



**Communication/
Language**

Exploring Words

- Option 1 (IG)** Toddlers participate in a “word walk” focused on the purposes of print in their room.
- Option 2 (OO)** A toddler looks at printed words and pictures in a favorite book with caregiver guidance.



Cognitive

Solving Problems

- Option 1 (IG)** Toddlers engage in pretend play in the dramatic play center, with opportunities to talk with a caregiver about their play.
- Option 2 (IG)** Toddlers engage in pretend play in the blocks/building center, with opportunities to use materials typically found in another area(s) in the room.
- Option 3 (IG)** Toddlers engage in pretend play with an ice cream focus, with opportunities for cooperative play.



Self-Regulation

Getting Calm

- Option 1 (IG)** Toddlers watch a caregiver calm down by pretending to be a tree moving in the wind.
- Option 2 (IG)** Toddlers participate in guided practice of a calming-down activity by pretending to be a tree moving in strong and then soft wind.
- Option 3 (IG)** Toddlers practice a calming-down activity by pretending to be a tree moving in strong and then soft wind, with minimal caregiver guidance.



Social-Emotional

Exploring Feelings

- Option 1 (IG)** Toddlers identify what the main character of a book may feel in response to different events.
- Option 2 (OO)** A toddler talks about events and situations in a story that are associated with feeling happy or sad.



Physical/Health

Moving Our Bodies

- Option 1 (IG)** Toddlers practice different ways of jumping.
- Option 2 (OO)** A toddler jumps from square to square.

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



24–36 Months

Option 1 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Awareness of pictures and print

Expressive language

Toddlers participate in a “word walk” focused on the purposes of print in their room.



Key Concepts

Words

Read

Say



Materials Needed

Labels and printed signs in your room



Also Promotes

Cognitive

BEGIN: [Invite 2–3 toddlers to go on a “word walk” in your room.]

EXPLAIN: Words are a big part of what we do. We use words when we talk and listen. I am using words right now to talk with you. We use words when we talk with people in our room and with our family.

There are words in our books. People read the words when they share a book with us.

There are words in our room that can help us know where things belong and how things work.

ACT: Let’s walk together to find some words that are written in different places in our room.

We can start with some very special words!

[Lead toddlers to their respective cubbies or a location in your room where each toddler’s printed name can be seen.

- Point to and say each printed name.
- Explain that our names are words. We can read words and we can say words.
- If there is a picture of the toddler on the name card, point to and describe each. Example: “Here is a picture of (toddler). Here is the word that says (toddler’s name). Pictures and words are different things.]

ASK: Why do our cubbies (or other location) have our names?

Follow-up prompt, if needed: How would we know where to put our things if our names were not on our cubbies?

ACT: Let’s look for some more words in our room.

[Walk to another part of the room where one or more printed words are available, such as signs on play centers or locations for storing specific materials. Use the following strategies:



**Option 1 continued**

- *Point to and say the printed word. Invite toddlers to repeat the word you say.*
- *Point to the item related to the printed word. Example: "This card says 'puzzles.' Here are our puzzles."*
- *Talk about how the printed word helps us do things in our room.*
- *Remind toddlers that we can read a word and we can say a word.*
- *If there is a picture with the word, point to and describe each.*


Repeat this process with several more words if toddler interest and time permit.]

RECAP: We looked at some words in our room. What very special words did we find? (our names)
The words can help us do things in our room.

 **What to Look For—Option 1**

The activity's focus on printed words supports emerging awareness of the purposes of print. The intent is to help toddlers broaden their concept of the printed word as existing in more than books, and to understand that printed words in a room can tell us how things work. The activity is not intended to teach reading or letters. The current activity extends and refines the broader attention to symbols in a room offered in Block 12.

Look for opportunities to help toddlers connect a printed word to an actual object(s), to a picture that accompanies the printed word, and to the spoken word. These emphases are consistent with the NAEYC accreditation standards for communication/language for very young children, as described in the *ELM Curriculum User Guide: Birth–36 Months*.

 **More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1**

Extra support ■ When you approach a printed word in the room (after exploring toddlers' names at their cubbies or elsewhere), point to the material(s) it represents and then point to the printed word. Ask toddlers what they think the word says. Example: "Here are the building blocks. What do you think this word says?" ■ Make clear that toddlers are not expected to know what a printed word says. Example: "Older children and adults can read this word. We can look at the picture by this word and figure out what the word says."

Enrichment ■ Expand the "word walk" to another part of your center, preferably the entryway that toddlers walk through daily.



24–36 Months

Option 2 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Awareness of pictures and print

Expressive language

A toddler looks at printed words and pictures in a favorite book with caregiver guidance.



