece. Name and describe the picture. Example: “This is a sheep. The sheep is white and has short legs.” Alternatively, encourage the toddler to say the name of the item in the picture. Invite the toddler to put the piece next to the puzzle.
- After all puzzle pieces have been removed, invite the toddler to look at each picture on the puzzle board. Encourage the toddler to point to each picture as you (or the toddler) say the name of the pictured item. Offer a brief description of the item, similar to the description you offered for puzzle pieces.
- Explain or emphasize that some of the pictures are the same. Invite the toddler to pick up a puzzle piece, one at a time, and look for the same picture on the puzzle board. Encourage the toddler to put the puzzle piece above the same picture on the puzzle board. Emphasize that the toddler is putting together the same pictures. Example: “Cow and cow go together. Horse and horse go together.”

Conclude the session by reminding the toddler that he/she used his/her eyes to look carefully at each picture. Recognize the toddler’s effort to put together pictures that are the same.



What to Look For—Options 1–2

Both activity options promote the practice of focusing on characteristics of pictures, with the goal of putting together pictures that are the same. A knob puzzle is a useful material to use for this purpose because it can be easily manipulated, has built-in supports for putting together the same pictures, and is an item that is likely to be used independently at a later age. The activities also promote cognitive skills related to object inquiry. Option 2 also promotes fine motor skills related to managing puzzle pieces.

Toddlers generally differ in their approach to tasks that require focused attention. A toddler who seems to ignore the pictures or is highly eager to quickly put the puzzle pieces back into the puzzle board may need gentle reminders to slow down and look at each picture. There is no need to rush. Emphasize we are looking at pictures and putting together pictures that are the same. A toddler who seems uncertain about how to proceed may benefit from your slowly comparing a puzzle piece to a picture on the board, as demonstrated in Option 1 and as suggested in an Extra Support tip.

The Option 2 suggestion of putting the puzzle fully in front of the toddler is an indirect way to communicate the task and puzzle are for the toddler to pursue. This position of the puzzle also makes it easier for the toddler to look at each picture. Putting the puzzle between you and the toddler may communicate a different message about responsibility. Your role in Option 2 is one of providing active guidance when it is needed, not serving as an observer only. Toddlers at this age are not expected to work with puzzles independently. In the current activities, the puzzle is a tool for practicing how to focus.

More Scaffolding Tips—Options 1–2

Extra support ■ In Option 1, invite the toddler to hold the puzzle pieces as you discuss each. ■ In Option 2, encourage the toddler to hold a puzzle piece next to each picture on the puzzle board, for purposes of comparing the two pictures. Option 1 includes this procedure. ■ Offer a progress report if it appears the toddler is beginning to lose interest in Option 1 or 2. Example: “You (I) have found the same picture for one of our puzzle pieces. There are just two more puzzle pieces to look at.”

Enrichment ■ Repeat Option 2 if a toddler remains interested.



Interest Area

Materials Needed: see activity description

Provide the puzzle used in the activity options plus other small sets of items that can be readily matched because they are the same. Possibilities include large picture cards, counters that represent different colors or types of figures, and soft blocks of different sizes or colors. Provide a small number of identical items in each set. Encourage toddlers to put together the same items in different sets. Example: after putting together picture cards that are the same, encourage a toddler to put together counters that are the same. The intent is to practice focusing on characteristics of different types of items.



Family Child Care

Materials Needed: see activity description

Extend the Interest Area activity to preschool-age and older children in your setting by providing age-appropriate items. Preschool-age and older children will enjoy working on puzzles, and might wish to work together on some puzzles. Give more emphasis to the process of looking closely at characteristics of items than to the outcome.



12–24 Months

Option 1 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Social interaction skills

Toddlers participate in a book sharing focused on the different activities of members of a bear family.



