



**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 about a hungry caterpillar, with opportunities to help tell the story with felt pieces that represent different foods.
- Option 3** (OO) A toddler who is familiar with *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* retells the story with caregiver support.



Cognitive

Exploring Objects

- Option 1** (IG) Toddlers explore ways to connect different sizes and shapes of fit-together blocks.
- Option 2** (IG) Toddlers explore ways to put together Bristle Blocks® of different shapes and colors.
- Option 3** (IG) Toddlers explore ways to build structures with fit-together blocks or Bristle Blocks®.



Self-Regulation

Focusing and Remembering

- Option 1** (OO) A toddler observes a caregiver take apart and put together a puzzle.
- Option 2** (OO) A toddler practices taking apart and putting together a puzzle with caregiver guidance.
- Option 3** (IG) Two toddlers take turns taking apart and putting together a puzzle with caregiver guidance.



Social-Emotional

Interacting with Others

- Option 1** (IG) Toddlers explore pretend roles during dramatic play with peers.
- Option 2** (IG) Toddlers engage in theme-based pretend play with their peers.



Physical/Health

Moving Our Bodies

- Option 1** (OO) A toddler practices underhand throwing with individualized support.
- Option 2** (OO) A toddler explores overhand ball throwing.
- Option 3** (IG) Toddlers practice overhand ball throwing at a large target.

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

Revision 1/16/20



24–36 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



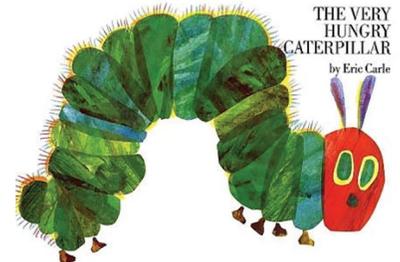
Also Promotes

Cognitive

BEGIN: [*Invite 3–4 toddlers to read a book about a hungry caterpillar.*]

Show book cover. Point to the caterpillar when you describe it.]

Our book is about a caterpillar. Here is the caterpillar. He has a green body and a red head. The caterpillar is hungry and wants to eat a lot of food.



EXPLAIN: Our book is called *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Let's find out about the food the caterpillar eats and what happens when the caterpillar eats a lot of food.

ACT: [*Use the following strategies to share the book:*

- *Point to words as you read the book text. Use your own words to describe pictures and what happens, such as the caterpillar eating his way through the apple to the other side. Point to features of pictures that you and toddlers talk about.*
- *Offer child-friendly definitions of novel words or concepts. Examples: "A cocoon is the caterpillar's small house." "Tiny means little."*
- *Repeat and expand on toddlers' comments. Acknowledge toddlers' pointing and gestures related to the book sharing.*
- *Ask questions that help toddlers anticipate what will happen next in the story. Example: "Our caterpillar is tiny and very hungry. What do you think the tiny caterpillar is going to do next?"*
- *Help toddlers connect foods included in the story to their experiences with the food item. Example: "We had this fruit for lunch yesterday! Let's remember what this fruit is called."*
- *Invite toddlers to recite with you the repetitive phase "But he was still hungry!"*]

RECAP: Our book told us about a caterpillar who was very hungry. The caterpillar was little at the beginning of our story. He ate lots of different foods and got big! He made a small house around himself called a cocoon. What happened to the caterpillar when he came out of his cocoon?

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

The book is a favorite of many toddlers. The repetitive text and colorful pictures are among its many appeals. The different foods eaten by the caterpillar will be familiar to many toddlers. Some toddlers may be familiar with the story and excited to tell what happens to the caterpillar at the end of the book.

Look for opportunities to emphasize language use and understanding plus story comprehension. Helping toddlers anticipate what might happen next in the story and recall key events at the end of the book sharing are ways to support story comprehension. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* includes counting of food items, but at this age it is not necessary to emphasize numbers or counting.

📈 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1

Extra support ■ Emphasize the concepts of in and out, such as when the caterpillar comes out of the egg and goes in the cocoon.

Enrichment ■ Talk about the concept of through. The caterpillar eats through the food, going in one side and out the other side. Invite toddlers to think of objects in the room that can go through another object, such as a toy train going through a tunnel or someone walking through a door.

24–36 Months

Option 2 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Receptive language
Expressive language

Toddlers participate in a book sharing about a hungry caterpillar, with opportunities to help tell the story with felt pieces that represent different foods.



Key Concepts

Caterpillar
Food
Butterfly



Materials Needed

The Very Hungry Caterpillar
by Eric Carle
The Very Hungry Caterpillar
Flannel Board Set



Also Promotes

Cognitive
Physical/Health

Invite 2–3 toddlers to join you in reading a book about a very hungry caterpillar. Explain (or remind) toddlers that the caterpillar eats different kinds of food during the story. Give each toddler several felt pieces that show different foods. Encourage each toddler to say the name of the food he/she is holding. Offer strong hints, if necessary. Examples: “You are holding a fruit, Jayla. It is orange and round. What do you think is the name of the fruit?”

Use strategies suggested in Option 1 to share the book, including support for reciting the familiar phrase “But he was still hungry.” Encourage toddlers to place their food items on the flannel board when described in the book.

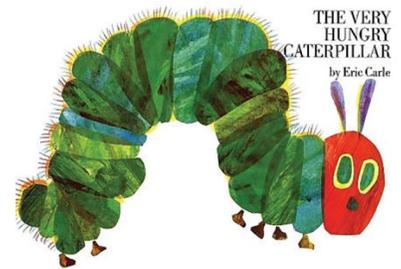
As you read the last several pages, place the big caterpillar, cocoon, and butterfly felt pieces on the flannel board at the appropriate times. Draw attention to all of the food eaten by the caterpillar. Encourage toddlers to recall what food each put on the board. Example: “Look at all the food the hungry caterpillar ate! What food pieces did we put on our felt board?” Invite toddlers to hold the cocoon and butterfly felt pieces before moving on to their next activity.