Key Concepts

Word

Picture



Materials Needed

A picture-rich book of interest to the toddler



Also Promotes

Cognitive

Physical/Health

Invite a toddler to join you in looking at a favorite book. Encourage the toddler to hold the book and turn the pages. Read the text. Point to text as you read it. Invite the toddler to describe what is happening in a picture. Then identify a word in the text that describes some aspect of the accompanying picture. Point to the word, say the word, and point to the aspect of the picture that the word describes. Examples: “This word says clock. Here is a clock in our picture.” “This word says jumped. In this picture, a frog jumped into the water. The word tells us what happened.” Use this approach for most pictures in the book. Conclude the session by inviting the toddler to find a picture in the book that he/she really likes. Remind the toddler that a word on this page helped us understand the picture.

What to Look For—Option 2

Use of a favorite book supports toddler engagement in the activity, including interest in telling what happens in the story. Reduce the amount of text you read if a toddler prefers to be the storyteller. But maintain the suggested procedure of (1) pointing to a word, (2) saying the word, and then (3) connecting the word to the pertinent aspect of the picture. Include words that name an object or character (noun) and words that describe actions shown in a picture (verb) without drawing attention to this distinction.

More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2

Extra support ■ Invite the toddler to point to the aspect of the picture that pertains to the word you point to and say. Example: “This word says basket. Where is the basket in our picture?”

Enrichment ■ Offer two books to explore and encourage the toddler to pick one for the current activity.



Interest Area

Materials Needed: drawing paper in white or light colors, crayons or markers (without lids) in multiple colors

Place the art materials on a low table. Invite toddlers to draw anything they wish. Offer to write the toddler's name on their picture and a word that tells what the picture is about. Encourage the toddler to say what word could be put on the art about the picture. Write in the toddler's presence. Describe what and why you are writing. Example: "I am writing your name here. Now we will know who drew this great picture. I am writing the word 'mommy.' You asked me to write the word 'mommy' on your picture. Now we know who is in your picture." Avoid using your writing contribution to teach about letters.



Family Child Care

Materials Needed: see activity description

In addition to offering Options 1 and 2 to toddlers, invite preschool-age children to join you in the one-to-one Option 2 activity. Talk about letters if a preschool-age child mentions a letter(s). If a preschool-age child participates in the Interest Area activity, draw attention to the first letter of his/her name when you write it on his/her artwork. Encourage a school-age child to read posted print in your setting for older toddlers and preschool-age children.



24–36 Months

Option 1 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal Problem-solving

Toddlers engage in pretend play in the dramatic play center, with opportunities to talk with a caregiver about their play.



Key Concepts Play

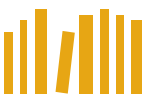


Materials Needed

Food-related items typically found in dramatic play center
Novel materials (see Be Prepared)



Also Promotes Communication/Language



Optional Reading

A Little Bit of Soul Food by Amy Wilson Sanger
Eating the Alphabet by Lois Ehlert
¡Hola! Jalapeño by Amy Wilson Sanger
My Very First Book of Food by Eric Carle

Be Prepared: Add food-related items that are not usually available in your dramatic play area, such as toy pizza and small pizza boxes, that you anticipate will be of interest to toddlers who participate in the gathering. Include a good supply of novel items to help prevent disputes about who gets to play with the new things. Limit participation to the number of toddlers your dramatic play area can easily accommodate. The quality of pretend play can be negatively affected if the area is crowded.

Invite several toddlers to play in the dramatic play area. Draw attention to novel materials as well as items typically available in the center. Remain in the area as an attentive observer as toddlers settle into play with the items. As play gets underway, offer brief comments that describe each toddler's activities or material(s) they are using and invite a toddler to talk about what he/she is doing. Remember that your facial expression is an important way to communicate your interest in connecting with a toddler. Example: "Roland, I see you are cooking." Roland may respond by saying, "I am a daddy cooking." Respond by repeating the toddler's comment and inviting another comment. Example: "You are a daddy cooking. What are you cooking?"

Emphasize a toddler's role in the play, such as a dad engaged in cooking, and imaginary uses of materials. Ask questions that may extend a toddler's play without directing the play. Example: "What will you do with the hot dogs after they are done cooking?" It is not necessary to coax a toddler to talk about his/her imaginary play. If a toddler does not react to your comment, stay close and continue to observe. The toddler may tell you about his/her play several minutes later.

Allow toddlers to determine their role and choose play materials. Sometimes toddlers assign themselves identical roles. This may be of concern to a toddler who thinks only one person can be in a role. Gently remind toddlers it is okay for several children to be and do the same thing. Example: "Dads like to cook. It is okay if we have many dads cooking today."

Provide materials that may be of interest as a toddler's play evolves. Facilitate sharing an item as appropriate.

What to Look For—Option 1

Assuming a pretend role and using objects to represent real items is important cognitive work for toddlers. The mental representation of an item may be a toy version of the item in your center, or the item may represent something else. Example: A toy washing machine may be a grill for preparing hamburgers or a cooler for soft drinks at a picnic. Although the suggested materials promote play related to food, it is possible that one or more toddlers will embark on play related to a different topic.

Option 1 continued

The pretend play of two-year-olds is likely to occur side by side with little or no association with one another and no common theme. The unrelated roles may involve toddlers engaged in pretending to cook or pack up for a trip or care for a baby or be a pet. Avoid imposing a theme and roles, and take each toddler's play on his/her terms. But look for ways to support cooperative play if you see two or more toddlers interested in each other's related play.