Key Concepts

Family

Busy



Materials Needed

Bear's Busy Family by Stella Blackstone



Also Promotes

Communication/Language

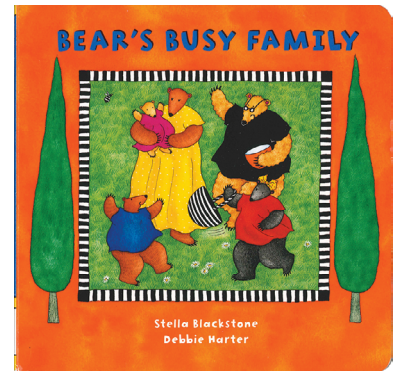
BEGIN: *[Invite several toddlers to join you to read a book about a busy family. Show the cover as you introduce the book.]*

EXPLAIN: Our book is about a bear family.

[Point to the family on the cover.]

The cover of our book shows some of the people in the bear family. Let's look at who is in the picture.

[Point to and name the five persons shown on the cover: Baby Bear, Mama Bear, Papa Bear, Sister Bear, and Brother Bear.]



Each of the bears on the cover of our book is doing something. We are busy when we do something.

The bears in our book are busy doing different things. Let's open our book and find out what the bears are doing!

ACT: *[Use the following strategies as you read the text with enthusiasm:*

- *Point to and describe parts of a picture that are important to understanding the story text, such as a sewing machine, beautiful flowers in a garden, the bread baked by Grandma Bear, and fish caught by an uncle. Pause on each page for toddlers to look closely at the rich illustrations.*
- *Use your own words to describe activities that may be unfamiliar to toddlers, such as Grandpa making bowls and a sister picking fruit (plums) from a tree.*
- *Respond to the toddlers' comments and pointing by repeating and extending their responses and words. Examples: "You are pointing to the cat, Emmanuel. The cat's mouth is open. I think the cat is singing with the auntie!" "Zoe said 'bear.' This is a grandma bear. The grandma bear is baking bread. Where is the bread in this picture?"*
- *Help the toddlers connect parts of the story to their own experiences. Example: "The bears are having a birthday party! Look at all the things in this picture of the party. Have you ever been to a birthday party? What happened?"*

RECAP: We learned about a busy family of bears! The bears were doing different things. The people in your family do different things, too.

**Option 1 continued****👁️ What to Look For—Option 1**

The book can support toddlers' early awareness of how people are different in their interests and the things they do. Awareness of individual differences can help children eventually appreciate how each person is unique. Look for opportunities in the current book sharing to emphasize that each bear is mostly doing something different than the other bears. The shared activities in the book are the cousins playing drums, and family members celebrating a birthday.

Toddlers will differ in their familiarity with some of the activities described in the book and words used to describe family members, such as cousins and auntie. Some toddlers may have limited experience with a traditional family as featured in the book, including extended family members. Look carefully for signs of confusion or uncertainty about the text and offer brief explanations where appropriate (see Extra Support tips).

The pages that show a family tree can be useful for helping toddlers recall book characters, but young children are not expected to comprehend the cognitively challenging concept of a family tree.

📈 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1

Extra support ■ Briefly define words that may not be familiar to some toddlers. Explain that cousins are people in a family. Explain that an auntie is an aunt. Some people call their aunt an auntie. A feast for a birthday is like a birthday party. A plum is a type of fruit. Plums grow on trees.

Enrichment ■ On the page that shows cousins playing drums, explain that drums can be noisy. Draw attention to the picture's small image of Grandpa covering his ears. Remind toddlers that we know what it means to be noisy. We read a book recently about noisy farm animals (Block 14, Communication/Language).



12–24 Months

Option 2 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Social interaction skills

Toddlers participate in a book sharing focused on the different activities of members of a bear family, with opportunities to engage in pretend play related to the story.



Key Concepts

Play together



Materials Needed

Bear's Busy Family by Stella Blackstone



Also Promotes

Communication/Language

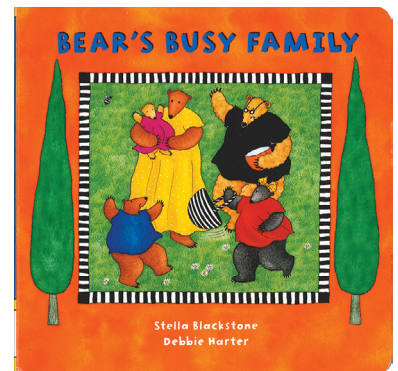
Physical/Health

Invite two toddlers to join you in reading a book and then playing together. Use the strategies suggested in Option 1 for sharing the book. Look closely at toddlers' reactions to different activities described in the book. An activity that seems to be of particular interest may be a good launch for pretend play after the book sharing.