👁️ What to Look For—Option 2

Toddlers enjoy opportunities to participate in telling a favorite book story. This activity emphasizes language use and understanding through interactions focused on book pictures and text plus felt pieces that depict different foods. Some toddlers may prefer to watch and listen. Positively acknowledge each type of participation.

A toddler may not wish to part with the felt piece he/she is holding. If this occurs, offer to put the piece on the board but do not insist. Example: “You are holding a picture of the watermelon, Lexi. I can see that you do not want to put it on our flannel board. Would you like me to put it on the board, or would you like to keep holding it while we read the story?”

This activity is a good option for one-to-one use. Consider opportunities for interested toddlers to hold and contribute all of the felt pieces with you at a later time.



**Option 2 continued**A small black icon consisting of three vertical bars of increasing height from left to right, representing scaffolding.**More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2**

Extra support ■ You may opt to describe and place some of the less familiar food items on the board, such as salami or sausage. ■ Provide verbal support for a child's placement of a felt piece on the board, if appropriate.

Enrichment ■ Toddlers with strong familiarity with the story may enjoy telling what food item comes next before you turn a page.

24–36 Months

Option 3 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Receptive language
Expressive language

A toddler who is familiar with *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* retells the story with caregiver support.



Key Concepts

Egg
Caterpillar
Cocoon
Butterfly



Materials Needed

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle
The Very Hungry Caterpillar Flannel Board Set: little egg on leaf, caterpillar, cocoon, butterfly



Also Promotes

Cognitive

Invite a toddler who is familiar with *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to help you remember the story. Look at and talk about each page of the book, as a reminder of the story. Then provide the four felt pieces: egg, caterpillar, cocoon, and butterfly. Describe each piece when you give it to the toddler. Invite the toddler to tell what happens in the story related to each felt piece. Go in the order in which the item is introduced in the book. To initiate the process, you may wish to read the first page of the book and help the toddler match the picture in the book to the appropriate felt piece. Place the felt piece on the flannel board or on the floor in front of you. Continue with the remaining three pieces, encouraging the toddler to tell what happened. Draw attention to the appropriate book page before or after the toddler describes what he/she recalls.

Conclude the session by talking about the order in which things happened in the story. Example: “First you found the little egg piece. Then what happened?” Approach the activity as a conversation with the toddler, not a test. Use questions as a springboard for discussion.

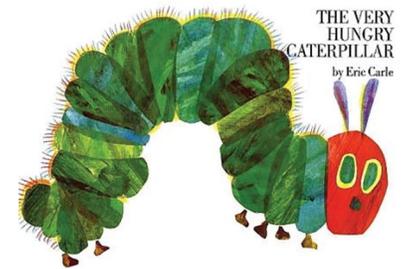
👁️ What to Look For—Option 3

Some toddlers will enjoy retelling the story with the felt pieces, whereas others may be more interested in the felt pieces than in the story they help tell. The intent is to promote language use and beginning skills in story comprehension, but talking with a toddler about the story is more important than determining whether the order is correct.

📊 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 3

Extra support ■ A toddler may prefer to work backwards with the story. Example: “You like the picture of the butterfly. What was the butterfly at the beginning of our story?”

Enrichment ■ Toddlers who readily describe the four felt pieces in this activity may enjoy receiving more felt pieces to talk about.





Interest Area

Materials Needed: *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* Flannel Board Set

Place the book, along with the flannel board and felt figures, on a low table. Review the book and invite toddlers to use the felt figures to tell the story. Toddlers may also enjoy finding corresponding food items in the housekeeping area to bring to the table.



Family Child Care

Materials Needed: *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* Flannel Board Set, crayons in different colors and sizes (chunky for toddlers and regular for older children), one large piece of paper with enough room for each child to have room to draw

Preschool-age children may enjoy participating in Option 2 by placing the felt pieces on the flannel board as you read the book. Invite older children to count the number of fruits eaten by the caterpillar. After the book reading, invite toddlers and older children to use the crayons to draw different foods that they like to eat on the large piece of paper. Talk with the children about what they are drawing and ask if they would like you to write their words near their work. You may wish to display the artwork on a wall.



24–36 Months

Option 1
Informal Gathering

Skill and Goal

Object inquiry skills

Toddlers explore ways to connect different sizes and shapes of fit-together blocks.



Key Concepts

Put together

Big

Small



Materials Needed

Fit-together blocks (see Be Prepared)

Trays—1 per toddler



Also Promotes

Physical/Health

Communication/Language

Be Prepared: Secure toddler-size fit-together blocks, such as Mega Bloks® by Fisher Price or Duplo® by Lego. Provide two basic shapes in small and big sizes for building. Put the same number and types of blocks on each tray. Providing 6–8 blocks per toddler should be appropriate for an introductory activity.

BEGIN: *[Invite several toddlers to a low table to build with blocks. Sit or kneel at eye level with toddlers to facilitate communication.]*

Point to a big block and a small block when you mention each.]



EXPLAIN: We have big blocks and small blocks to build with today. Our blocks can fit together. I am going to put two small blocks together.

ACT: *[Demonstrate and describe how to connect two small blocks.]*

Encourage each toddler to connect two blocks. Describe their actions. Provide verbal support for connecting the blocks, if needed.]

EXPLAIN: There are many ways to put our blocks together. We can put together a small block and a big block. We can put together three or more blocks. We can put together different blocks.

ACT: *[Demonstrate and describe putting together a big block and a small block or whatever combination you think would prompt toddlers to explore possibilities.]*

Encourage toddlers to try different combinations.

Describe toddlers' actions. Examples: "Lena, I see you put two small red blocks on top of a big yellow block." "Carlos, you put together three big blocks."