How is this activity different than pretend play that occurs during regular play periods in your room? Answer: your responsive connection to the play. The activity description emphasizes paying close attention so you can offer supportive questions and comments that encourage a toddler to think and talk about his/her role and use of materials. This contribution is difficult to assume on an ongoing basis.

The activity description's examples of interactions with a toddler reflect the serve-and-return approach to communication described in the *ELM Curriculum User Guide: Birth–36 Months*. In addition to promoting back-and-forth exchanges, look for opportunities to nonverbally acknowledge a toddler who makes eye contact with you. The toddler may be "checking in" with you, making sure you continue to be engaged. Your attentive presence can provide security for toddlers who are exploring materials and roles.

Toddlers may differ in their interest in the novel materials. A toddler who is familiar with the item(s) may readily incorporate the material into their play. Others may have a current play approach that leaves no room for something new or different.

If a toddler's imaginary role is not conducive to positive interactions, insert yourself into the play and redirect him/her. Example: If a toddler claims he/she is a "bad guy," redirect the child by engaging with the character. You might say "Our restaurant serves your favorite foods. Come and eat some delicious food." Encourage the pretend "bad guy" to consider a positive way to play. Example: "The restaurant needs strong helpers for making food." If redirecting a toddler's role does not work, remind the toddler about your room's rules about being safe and friendly. Tell the toddler that he/she will need to pretend to be someone else. Provide suggestions the child may accept, such as a pet helper, firefighter, or pilot. Emphasize that strong people often help others.

 **More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1**

Extra support ■ Move around the play area, kneeling near a toddler so you have a child's eye view of what is happening and ease of communication. Avoid talking across another toddler(s) to communicate with a toddler. ■ Say the name of a toddler's pretend role if it is not included in his/her description. Example: "The person at a restaurant who asks what food you would like is called server (or a waiter or waitress)."

Enrichment ■ Provide clipboards with paper and a few crayons. ■ Arrange several books related to food and cooking (see Optional Reading list) in the housekeeping area. After the play activity, draw attention to pictures directly related to a toddler's play. Inviting a toddler to look at a picture during the play may interrupt the flow of activity.



24–36 Months

Option 2 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Problem-solving

Toddlers engage in pretend play in the blocks/building center, with opportunities to use materials typically found in another area(s) in the room.



Key Concepts

Play



Materials Needed

Items found in other play areas (see Be Prepared)



Also Promotes

Communication/Language
Social-Emotional

Be Prepared: Gather materials from other play areas in your room that are generally not found in the blocks/building area. Select items that you anticipate will be of interest to toddlers and that potentially could be used with blocks. Examples: dishes, dolls, texture bears, scarves.

BEGIN: *[Invite several toddlers to join you in playing in the blocks/building area. Sit on the floor facing the toddlers.]*

EXPLAIN: I moved some things to our building area that are usually in other centers in our room. Maybe there are ways to play with these things in the building area.

[Point to and name the items.]

ACT: *[Use strategies suggested in Option 1 for observing toddlers' play and encouraging each toddler to talk with you about his/her play. The strategies include offering an item to a toddler once the focus of the play is clear to you. Examples: Offer a "daddy" a toy bottle or a book to read to his baby. Crinkle a sheet of yellow paper for a "camper" to use as fire.*

Draw attention to toddlers' play by briefly describing what peers are doing. Do this after you have talked with each toddler about his/her role and materials. Examples: "Mica is a camper. Diego is a daddy." "Mica is using a pan and blocks to make a campfire. Diego has baby food in his pan for the baby."

Consider supporting toddlers' play by briefly taking on a role in the play. Example: Become a customer at a pizza restaurant. "I would like to buy a cheese pizza, please."

If toddlers are interacting and/or noticing one another, draw attention to similar interests of activities. Examples: "Ruby is washing dishes and Aaron is making pizza. He is putting plates inside pizza boxes."

RECAP: *[Describe the role each child assumed and different ways the toddlers used materials, including materials you introduced from other areas.]*

What to Look For—Option 2


Toddlers frequently assume the same role and actions in pretend play for periods of time, such as a week or more. Example: A toddler may place dishes and pretend food on a table with the same scenario in mind for two weeks. This approach is to be respected; repetition is valuable. At the same time, providing items typically found in another play area in your room may prompt

**Option 2 continued**

a toddler to slightly revise his/her usual approach to include the “new” item. Alternatively, a toddler may not be ready to alter his/her play approach and will ignore the availability of different materials.

In general, expect toddlers to use the blocks to structure their play and to represent other objects. Some toddlers have limited experience with blocks, however; their play time is spent in other areas. A toddler who infrequently plays with blocks may join the gathering due to interest in an item you added from another area. If the toddler seems uncertain about how to use the blocks to accommodate the desired item, you may wish to suggest an idea. This is an opportunity to broaden the toddler’s play experiences. The toddler may leave the area, taking the desired item with him/her, if the blocks area seems too foreign.