At the end of the story, invite the two toddlers to play together in the housekeeping area.

Suggest a play focus, such as any activity interest you noticed during the book sharing. Example: "The little bear in our book had a birthday party. Maybe you would like to do things for a birthday party." Draw attention to available items, including items related to an activity that seems to be of interest to the toddlers.

Stay near the play area to provide occasional verbal support for engagement and interaction without directing the toddlers' play. Describe a toddler's actions. Example: "You are holding a baby, Tomas. You have a bottle. I think you are going to feed your baby!" Ask questions that encourage a toddler to describe his/her plans, and perhaps expand play ideas. Example: "You have a pot on the stove, Catalina. What are you cooking in the pot?"



👁️ What to Look For—Option 2

The book may provide a play theme for the toddlers or they may choose to engage with the materials, and each other, in different ways. Some toddlers will have ideas and intentions with the materials, whereas others who are new to pretend play may be unsure how to interact in the housekeeping area. Parallel play is likely at this age. A toddler may prefer to watch and may imitate the play of a peer. Watching and imitating a peer is a beginning step in learning how to play with others. Recognize and acknowledge all play efforts.

📊 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2

Extra support ■ Toddlers who are new to pretend play may benefit from suggestions of things to do. Example: "The plates and cups can go on the table. You can pretend to eat the cake that you making, Catalina!" ■ Some toddlers may be more comfortable playing next to a peer. Provide duplicate items so they can play side by side without conflict over a particular toy.

Enrichment ■ Suggest additional items for toddlers' play. Example: "Tomas, you are putting your baby to bed. Would you like to find a blanket to cover the baby?"



Interest Area

Materials Needed: items for a pretend birthday party

Use the birthday party for a baby bear described in the *Bear's Busy Family* book (Options 1 and 2) as the focus of an Interest Area. Provide materials for baking a pretend cake and other items similar to those shown in the book. Encourage toddlers to make a pretend cake and organize other things for a birthday party. Offer suggestions for getting ready for a party.



Family Child Care

Materials Needed: *Bear's Busy Family* by Stella Blackstone, items for a pretend birthday party (including food)

Share the book with preschool-age children in your setting. Emphasize the birthday party. Invite preschool-age and older interested children to join Interest Area activities focused on preparations for a birthday party for a baby. Toddlers will enjoy watching, imitating, and joining in the play of the older children. Babies may enjoy being included by holding a baby doll or playing with a toy plate and cup.



12–24 Months

Option 1 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Fine motor development

A toddler practices putting large buttons into the hole of a button box.



Key Concepts

Out
Into
Drop



Materials Needed

Button box toy (see Be Prepared)



Also Promotes

Cognitive
Self-Regulation



Optional Reading

Hands Can by Cheryl Willis Hudson

Be Prepared: Use large buttons only for this activity option. Place the large buttons inside the round box and put on the lid. The activity description calls the openings (slots) in the box lid buttonholes. This activity option uses one buttonhole and does not draw attention to button shapes or colors. The focus is on fine motor skills in manipulating large buttons. Commercially available button boxes specify use with children ages 12 months and older.

BEGIN: *[Invite a toddler to play with the button box with you. Sit facing the toddler. Place the box between you and the toddler.]*

EXPLAIN: This little box has buttons inside.

[Shake the box so you and the toddler hear the buttons.]

ACT: Would you like to take the buttons out of the box?

[Encourage the toddler to open the lid and pour out the buttons. Help the toddler remove the lid if needed. Encourage the toddler to touch or hold some buttons. Point to the lid and to the buttonhole when you name each.]