Encourage toddlers to talk about their block structures. Example: "What are you doing with your blocks?"

Repeat and expand on toddlers' comments, such as "Mine can fly."]

RECAP: We had fun figuring out how blocks can fit together. We put together big blocks and small blocks. There are many different ways the blocks can fit together.

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

The activity supports exploration of different shapes and sizes of fit-together blocks while also promoting fine motor skills and imaginative building. A particular way to use the blocks is not required. Some toddlers may be interested in arranging the blocks in a line. Others may be more interested in stacking them to build a tall or big structure. Refrain from providing a model structure that toddlers are expected to create.

Limiting the type and size of blocks helps toddlers focus on the mechanics of putting together the blocks. Hold back more advanced block pieces often included in sets of blocks; these may be used after toddlers have many opportunities to explore basic construction. Providing each toddler with the same number and type of blocks prevents competition for and/or hoarding of blocks.

Toddlers of this age are often interested in building towers. Look for opportunities to support a toddler's interests, especially when there seems to be a problem with the structure. Stating the problem may be a useful first step in offering support. Example: A tower of small blocks may be unsteady with a large block on top. In this situation, consider pointing to the block on top of the tower and explaining that the big block makes the structure tip over. Pause for the toddler to react. If the toddler seems uncertain about how to proceed, you could ask the toddler if he/she wants to take off the block.

📊 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1

Extra support ■ Hold a small block and a big block next to each other when you describe the two sizes of blocks in the opening segment. ■ Sit next to a toddler who seems challenged by the mechanics of putting together blocks. Offer just enough assistance, beginning with verbal support and providing hands-on support only when necessary. Example: If verbal support seems insufficient, hold one block steady as the toddler pushes downward on a second block.

Enrichment ■ Toddlers are likely to be interested in repeating the activity on other days. Support creative block building by including animal figures with the blocks.



24–36 Months

Option 2 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Object inquiry skills

Toddlers explore ways to put together Bristle Blocks® of different shapes and colors.



Key Concepts

Put together



Materials Needed

Bristle Blocks®



Also Promotes

Communication/Language

Social-Emotional

Physical/Health

Be Prepared: Secure blocks of different shapes and colors, with more cubes and rectangles if toddlers are new to Bristle Blocks®. Provide 6–8 blocks per toddler. Avoid providing people figures, circles, and other special items often included in sets of Bristle Blocks®. Arrange the blocks in random order in the middle of a low table.

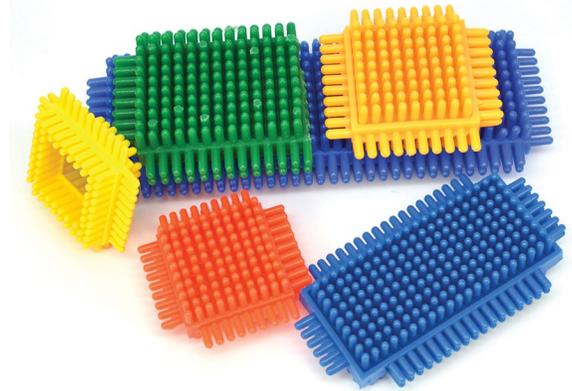
Invite 2–3 toddlers to join you at the table to play with the blocks. Encourage each toddler to create what he/she wishes. Hold and describe several individual blocks if toddlers have limited familiarity with the material.

Invite toddlers to show how the blocks can be put together.

Describe toddlers' actions. A toddler can hold one block in each hand and press them together. A toddler may also lay a block on the table and connect another by pressing downward with a second block. Demonstrate how to put two blocks together, if necessary (see Extra Support tip).

Sit or kneel at the table with the toddlers. Participate in the activity by putting together a few blocks but avoid drawing attention to your efforts. Demonstrate cooperation by asking a toddler to pass a block to you. Offer another block in exchange.

Comment on each toddler's efforts. Draw attention to the color or shapes of blocks. Examples: "These are all the same color, but not the same shape." "I see you found some blocks that are all the same shape." At this age, toddlers are not expected to know shape names and may call any round shape a ball. It is fine for you to use shape names, but avoid approaching the activity as an opportunity for teaching about shapes.



👁️ What to Look For—Option 2

This activity extends the Block 10, Option 3 activity in which toddlers were encouraged to put together and take apart Bristle Blocks®.

Generally toddlers begin attaching blocks without a goal in mind. A toddler may put several blocks together, look at the creation, and announce it is a boat or house. Encourage exploration and imaginative building with the blocks. Do not offer a specific structure as a model for toddlers to try to build.

**Option 2 continued**

Sometimes a toddler will treat a set of blocks or particular types of blocks, such as all red blocks, as his/her own and refuse to share them with others. Explain the blocks are for everyone to use and encourage the toddler who hoards materials to pass some items to others or put them in the center of the table or play space for others to use.

 **More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2**

Extra support ■ If a toddler finds it difficult to put together two blocks, assist by placing a flat rectangle on the table and offering a cube to attach with a downward push. The cubes and rectangle shapes are the easiest to attach. ■ Put a soft place mat on the table for each child. The place mat defines the toddler's workspace and softens sounds. ■ Move around the table, so you sit next to each child for a back-and-forth exchange. ■ Some toddlers may be more comfortable building in a one-to-one activity.

Enrichment ■ Toddlers will enjoy playing with Bristle Blocks® repeatedly. For a toddler who is familiar with how to attach the Bristle Blocks®, offer a little challenge by suggesting he/she build a small structure using only one color or shape.

24–36 Months

Option 3
Informal Gathering

Skill and Goal

Object inquiry skills

Toddlers explore ways to build structures with fit-together blocks or Bristle Blocks®.