Some older toddlers may be approaching the ability to engage in the beginnings of cooperative play. Help toddlers increase awareness of other toddlers by describing their play. Let a toddler know that joining another toddler in play is a possibility. Example: A toddler who watches you play the role of customer at a pizza restaurant may want to be the next customer. Fully accept a toddler’s wish to remain focused on individual pretend play.

 **More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2**

Extra support ■ Encourage toddlers to pass around some of the items you describe in the opening segment. Touching a particular item may be a new experience for some toddlers.

Enrichment ■ Encourage verbal expression by using a block as a phone. Example: Pretend to call a restaurant to order carry-out.



24–36 Months

Option 3 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal Problem-solving

Toddlers engage in pretend play with an ice cream focus, with opportunities for cooperative play.



Key Concepts Pretend



Materials Needed

- Ice cream toys (see Be Prepared)
- Small bowls
- Spoons
- Aprons



Also Promotes

- Social-Emotional
- Communication/Language
- Physical/Health



Optional Reading

- Is it Warm Enough for Ice Cream?* by DK Publishing
- The Little Ice Cream Truck* by Margery Cuyler
- Groovy Joe Ice Cream & Dinosaurs* by Eric Litwin

Revised: 6/30/2023

Be Prepared: This activity is for toddlers who seem ready to interact with a peer(s) in a shared play arrangement. Secure toys that support ice cream play, including cones, scoops, and material that can be pretend ice cream. One possibility is Melissa and Doug® Scoop and Stack Ice Cream Cone Playset. Ice cream bar and multi-part popsicle toys also are available commercially. Another option is to create materials. Roll stiff brown paper into cones and fasten with tape. Fashion ice cream balls from craft materials, or provide small balls to fit onto the cones or into small bowls. Scoops are typically a popular part of ice cream play. Provide materials for four toddlers to be engaged in preparing and serving ice cream at the same time. Organize the items in an appealing arrangement that leaves open pretend setting possibilities (store, party) for toddlers to create.

Invite 3–4 toddlers to play with ice cream toys. Introduce an ice cream focus for the play but avoid determining a specific activity and assigning roles. Suggest possibilities, such as serving and eating ice cream at a birthday party or an ice cream shop, if toddlers seem unclear about how to proceed. Describe items and show how to use a scoop (some toddlers may be familiar with soft ice cream from a machine only).

Serve as an attentive observer who describes how specific toddlers are using the materials and offers suggestions, not directives, if toddlers seem to need guidance. It may be helpful to describe how an ice cream shop works or how ice cream cones get prepared and served at a party. If appropriate, briefly enter the play by serving as a pretend consumer or server of the ice cream. This offers an example of a role and helps a toddler(s) carry out a counterpart role. Example: A toddler’s pretend customer role at an ice cream shop is clarified when you pretend to be a server who asks about flavors, numbers of scoops, and whether a customer wants the ice cream in a cone or bowl. Also serve as a props manager who provides additional materials as needed and facilitates turn taking with items and tasks.

Support opportunities for toddlers to engage in cooperative play, even if it is a brief exchange. Examples: If you pretend to be an ice cream server, ask who wants to be the next server and physically hand off some of the materials. Draw attention to a toddler who needs a counterpart role, such as “Maria is looking for ice cream customers. Would someone like to get some pretend ice cream from Maria?”

Conclude the activity by inviting toddlers to put away the ice cream toys and also talk about what they did during the play.

What to Look For—Option 3


The use of materials related to ice cream provides a common focus that may facilitate cooperative play. Play with others can be more difficult for a toddler to consider and initiate when peers are engaged in parallel play focused on a range of interests and materials. Cooperative play does not automatically

**Option 3 continued**

happen, however, especially at this age. Look for opportunities to help two or more toddlers connect in complementary roles and communicate, as suggested in the activity description. Also look for a chance to help a toddler experience a cooperative play exchange by entering into a one-to-one interaction with a toddler in a role he/she chooses. Example: Ask a toddler if he/she would like to be a pretend server or a customer at an ice cream shop. Role play the counterpart role for a minute or two.

Taking on a pretend role is a cognitive task that a toddler may not be able or interested in sustaining for more than a few minutes. Anticipate that some toddlers will change their roles frequently. Be attentive to how you might help facilitate the transitions. Also, notice the possibility that a toddler may not be interested in a role. Some toddlers may be mostly interested in the materials, especially if they are new, and want to spend time playing with them in a mostly solitary or parallel arrangement, maybe without assigning a role to themselves.

Staying fully focused on the toddlers' play can provide security for toddlers. Generally, toddlers manage activities with peers better when a caregiver is actively observing.

 **More Scaffolding Tips—Option 3**

Extra support ■ Acknowledge a child's wish to observe the activity. Invite a toddler to sit next to you.
■ If a toddler wishes to carry materials around the room, help him/her find suitable things to carry that keep the ice cream props in the activity area.