We have different kinds of buttons. The buttons are different colors and different shapes.

I am going to put the lid back on our box. Then you can put each button through the hole on the lid of our box.

[Describe your actions with the lid. Example: "I pushed the lid down so it fits on the box."]

Position the box in front of the toddler so the larger hole is horizontal to the toddler.]

Here is a hole in the lid for our box. Let's feel the hole. You can put buttons through this hole. There are other holes in the lid. This is the hole we can use now.

[Place the box in front of the toddler with a large buttonhole in a horizontal position facing the toddler. Point to the hole in front of the toddler, demonstrate moving your finger across the hole several times, and encourage the toddler to do the same.]



**Option 1 continued**

Demonstrate and describe putting a button into the hole. Example: "I am holding one button with my fingers. Now I am putting the button over the hole. I will let go of the button and the button will fall into our box."

Would you like to drop a button into the box?

[Offer encouragement, if appropriate. If a toddler holds a button in a manner that makes it difficult to place into the buttonhole, provide another demonstration with brief descriptions or offer verbal guidance. Example: "Open your fingers to let the button drop into the box."]

RECAP: *[Briefly describe the toddler's experience with the button box. Example: "You used your fingers to put some buttons into a buttonhole. We could not see the buttons after you put them into the buttonhole. You said the buttons are 'all gone.'"]*

👁️ What to Look For—Option 1

Dropping small items through holes is often a favorite toddler activity. This activity includes a more refined fine motor skill than handling balls or small toys. Most toddlers will need your specific guidance about how to hold and drop a button. Look for opportunities to demonstrate and describe how to (1) hold a button with fingers (some may initially grasp a button with one hand), and (2) align the edge of the button to the buttonhole. Provide hands-on assistance with aligning the button and buttonhole only after a repeated demonstration and specific verbal support have been offered.

Generally, it will be easier for a toddler to drop a button into a buttonhole that appears horizontal to him/her. This provision in the activity description will likely determine the way a toddler holds his/her hand.

Toddlers are not expected to learn shapes and shape names. Some toddlers may notice shape (and color) similarities and differences with the buttons. Respond to their interest by emphasizing how some buttons are the same and some are different. This approach is in keeping with other ELM activities, including the Self-Regulation activities in the current block.

Respond promptly to signs of frustration with the task. If a toddler is not able to put a button into the buttonhole after several attempts, remove the lid and change the activity to a game of dropping buttons into the box.

Toddlers may maintain interest for a few minutes and come back to the button box later to try it again.

📊 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1

Extra support ■ Move the box closer to the toddler. ■ Use 3–4 large buttons initially. ■ Hold one button with your fingers and encourage the toddler to use his/her fingers to take it from you and then put into the buttonhole. ■ Encourage the toddler to listen for the button hitting the bottom of the box when you demonstrate putting a button into the box.

Enrichment ■ Provide more large buttons. ■ Invite a second round of the activity.



12–24 Months

Option 2 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Fine motor development

A toddler practices putting big and small buttons into big and small holes of a button box.



Key Concepts

Into
Out
Turn
Big
Small



Materials Needed

Button box toy (see Be Prepared)



Also Promotes

Cognitive
Self-Regulation

Be Prepared: This activity is for a toddler who readily put large buttons into a buttonhole in Option 1 or a related activity. Use large and small buttons for the current activity. Place the buttons inside the round box and put on the lid. The activity description calls the openings (slots) in the box lid buttonholes. Commercially available button boxes specify use with children ages 12 months and older.

Invite a toddler to play with a button box with you. Sit across from the toddler and place the button box between you and the toddler. Shake the box and explain there are buttons inside. Encourage the toddler to remove the lid and pour out the buttons. Provide assistance with lid removal, if necessary.

Point out that some buttons are small and some buttons are big. Encourage the toddler to feel with his/her fingers a big button and then a small button. Keep the buttons in front of the toddler.

Put the lid on top of the box, place the box with a large buttonhole horizontal to the toddler, and draw attention to the buttonholes. Point to and describe how two openings are big and two openings are small. Move your finger across each hole several times. Encourage the toddler to do the same as you emphasize one hole is smaller than the other.