Key Concepts

Build
Under
Above
More



Materials Needed

Blocks that connect (see Be Prepared)



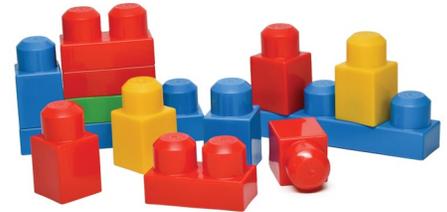
Also Promotes

Physical/Health
Communication/Language
Social-Emotional

Be Prepared: This activity is for toddlers who want to build structures of more than two blocks and have familiarity with and interest in putting together blocks. Offer fit-together blocks (Option 1) or Bristle Blocks® (Option 2) for this activity. Do not offer both. Use toddlers' interests to determine what material to provide. Provide 10–15 blocks per toddler. Arrange blocks in random order in the middle of a low table.

Invite 2–3 toddlers to build with blocks. Kneel or sit at the table. Use a quiet voice to talk with toddlers about their block building. Consider using the following strategies:

- Describe a structure or a structure-in-the-making. Example: “Zane, your little doghouse is yellow on the bottom and red above.”
- Emphasize relational words, such as under, above, and more.
- Ask questions to encourage problem-solving. Example: “How can you make the doghouse bigger for more dogs?”
- Encourage and facilitate cooperation among toddlers in sharing the blocks.
- Acknowledge toddlers' efforts to try new ideas and stay focused.


 What to Look For—Option 3

Building with blocks supports toddlers' emerging skills in reasoning. As toddlers gain fine motor skills in attaching the blocks, they begin to create and remember basic construction. Over time you will see toddlers develop greater skill and understanding of what is achievable with block structures. Block building also supports spatial understanding and basic number sense. At this age, understanding size differences and the meaning of more is appropriate. You may see toddlers match two types of blocks in an early understanding of one-to-one correspondence.

Put away packaging that shows complex block structures. Toddlers may become frustrated if they attempt to duplicate a castle or rocket on a package. Few toddlers will independently build arches or include windows in a structure.

Look for opportunities to support a toddler's problem-solving skills. Example: If a toddler asks for your help to make a structure stand upright, talk with him/her about the process of making an upright building. Assume the role of a building coach who asks questions, such as “What if you use the big block first?” Avoid solving a problem for a toddler, but offer concrete suggestions.



Option 3 continued

More Scaffolding Tips—Option 3

Extra support ■ In preparing for the activity, arrange the blocks in groups by shape to help toddlers clearly see choices.

Enrichment ■ Provide several small craft or play items to enhance block building. Examples: curly ribbon cut into two-inch lengths, muffin papers, felt cut into squares and circles, small people or animal figures, small vehicles. Keep the table organized by putting ribbon curls into a cup or muffin pan. Stack the felt shapes. Line up figures. Keeping the work area orderly will help toddlers maintain focus.

Interest Area

Materials Needed: blocks, several road signs and vehicles, books about vehicles

Foster continued block building by placing together all blocks of one size in the block area. Create interest in building by adding several road signs and vehicles. Put books about vehicles in the block area. Change the building props as toddlers' interests change.

Family Child Care

Materials Needed: beads, yarn or ribbon, play dough

Toddlers and preschool-age children will enjoy stringing beads. Emphasize how a bead string becomes longer when more beads are added. Introduce patterns with 2–3 colors. Children of all ages will benefit from sensory play opportunities. Infants may feel water and sand. Play dough, when made weekly, provides a calming way for children to explore molding shapes of different sizes. Older children will enjoy building sets with smaller parts.



24–36 Months

Option 1 One-to-One



Skill and Goal Executive function

A toddler observes a caregiver take apart and put together a puzzle.



Key Concepts

Look
Pay attention
Out
In
Remember



Materials Needed

Puzzle (see Be Prepared)

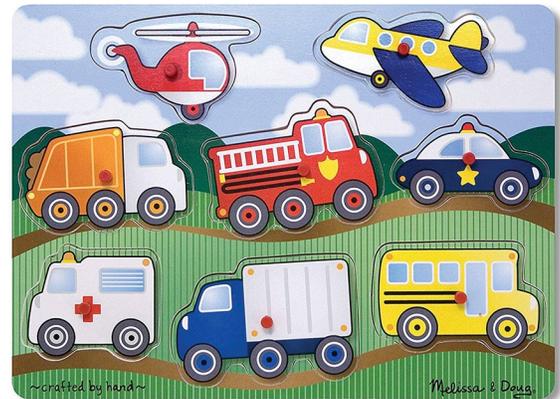


Also Promotes

Cognitive
Physical/Health

Be Prepared: Select a puzzle that you anticipate will be appropriately challenging and of interest to the toddler you invite to participate in this activity. In addition to the toddler's interests, considerations include: (1) the number of pieces; (2) ease of picking up the pieces, including size or "chunkiness" and whether each piece has a peg; (3) color contrasts; (4) whether there are pictures on the puzzle board under the puzzle pieces; and (5) whether the puzzle has some characteristics of a jigsaw puzzle, such as pieces that represent part (rather than all) of a pictured item. Some puzzle possibilities include: animal puzzles for toddlers that are part of the Dreampark wooden jigsaw puzzles; Melissa and Doug® first shapes jumbo knob puzzle; and Melissa and Doug® first play jigsaw puzzle set featuring vehicles. The activity description below uses the Melissa and Doug® Vehicles Wooden Peg Puzzle (8 pieces) for illustration purposes only.

BEGIN: *[Invite a toddler to join you at a table to help you work with a puzzle. Put the assembled puzzle between you and the toddler.]*



Look at this puzzle!
It shows different things people can ride in.

Please help me figure out what is shown in our puzzle. Let's look carefully at each puzzle piece when we take pieces out of the puzzle board. We can pay attention to what the puzzle piece looks like.