Enrichment ■ Draw attention to related books. ■ Draw the outline of a cone and encourage toddlers to make a sign for their ice cream shop.

 **Interest Area**

Materials Needed: baskets of related books such as, *A Little Bit of Soul Food* by Amy Wilson Sanger, *Eating the Alphabet* by Lois Ehlert, *¡Hola! Jalapeño* by Amy Wilson Sanger, *My Very First Book of Food* by Eric Carle, *Tacos!* by Lotta Nieminen, toy phone, toy camera, people and animal figures, manipulative builders, such as Duplo® blocks

Extend Options 2 and 3 activities. Add additional novel materials, such as a toy phone and camera, to the building center to foster pretend play. Arrange people and animal figures with manipulative builders, such as Duplo® blocks. Make the Option 3 materials available for open-ended play. Toddlers will normally repeat their play with the ice cream shop props and begin to extend and enhance their pretend roles and interactions. Allow ample time for the pretend play to develop and deepen. If after a few weeks toddlers are no longer interested in the materials, put them away and present them again in 8–10 weeks.

 Family Child Care

Materials Needed: *Whistle for Willie* by Ezra Jack Keats, dolls or animal figures

In addition to offering each of the activity options to older toddlers, provide opportunities for children of other ages in your setting to engage in pretend play. Mobile infants often begin to pretend by feeding dolls or animal figures. Younger toddlers (12–24 months) sometimes talk to animal figures or pretend they are talking or making sounds. You may see early signs of mental representation if a toddler pushes a block on the floor while making a car sound. Using the block to represent a car is a mental representation that later in life involves using marks on paper to represent words and ideas. Introduce pretend play with mobile infants and toddlers in a one-to-one interaction.

Preschool-age children will enjoy hearing the story of *Whistle for Willie* by Ezra Jack Keats. When Peter puts his father’s hat on and pretends to be Father, his mother plays along.

If a child arrives, already pretending to be a pirate, superhero, or other character, consider encouraging him/her to place pretend props in a cubby area. Let the child and parent know you are asking the pretend character to remain in the cubby. Assure the child he/she may resume the role at the end of the day.



24–36 Months

Option 1
Informal Gathering

Skill and Goal

Self-control

Toddlers watch a caregiver calm down by pretending to be a tree moving in the wind.



Key Concepts

Tree
Calm
Focus



Materials Needed

None



Also Promotes

Physical/Health

Be Prepared: Arrange for an adult or a preschool-age child in your center to demonstrate the tree movements if you do not wish to do so.

BEGIN: *[Invite 3–5 toddlers to help you pretend to be a tree.]*

We are learning some ways to calm our bodies and our minds. Today I will show a way to calm down by pretending to be a tree.

EXPLAIN: A tree has roots that grow deep in the ground. The branches of a tree grow above the ground. The branches can move when the wind blows.

I am going to stand up tall and pretend I am a tree. I am going to pretend my arms are the branches of the tree. My fingers are some of the leaves on my pretend tree.

[Demonstrate standing tall with your arms stretched up and out to represent branches and leaves.]

A tree has roots in the ground. I am going to pretend my feet are in the ground, just like roots of a tree are in the ground. Remember, our pretend cornstalk and seaweed had roots in the ground.

I am going to pretend there is wind blowing all around me. My make-believe branches and leaves will move in the wind. But my feet will not move or lift up. I am pretending my feet are the roots of the tree in the ground.

ACT: Please watch me pretend to be a tree moving in the wind. A strong wind is moving toward me. The strong wind moves fast.

[Demonstrate making big movements with your arms and moving your fingers quickly.]

My pretend branches and leaves are moving fast in the strong wind.

Now I am going to pretend the wind is moving slower. The fast winds are gone. Now the wind is soft and slow.

[Demonstrate smaller and slower movements with your arms and fingers.]

EXPLAIN: *[After a brief period, stop moving your arms and fingers. Stand in a relaxed position.]*

**Option 1 continued**

My body feels calmer now. I focused on being a pretend tree moving in the wind. I tried hard not to look at other things or think about other things.

My pretend branches and leaves moved fast when the wind was strong. My pretend branches and leaves moved slower when the wind was soft and slow.

- ASK:**
- Did my feet move while my pretend branches and leaves were moving in the wind?
 - Why not? (feet are pretend roots in the ground)
 - Would you like me to pretend to be a tree moving in the wind again?

[If two or more toddlers respond positively, repeat the movements. Begin with larger arm movements in the imaginary strong wind and then move at a slower pace in the pretend soft and slow wind.]

RECAP: We can calm our minds and bodies by pretending to be a tree moving in the wind. I focused on my arms and fingers and feet. I paid attention to moving my pretend branches and leaves in fast wind and in slow wind. I worked hard to not move my feet. I did not look at other things when I was pretending to be a tree.



24–36 Months

Option 2 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Self-control

Toddlers participate in guided practice of a calming-down activity by pretending to be a tree moving in strong and then soft wind.