Demonstrate holding a big button with your fingers and then putting it into a big buttonhole. Describe your actions and emphasize how you used a big hole for a big button.

Invite the toddler to put buttons into the button box. Provide quiet time for the toddler to explore the challenge of locating the appropriate-size hole. Comment on the toddler's discovery without telling him/her what to do. Example: "Your big button would not fit into this small buttonhole." Pause for the toddler's reaction. If the toddler needs guidance, point to a large (or small) buttonhole and offer a suggestion. Example: "Try this buttonhole. It looks big (or small)."

The task of turning a hand to put a button into a vertical buttonhole may need your demonstration and verbal support. As appropriate, demonstrate how to hold the button and turn your hand. When the toddler is holding a button for a vertical hole, suggest he/she turn his/her hand. If necessary, gently move the child's hand. Acknowledge that the task is challenging.





Option 2 continued

Conclude the activity by describing the toddler's efforts. Emphasize how the toddler worked hard to find holes for big and small buttons and had to turn some buttons so they would go into a hole.

What to Look For—Option 2

This activity option offers more challenge than Option 1 by providing buttons of two different sizes and using both horizontal and vertical buttonholes. To place a button into a vertical buttonhole, a toddler must rotate his/her wrist to change the angle of the button. Paying attention to differences in button sizes supports cognitive development (object inquiry). The use of both vertical and horizontal buttonholes promotes fine motor skills.

Teaching shape names is not appropriate at this age, but some toddlers may be interested in finding buttons that are the same size or sorting small and big buttons.

Respond promptly to signs of frustration. If putting a button in a vertical hole is a source of frustration, turn the box so the hole is horizontal to the toddler. If the entire activity is frustrating, change to a game that uses some of the materials, such as feeding the buttons to a puppet. You could offer suggestions that emphasize big and small. Example: "Now our puppet would like a big button."

More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2

Extra support ■ Limit the number of buttons to three big and three small. ■ Help a toddler identify differences in button size by arranging buttons in pairs of the same shape, such as a one big square next to a small square. Point to big and small as you say the words: "This one is big." ■ If a toddler has trouble aligning a button with a buttonhole, demonstrate and describe how to touch a button to the buttonhole. Offer gentle hands-on assistance if demonstration and verbal support are not sufficiently helpful.

Enrichment ■ Provide more buttons for a second round of the activity. ■ Help a toddler find buttons and buttonholes on jackets or other clothing after the activity.



Interest Area

Materials Needed: builders, peg puzzles, scoops and cups, sensory table with water or dry materials, books of different sizes, simple clothes on dolls and soft animals, toy pans with lids, toddler-size vehicle toys, blocks, toy dump truck, foam blocks or connecting toys, ping-pong-size balls, clean egg carton

Provide the materials listed above to foster toddlers' fine motor skills, such as builders that fit together and come apart, peg puzzles, scoops and cups in a sensory table with water or dry materials. Arrange books of different sizes for toddlers to open. Put simple clothes on dolls and soft animals so the toddlers can practice taking them off. Add toy pans with lids to the dramatic play area. On another day, place toddler-size vehicle toys on a low surface with blocks. Provide materials toddlers can put into a toy dump truck and dump out, such as foam blocks or connecting toys. Toddlers will enjoy placing ping-pong-size balls into an egg carton.



Family Child Care

Materials Needed: stacking rings, building bricks, small blocks, snap-link beads, bunny builders

Each child in your care may wish to explore different materials that support fine motor skills. Infants will enjoy holding and dropping toys. Toddlers who have little experience with fine motor toys may enjoy stacking rings. Preschool-age and older children will enjoy building bricks and small blocks. Play materials that fit together and come apart are appropriate for toddlers and preschool-age children. Observe each child's existing fine motor skill and offer materials that will help refine the skill. Example: If a child is pulling pop beads apart, offer fit-together builders that require the same or a similar action, such as the bunny builders shown in the adjacent picture.