ACT: *[Encourage the toddler to look at and name the vehicle on each puzzle piece. Point to each piece you discuss. Provide names of vehicles the toddler does not seem to know, such as the ambulance and helicopter. Talk briefly about when or how the vehicles are used. Demonstrate and describe how to feel the edge of the puzzle piece with your fingers. Invite the toddler to move his/her fingers on the outlines of the puzzle piece.]*

After the vehicle shown in a puzzle piece is identified and discussed, explain that we want to try to remember where a piece goes in the puzzle. Then invite the toddler to put the piece on the table above or near the puzzle board.

**Option 1 continued**

After all pieces have been removed, put each piece in the puzzle as you describe your thinking. Point to puzzle features you describe. Example: "This is the school bus. I remember the school bus was in this part of the puzzle. Look, here's a picture of where the bus goes in the puzzle."

Draw attention to how a piece fits in the puzzle board. Example: "This piece fit! The airplane piece fit in the space above the picture of an airplane."]

RECAP: You helped me take apart and put together a puzzle. We looked at each piece of the puzzle. We felt the edges of the puzzle. We put each piece of the puzzle where it fits. Look at all the vehicles in our puzzle!



24–36 Months

Option 2 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Executive function

A toddler practices taking apart and putting together a puzzle with caregiver guidance.



Key Concepts

Look
Edge
Remember



Materials Needed

Puzzle (see Be Prepared)



Also Promotes

Cognitive
Physical/Health

Be Prepared: Select a puzzle that you anticipate will be appropriately challenging and of interest to the toddler who will participate in this activity. See considerations in Option 1's Be Prepared section. You may wish to use the puzzle offered in Option 1.

Invite a toddler to join you at a table to work on a puzzle. Place the assembled puzzle in front of the toddler. Sit across from or adjacent to the toddler. This indirectly lets the toddler know that he/she is in charge of the puzzle work, with you offering help if needed.

Invite the toddler to describe and then remove each puzzle piece. Encourage the toddler to look at each piece before putting the pieces on the table. Draw attention to the image or shape of a piece as appropriate. Encourage the toddler to feel the edge of the puzzle piece with his/her fingers. Remind the toddler that it helps to remember where a piece goes in the puzzle.

After all pieces are in a small group near the puzzle board, invite the toddler to put each piece in the puzzle board. Offer suggestions or comments if it appears the toddler is uncertain about where a piece should go. Use strategies promoted in Option 1 for putting pieces in the puzzle board. Emphasize whether or how a piece fits in the puzzle.

Conclude the activity by positively acknowledging the toddler's efforts, especially looking closely at each piece and trying to remember where it fits.



24–36 Months

Option 3 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Executive function

Two toddlers take turns taking apart and putting together a puzzle with caregiver guidance.



Key Concepts

Look
Edge
Remember
Fit



Materials Needed

Puzzle (see Be Prepared)



Also Promotes

Cognitive
Physical/Health
Social-Emotional

Be Prepared: Select a puzzle that you anticipate will be appropriately challenging and of interest to the two toddlers who will participate in this activity. See considerations in Option 1's Be Prepared section.

Invite two toddlers to sit next to each other at a table with a completed puzzle in front of them. Encourage the toddlers to take turns pointing to and describing a piece in the puzzle and then removing it from the puzzle. Invite each toddler to feel the edge of the piece he/she removes. Remind the toddlers that it helps to remember where a piece fits in the puzzle. Encourage the toddlers to put the puzzle pieces in one group on the table, not one group per toddler.

Invite the toddlers to take turns as they select one puzzle piece from the group of pieces on the table, describe the puzzle piece, and talk about where the piece fits in the puzzle board. Conclude the activity by asking toddlers how they knew where a piece fits on the puzzle. Positively acknowledge each toddler's efforts to look closely at each piece and remember where a piece fits.

What to Look For—Options 1–3

The current activity emphasizes the self-regulation aspects of puzzle work first offered in Block 6. The amount of challenge offered to a toddler(s) in the current activity plan depends on the selected puzzle, per considerations suggested in Be Prepared.

The three options gradually increase the challenge of puzzle work by beginning with guided participation (Option 1) and moving to options with higher levels of independent work with the puzzle pieces (Options 2 and 3). Option 3 also offers the challenge of taking turns with a peer. As noted in Block 6, it can be challenging for some toddlers to wait and/or to avoid telling another child what to do with a puzzle piece. Be prepared to offer gentle reminders about turns and how we wait patiently while another child takes his/her turn.

A toddler may try to rush through the puzzle work. Encourage a slower approach, so the toddler can look at each piece, and remind the toddler that we are not interested in how fast a puzzle can be done. It may be helpful for a toddler to take two deep breaths between each piece.

A small icon of a staircase with three steps. **More Scaffolding Tips—Options 1–3**

Extra support ■ It is fine to discuss and omit a portion of the pieces in Options 1 and 2 if it appears working with all pieces is too challenging for a toddler. ■ Offer a progress report on efforts in Options 2 and 3. Example: “Look at how many pieces you have put in the puzzle.”

Enrichment ■ Invite the toddler to tell how he/she knew where a piece fits. It is beneficial for toddlers to describe their thinking.

**Interest Area**

Materials Needed: 2–3 puzzles of different challenge levels

Use the considerations offered in Option 1’s Be Prepared section to select several puzzles that differ in level of challenge and also represent interests of some toddlers in your room. Invite toddlers to work with a puzzle independently. Stay nearby, when possible, to provide comments and assistance if needed.

**Family Child Care**

Materials Needed: large floor puzzle

In addition to offering Options 1–3 for toddlers, provide a large floor puzzle for toddlers and older children to work on together. Toddlers will enjoy watching older children work on more challenging pieces, and older children may enjoy assisting younger toddlers to complete parts of the puzzle.