Key Concepts

Tree
Calm
Focus



Materials Needed

None



Also Promotes

Physical/Health

Be Prepared: This activity is for toddlers who are familiar with the calming-down activity demonstrated in Option 1. Make arrangements for an adult or preschool-age child in your center to demonstrate the activity if you do not wish to do so.

Invite 3–5 toddlers to practice calming down by pretending to be a tree moving in the wind. Use Option 1 strategies to provide a brief description of a tree. Remind toddlers of how we focus on our body while pretending to be a tree moving in the wind. First the wind is strong. Then the wind is soft.

Lead toddlers in pretending their body is a tree moving in strong wind. Encourage toddlers to sway their arms (pretend branches) with big movements and to move their fingers (pretend leaves) quickly. Remind toddlers that we do not move our feet; our feet are the pretend roots of the tree. Encourage toddlers to focus on what their body is doing and not on other things.

Stop moving your body and invite toddlers to also stop moving. Ask toddlers what happens next. Affirm that the wind slows down and our arms and fingers move slower. Then lead toddlers in moving their arms and fingers at a slower pace. The wind is slow and soft. The branches and leaves of our pretend tree are moving slower.

After a brief practice of moving our bodies slower, stop moving your body and ask toddlers to stop moving. Talk about the movements. Describe how focusing on our body as a pretend tree in wind can help our bodies and minds get calmer. We work hard to not pay attention to other things around us when we focus on being a pretend tree moving in the wind.

Then lead toddlers in another round of practice, this time without a pause between strong and soft wind movements. Remind toddlers that first there is strong wind, then there is soft wind. When the wind changes from strong to soft, quietly say “soft” or “strong.” Conclude the activity by inviting toddlers to talk about what it’s like to pretend to be a tree moving in the wind. Ask whether it was hard to change how we moved our arms and fingers in fast wind and then in slow wind.



24–36 Months

Option 3 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Self-control

Toddlers practice a calming-down activity by pretending to be a tree moving in strong and then soft wind, with minimal caregiver guidance.



Key Concepts

Tree
Calm
Focus



Materials Needed

None



Also Promotes

Physical/Health

Be Prepared: This activity is for toddlers who are familiar with the calming-down activity focused on a pretend tree through participation in Options 1 and 2.

Invite toddlers to practice calming their bodies and minds by pretending to be a tree with branches and leaves (arms and fingers) that move in strong wind and then in soft wind. Remind toddlers to keep feet on the floor and to focus on moving their bodies. Offer verbal support. Provide a demonstration, if needed. It is not necessary for toddlers to move from strong to soft wind at the same time. Offer two rounds, with a pause between each practice (that includes both strong and soft wind) to briefly talk about the experience, including how we focus on the pretend wind and moving our arms and fingers in strong and soft wind.

What to Look For—Options 1–3

This is the third of a set of similar mindfulness activities in the ELM Curriculum for older toddlers (24–36 months). Prior activities involved pretending to be a cornstalk moving in wind (Block 17) and seaweed moving in water (Block 20). The two earlier activities include movement of torso, especially the upper torso. The current activity emphasizes movement of arms and fingers (branches and leaves), not torso (the pretend tree’s trunk). The arm and finger movements are valuable to promote, but it is fine if toddlers move their whole upper body while pretending to be a tree. More important is the experience of trying to focus on faster and slower physical movements in pretend wind of different strength while not moving feet.

This set of activities is popular among toddlers. Some may find it challenging to keep their feet in place and to transition from faster to slower body movements. The questions of toddlers in Option 1 include attention to these aspects of the activity. In Options 2 and 3, offer verbal support as needed in an especially quiet, calm voice. Positively accept differences in how toddlers approach the activity.

It is not necessary in Option 3 for toddlers to engage in a uniform transition from strong to softer wind, as noted in the activity description. Pursuing independent practice as a group activity may prompt toddlers to pay more attention to what their peers are doing than to their own image of wind and how their body moves in strong and then softer wind.

Some toddlers may look at other interesting things going on in the room during part, or a good portion, of the activity. Focusing on a specific set of movements and avoiding distractions are understandable challenges at any age, especially the early years. Repeated practice and gentle guidance are appropriate ways to help toddlers strengthen their ability to be more engaged in an activity.



More Scaffolding Tips—Options 1–3

Extra support ■ In Option 2, provide a brief demonstration of moving arms and fingers in strong wind, and again in slow wind, prior to leading toddlers in movement during these two segments of the activity.

Enrichment ■ Add another movement transition and change the wind order by beginning with slow wind, moving to fast wind, and returning to slow wind. ■ Play quiet, soothing music or nature sounds in future offerings of the activity. ■ Explain that the part of the tree that grows from the root is called a trunk. Branches are connected to a tree's trunk. ■ Encourage toddlers to move like seaweed (Block 20), and then move like a tree (current activity).



Interest Area

Materials Needed: several books with illustrations and photos of trees, several small tape squares on the floor large enough for two toddler feet to fit inside

Display the tree books on a low table. Talk with toddlers about how roots keep trees in the ground, and how other parts of the tree grow out of the ground. Also, invite toddlers to stand in a taped square and practice keeping their feet inside the square while pretending to be a tree blowing in the wind. Generously acknowledge it is challenging to not move our feet when our arms and fingers are moving. Accept a range of toddler responses to the task.



Family Child Care

Materials Needed: live tree outdoors

Preschool-age and older children will enjoy participating in these activity options. Mindful movement activities can benefit children of all ages. If possible, visit or look at a live tree outdoors. Talk with children about the roots under the ground and the strong trunk growing up high. Point out branches and leaves. There may be wind that moves the branches or leaves during the tree observation. If you are able to visit a tree outdoors, invite children to participate in Option 2 or 3 as a part of the outing.



24–36 Months

Option 1 Informal Gathering



Skill and Goal

Awareness of emotions

Toddlers identify what the main character of a book may feel in response to different events.



Key Concepts

Happy
Sad



Materials Needed

A Ball for Daisy by Chris Raschka



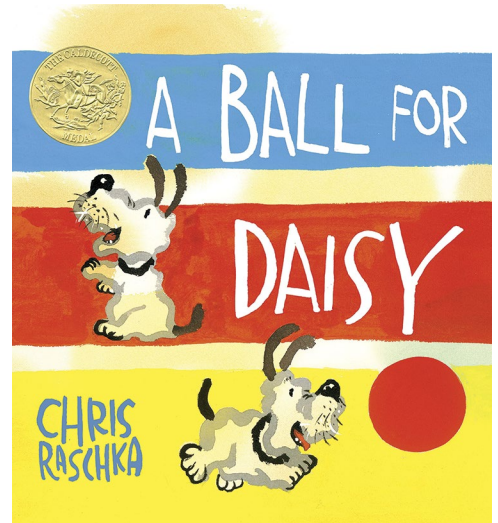
Also Promotes

Communication/Language
Cognitive

Be Prepared: Review each illustration in this wordless book to determine what you will say about the story's various events. The activity plan invites toddlers to identify and talk about what the main character (Daisy) might feel in response to each event you describe.

Invite 3–5 toddlers to read and talk about a book with you. Show the book cover and explain that our book is about a dog named Daisy. Draw attention to Daisy's red ball. Explain that the book is special because it has no words. The pictures in our book tell us what happens with Daisy and her red ball.

Point generously as you describe illustrations. Explain specific events, including events that may not be obvious to toddlers. Example: The air came out of the ball when the larger dog picked up the ball with its mouth. Some toddlers may be familiar with air coming out of a balloon when it is popped.



Focus on major events or situations, especially the following:

- Daisy playing with favorite red ball
- lying on couch with red ball
- bigger dog taking Daisy's favorite ball
- favorite ball losing its air
- Daisy getting a new ball
- Daisy and larger dog playing together again at end of story

For each major event, ask toddlers what Daisy might be feeling. Draw attention to Daisy's facial expression and body posture. Example: "The other dog took Daisy's red ball. Look at Daisy's face. What do you think Daisy is feeling?" Pause for toddlers' comments. If no comments are offered, draw attention to additional information in the picture. Example: "Look at how Daisy's head is down. Daisy is looking to the ground." If this information and another pause do not prompt a response, offer two possible ways Daisy might be feeling. Example: "Do you think Daisy might be feeling happy or sad?"

**Option 1 continued**

Conclude the session by explaining that Daisy had different feelings during the story. Name the feelings mentioned by toddlers during the session and remind toddlers what happened when Daisy had a specific feeling. Example: “Daisy was happy when she played with her ball and rested with her ball. Daisy felt happy when she got a new ball. She was happy when she played with the larger dog.”

👁️ What to Look For—Option 1

The achievable challenge of this activity is saying what Daisy might be feeling. The book sharing is useful practice for toddlers in connecting an event or situation to an emotion. Support the role differences in this activity: you tell what happened (with toddler help) and toddlers describe what Daisy might be feeling.

Toddlers may be quiet the first time you ask what Daisy might be feeling. Do not rush to provide a response. Offer a little more information about an event or situation, as suggested in the activity description. Then pause again. Offer two feeling possibilities (happy or sad) only when the additional information and second pause do not lead to a toddler comment. After discussion of Daisy’s response to the first event, toddlers may find it easier to think about and respond to your recurring question of what Daisy might be feeling.

Most likely, happy and sad will be the primary or only emotions toddlers mention. Be prepared for a toddler to say that Daisy is mad or angry when the larger dog takes the ball or when the air comes out of the ball. Accept a range of appropriate emotions named by toddlers. Note the question is “what Daisy might be feeling,” and not “what is Daisy feeling.” It is useful for toddlers to consider several different emotion responses, not one only.

📈 More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1

Extra support ■ Acknowledge and build on toddlers’ comments and pointing. ■ Invite toddlers to point to features of illustrations you describe. Offer time and help because the award-winning illustrations in the book are somewhat abstract.