24–36 Months

Option 1 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Social interaction skills

Toddlers explore pretend roles during dramatic play with peers.



Key Concepts

Play together



Materials Needed

New items for the dramatic play area (see Be Prepared)



Also Promotes

Communication/Language
Cognitive



Optional Reading

Bear's Busy Family (A Barefoot Board Book) by Stella Blackstone

Be Prepared: Add items to the dramatic play area that will appeal to toddlers and support pretend play that toddlers determine. Possibilities: purses, wallets, hats, scarves, chunky necklaces, neckties, vests, shoes, baby bottles, extra-small diapers, empty food boxes and containers, pots and pans.

Invite several toddlers to play in the dramatic play area. Introduce the new items and use their initial responses to the items to talk about how the materials could be used in their play. Examples: “Devon, you like to play with the baby dolls. Would you like to use the new bottles and diapers with your babies?” “LaShawn, I see you are looking at the new dress-up clothes. What do you want to dress up as?” As toddlers share their ideas, encourage them to play together. Example: “LaShawn wants to dress up and go to a restaurant. Who would like to be a chef and cook in the restaurant with our new pots and pans?”

As toddlers play, look for opportunities to provide play cues that expand their interactions with the materials and each other. Examples: “Devon, you changed your baby’s diaper and gave him a bottle. What are you going to do next with your baby?” “Gavin is dressing up. He is wearing a necktie and a hat! Maybe Gavin should go to the restaurant with LaShawn! LaShawn, would you like Gavin to go to the restaurant with you?”

If appropriate, suggest using a new material with an item consistently available in the area. Example: “Gabby, I see that you are putting your baby to bed. Would you like to choose a book to read to your baby before she goes to sleep?”

Toddlers may invite you into their play. Be careful to join them without changing the direction of their play. Example: “Cayden wants me to be a waitress at his restaurant. Can I take your food order, LaShawn? What would you like to eat tonight?”

Recognize and acknowledge all play efforts. Example: “Maya had fun pretending to be a chef with the new pots and pans. LaShawn had fun ordering his favorite food!”

What to Look For—Option 1

Providing real items in the dramatic play area may spark new interest in pretend play and provide a greater variety of roles for toddlers to explore. Some toddlers may prefer to watch and possibly imitate others. Some toddlers will enjoy exploring new roles with the new materials. Toddlers may act out familiar routines, such as bedtime, or work through difficult experiences, such as saying goodbye to a parent.

**Option 1 continued**

Provide suggestions and cues that extend toddlers' play without dominating their actions. Some toddlers will prefer to watch and may imitate the play of others. These are initial steps in learning how to play with others.

More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1

Extra support ■ Toddlers who have difficulty engaging in pretend play may benefit from you demonstrating some ways to use the new materials. Example: "I am going to dress up fancy. I am putting on a fancy hat and necklace. What shoes do you think I should wear with my outfit?" ■ Validate each toddler's efforts to play pretend. Example: "Martin, you are wearing a hat and building with the blocks. I wonder if you are pretending to be a builder or an architect." ■ Some toddlers may be more comfortable playing next to others. Provide duplicate items so they can play side by side without conflict over a particular material.

Enrichment ■ Provide suggestions for new ways to use the materials in the dramatic play area. Examples: Use a beaded necklace as spaghetti to stir in a pot. Use a scarf tied like a sling to wear a baby doll like a mother wears a baby in a sling. ■ Encourage toddlers to think of new roles to play with the new materials. Example: "You are dressing up fancy. Where are you going to go in your fancy outfit? Maybe you are a shopper, or maybe you are going to a dance!"



24–36 Months

Option 2 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Social interaction skills

Toddlers engage in theme-based pretend play with their peers.



Key Concepts

Play together



Materials Needed

Items that encourage a new play theme



Also Promotes

Communication/Language
Cognitive



Optional Reading

Leo Gets a Checkup by Anna McQuinn

My Doctor's Visit by Cara Florance and Jon Florance

Going to the Doctor by Anne Civardi (Usborne First Experience series)

Corduroy Goes to the Doctor by Don Freeman

Revised: 6/30/2023

Be Prepared: Select and provide special props to support pretend play related to a theme of interest to toddlers. Example: For a theme focused on going to the doctor (often popular with toddlers), add medical face masks, scrub shirts, stethoscopes, bandages, clean medicine syringes, clipboard with paper and pens. Other play themes may include getting a haircut, taking a pet to the vet, shopping at a shoe store, being a construction worker, or working in an office. Providing new materials related to a theme of interest to toddlers is central to this activity option.

Invite several toddlers to play together with the new items in a theme you suggest. You may wish to provide a book or two with pictures of the new items that toddlers can look at and learn about. Talk with the toddlers about new roles they may be interested in exploring with the materials. Example: In a doctor play theme, toddlers may want to pretend to be a doctor, a nurse, a patient, or a parent taking a child to an appointment. Help toddlers plan ways to play together. Example: "Chloe and Hayley want to be doctors. Who would like to be a patient for them to take care of?"

Similar to Option 1, demonstrate uses of items, if appropriate, and look for opportunities to provide play cues that expand the toddlers' interactions with the materials and each other. If toddlers invite you into their play, take care to join them without changing the direction of their play. Recognize and affirm all efforts to participate in pretend play. Example: "We played doctor's office together. Chloe and Hayley were doctors and Nolan was the patient. I pretended to be Nolan's mother, and I held his hand when Hayley gave him a shot. We had fun playing together!"

What to Look For—Option 2

This activity option is more challenging than Option 1 because it begins with a play theme related to new materials. Option 1 begins with new materials and encourages play with the materials that may or may not emerge into a theme.

Toddlers enjoy acting out familiar experiences. Pretending to be a doctor, vet, hairstylist, or shopper are roles that toddlers can connect to their personal lives. Some toddlers will need extra support as they interact with new materials. (See Extra Support tip.) Other toddlers will pick up new props and find ways to use them independently. Some toddlers may prefer to watch the play, and others may play beside other toddlers. Some toddlers may need extra support to join in the play. Toddlers can learn new social skills by watching as well as carrying out pretend play.



Option 2 continued

More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2

Extra support ■ Demonstrate appropriate ways to use the materials, such as putting on a medical mask and listening to the heartbeat of a baby doll with a stethoscope. ■ Explain reasons for and uses of new materials. Example: “Some doctors and nurses wear masks to protect everyone from germs.”

Enrichment ■ Create prop boxes that you can add to the dramatic play area to spark new interest in pretend play and exploring new roles. Consider play themes that the toddlers in your care are interested in.



Interest Area

Materials Needed: new items provided in Options 1 and/or 2

Provide time for the toddlers to explore and play with the new materials independently and with friends. Toddlers will enjoy finding new ways to interact and explore social roles that they were unable to engage in during the planned activity. Talk with the toddlers about their ideas and actions as they play.



Family Child Care

Materials Needed: Option 2 items

It is likely that the Option 2 theme will be of interest to preschool-age and older children in your setting. Encourage their participation. Toddlers will enjoy watching, imitating, and joining in the play of the older children. Older infants may enjoy being “doctored” gently with a stethoscope and loose bandages with close caregiver supervision.



24–36 Months

Option 1 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Gross motor development

Fine motor development

A toddler practices underhand throwing with individualized support.



Key Concepts

Throw

Let go



Materials Needed

Up to 5 small balls

2–3 half-gallon milk jugs
(see Be Prepared)

Basket



Also Promotes

Cognitive

Self-Regulation

Communication/Language

Be Prepared: This activity is for a toddler who would benefit from individualized support for underhand throwing, a motor skill introduced in activity plans for younger toddlers (12–24 months). See Option 2 for overhand throwing.

Place empty, clean, milk jugs on the floor about two inches apart as a target in an open play area. Toddler-size bowling pins or soft blocks also may be used as a target. Place the balls in the basket and put the basket about three feet from the jugs.

Invite one toddler at a time to play a throwing game with you, using a ball that is easy for the toddler to grip (typically four inches). Demonstrate and describe an underhand throw: stand with ball in hand and facing the milk jugs, look at the milk jugs, swing arm back and then forward, let go of the ball when moving arm forward.



Invite the toddler to try. Kneel next to the toddler about three feet from the target. Offer reminders of each step. Demonstrate again, if appropriate. Enthusiastically acknowledge the toddler's efforts with the throwing, not whether a milk jug is knocked down.

👁️ What to Look For—Option 1

Throwing a ball is a complex motor task that involves coordinated use of large and small muscles, including eye-hand coordination. Ball throwing also involves motor planning, a cognitive task of thinking about a set of physical movements. Structured throwing activities are a beneficial way for toddlers to increase upper body strength, hand-eye coordination, and body awareness.

Underhand throwing was introduced in Blocks 10 and 16 activity plans for younger toddlers (12–24 months). Balls and other throwing play materials are provided indoors only during a supervised throwing activity.

Look for ways to tailor your support of the toddler's ball-throwing attempts. Toddlers differ considerably in their ball-throwing experiences and skill.

📊 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1

Extra support ■ Move the milk jugs closer together. ■ Encourage repeated practice of a part of the throwing that seems most challenging, such as swinging the arm or letting go of the ball.

Enrichment ■ Offer a larger (typically seven-inch) ball.



24–36 Months

Option 2 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Gross motor development

Fine motor development

A toddler explores overhand ball throwing.



Key Concepts

Throw

Up

Let go



Materials Needed

Assorted balls (see Be Prepared)

2 yards of blue fabric

Basket



Also Promotes

Cognitive

Self-Regulation

Communication/Language

Be Prepared: Gather 5–7 lightweight balls for indoor use. Be sure each ball is small enough for a toddler to grasp in one hand. Place the balls in the basket. Arrange the fabric on the floor as a large target, about three feet from the basket of balls. The fabric serves as pretend water. Leave folds and an uneven surface in the fabric to help prevent the balls from rolling away. You may wish to use beanbags or rolled-up adult socks instead of balls.

BEGIN: [*Invite a toddler to join you in throwing balls into a pretend lake.*]

EXPLAIN: Let's pretend our blue fabric is a small lake. We have some small balls that we can throw into our pretend lake.

[*Point to the pretend lake and to the basket of balls as you describe each.*]

We can try throwing a ball by moving our arm and hand up. Let me show you how we could throw the ball today.

ACT: [*Position yourself near the basket of balls, about three feet from the fabric.*]



Demonstrate and describe a gentle overhand throw. Emphasize the following sequence: We stand in front of the pretend lake and always keep our eyes on the lake. We move our arm up to bring the ball near our ear, we move our arm forward, and we let go of the ball. Explain that we use our whole body when we throw a ball.

Encourage the toddler to choose one ball from the basket and hold it in his/her hand. It may be helpful for the toddler to hear you repeat the sequence as he/she tries an overhand throw: move the ball near our ear by moving our arm up, move our arm forward, and let go of the ball as our arm moves forward.

Draw attention to how the ball moves away from the toddler when he/she moves arm forward. This is often motivating to a toddler, especially when dropping a ball is a toddler's main experience with balls.

Demonstrate again, if appropriate. Offer verbal support for what to do. Example: "Tyler, your ball dropped down by your feet. Try again to let go of the ball when your arm is moving forward."

**Option 2 continued**

Positively acknowledge the toddler's specific efforts rather than offering a general "good job." Examples: "Christina, you put the ball by your ear and pushed it forward. Your ball flew through the air and landed in the water!" "Great. You threw the ball forward. It is close to the water."]

RECAP: Today we practiced throwing a ball into pretend water. We remembered to move our arm up so we could put the ball near our ear. We let go of our balls while our arm was moving forward. Our balls moved through the air to our pretend water. We used our eyes to watch the water.

What to Look For—Option 2

The current activity builds on ball-throwing activities offered in ELM's activity plans for younger toddlers (12–24 months), including Blocks 10 and 16. The activities for younger toddlers mostly focus on underhand throwing, which is generally easier for toddlers to do than overhand throwing. Of course, young children's experiences with ball throwing are not limited to organized activities. Many children enjoy playing with balls during play times, and some families involve their young children in early sports activities.

A wide range of ball-throwing experiences across toddlers in your room underscores the importance of adapting the current activity. The one-to-one configuration supports adaptations. Some toddlers may prefer to throw underhand. Some may need guidance on when to let go of the ball. Some may benefit from repeated demonstrations of moving the arm forward. Many will need reminders about looking at the pretend water.

It is not necessary to count the number of balls a toddler throws.

More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2

Extra support ■ A toddler may choose two balls when invited to select one. Offer to hold the second ball for him/her. ■ Reminders about the target (pretend water) may be needed. A toddler may throw a ball at you, thinking it is a game of catch, or throw a ball at friends.

Enrichment ■ If a toddler has learned to throw overhand and does not need your coaching on the sequence, encourage the toddler to wait to throw until you say "Ready. Set. Go." ■ If you anticipate a toddler would be interested in learning about balance, explain that we use one arm to throw. Our other arm helps us keep our balance when we are standing and throwing. ■ Offer a smaller target by making the pretend water (fabric) smaller.



24–36 Months

Option 3 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Gross motor development

Fine motor development

Toddlers practice overhand ball throwing at a large target.



Key Concepts

Throw

Up

Let go



Materials Needed

12 balls

Cloth shower curtain

Hangers for shower curtain

Basket



Also Promotes

Cognitive

Self-Regulation

Communication/Language

Be Prepared: This activity is for toddlers who have experience with overhand ball throwing through participation in Option 2 or a similar activity. The activity option may be easily broadened to embrace both overhand and underhand throwing. However, it is not a good option for introducing a toddler to overhand or underhand throwing. See Option 2 for individualized support for overhand ball throwing. See Option 1 in the current activity plan or Blocks 10 and 16 for younger toddlers (12–24 months) for support for underhand throwing.

Affix the shower curtain in an outdoor area or in a gross motor play area. In an outdoor space, affix the curtain to a fence with clothespins. Fasten all corners. In an indoor space, a tension rod in a corner of the room is often a good option. The curtain and rod can be taken down easily. Place the balls in the basket or a pail. Consider affixing a large picture to the curtain as a smaller target or using a curtain that has large images that can serve as specific targets on the curtain.

Invite 2–4 toddlers to throw balls at the curtain, one at a time. Open the activity by reminding toddlers of how we throw overhand (and underhand, if appropriate). Demonstrate and describe an overhand throw. Emphasize the importance of standing and facing the curtain. Remind toddlers that we move our arm up and we let go of the ball when our arm is moving forward.

Encourage toddlers to stand about three feet away from the curtain. Provide a simple turn-taking method. Example: “Natalie throws a ball. Next, Ryan throws a ball.” Point to each child and restate the order. “First Natalie, then Ryan.” At this age, toddlers are not expected to take turns without adult guidance.

Determine and describe a method for retrieving thrown balls, such as after all balls have been thrown or after each ball is thrown. Be clear about who picks up a thrown ball(s) and the importance of standing away from the curtain when it is another toddler’s turn to throw. Offer verbal support for the specific sequence of ball throwing as appropriate. Acknowledge each toddler’s efforts.

What to Look For—Option 3

Use the motor skills and interests of toddlers in your room to determine whether this practice activity focuses on overhand throwing or both overhand and underhand. It is easy to make the activity inclusive of both underhand and overhand throwing by demonstrating and describing each at the beginning of the activity. Offer to play a ball-rolling game with toddlers who seem interested but reluctant to participate in the ball-throwing activity. Avoid comparing how toddlers throw the ball. Acknowledge all forms of participation.

**Option 3 continued** A small icon of a staircase with three steps. **More Scaffolding Tips—Options 3**

Extra support ■ Move the balls closer to the target. ■ Provide gentle reminders of the sequence, as described in Option 1.

Enrichment ■ Encourage a toddler to say which part of the curtain he/she wants to hit with the ball prior to picking up the ball. ■ Affix a large circle or square to the curtain as a smaller target within the curtain target.

**Interest Area**

Materials Needed: cardboard mailing tubes; 12 small balls, such as ping-pong balls, that will easily go through the tube; basket

Attach several cardboard tubes to a flat surface at toddler eye level. Place one of the tubes at a slight angle. Place a basket with the small balls near the tubes. Toddlers will enjoy experimenting with the balls and tubes.

**Family Child Care**

Materials Needed: soft balls, laundry basket, ping-pong balls, cardboard mailing tubes, hula-hoop, cushion

In addition to offering an appropriate option for toddlers in your setting, provide balls for other children to explore with supervision. Mobile infants will enjoy a simple game of passing a ball back and forth to you. Sit close to a mobile infant and roll the ball to him/her. A walking infant will enjoy carrying a small ball, such as sock balls. Some toddlers may enjoy a game of carrying a ball and dropping it into a laundry basket. A fun eye-hand game is to use ping-pong balls on a tabletop and pass them back and forth using a mailing tube. Place a barrier along the edge of the table to prevent a ball from rolling onto the floor. Preschool-age and older children may enjoy having several targets for sock-ball throwing; such as a laundry basket, a hula-hoop, or a cushion.