Enrichment ■ In the opening segment, when you explain our book has no words, remind toddlers that we found words on a “word walk” in our room and we looked at words printed in a book (Communication/Language in the current block). Now we’re looking at a book that has no words to read. But we will say words when we talk about what is happening in the pictures.

24–36 Months

Option 2 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Awareness of emotions

A toddler talks about events and situations in a story that are associated with feeling happy or sad.



Key Concepts

Happy
Sad



Materials Needed

A Ball for Daisy by Chris Raschka



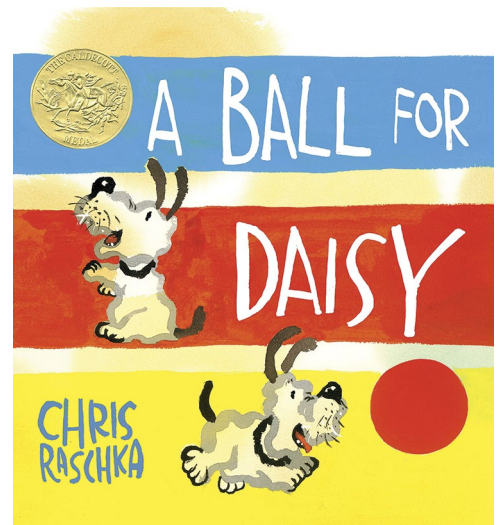
Also Promotes

Communication/Language
Cognitive

Be Prepared: This activity is for a toddler who participated in Option 1 or is familiar with the *A Ball for Daisy* story through a similar book sharing.

Invite a toddler to look at *A Ball for Daisy* with you. Engage the toddler in one of two possible ways with the book:

1. Support the toddler in using the pictures to recall what happened in the story, including what Daisy may have felt in each event or situation.
2. Support the toddler in discussing events and situations associated with Daisy feeling happy and then with Daisy feeling sad.
Examples: "Let's look at pictures that tell us about times Daisy was feeling happy." "Now let's look at pictures that tell us about times when Daisy was feeling sad."



The first possibility follows the order of events in the story. The second possibility is more appropriate for a toddler who has a good grasp of the story and is ready to consider events selectively and somewhat out of order. Both approaches emphasize the toddler as storyteller and connections between events/situations and Daisy's feelings.

Conclude the session with positive acknowledgment of the toddler's efforts to tell a story and help us remember what Daisy felt and why.

What to Look For—Option 2

The second approach to the session is more challenging than the first approach because story events are organized by one of two feelings (happy and sad), not by the order in which they occurred. If a toddler finds the second approach too challenging, it is easy for you to transition to the first approach during the session.

The one-to-one configuration supports individualization of the session. Spend more time on parts of the story that are of interest to the toddler. It is not necessary to give equal attention to all events.



Option 2 continued

More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2

Extra support ■ For the second approach (organized by happy and sad), focus on the following for Daisy feeling happy: Daisy playing with her red ball, lying on the couch with her red ball, and being given a new (blue) ball by a friend. Focus on the following for Daisy feeling sad: bigger dog taking Daisy's favorite ball and the favorite ball losing its air and being destroyed.

Enrichment ■ Talk about how the friend who gave Daisy a new ball was being helpful to Daisy.



Interest Area

Materials Needed: *A Ball for Daisy* by Chris Raschka, pet animal figures or soft animal toys

Place the book and toy animals on a low table. Invite toddlers to look at the book pictures and act out parts of the story with the toys or create their own play themes with the toy animals.



Family Child Care

Materials Needed: *A Ball for Daisy* by Chris Raschka, teddy bear or other soft animal toy

Invite preschool-age and older children to join toddlers in Option 1. Invite preschool-age and older children to describe situations or things that make them feel happy and situations or things that make them feel sad.



24–36 Months

Option 1
Informal Gathering

Skill and Goal

Gross motor development

Toddlers practice different ways of jumping.



Key Concepts

Jump
Knee
Tip
Forward
Different



Materials Needed

Soft flooring with marked spaces for each toddler (see Be Prepared)



Also Promotes

Cognitive
Communication/Language
Self-Regulation



Optional Reading

Hop Jump by Elaine Stoll Walsh

Five Green and Speckled Frogs by Priscilla Burris

Revised: 6/30/2023

UPDATE: The Optional Reading book originally suggested for this activity (*Five Green and Speckled Frogs*) may be challenging to secure. An alternative book has been added.

Be Prepared: Offer this activity on a carpeted or soft floor. Provide a well-defined space for each toddler's participation with a nonslip carpet square or use of masking tape to create an area of approximately 36 x 36 inches. Note the activity description below suggests that shoes with smooth soles should be removed to prevent slipping while jumping. Arrange for another adult or preschool-age child in your center to demonstrate the simple physical movements and jumping approaches described in the activity plan if you do not wish to do so.

Invite 3–4 toddlers to do some jumping. Encourage each toddler to help you look at the bottoms (soles) of their shoes to make sure they are not smooth. Explain that we might slip if the bottoms of our shoes are smooth. Invite toddlers with smooth soles to remove their shoes for the activity. Encourage each toddler to stand in an activity space (carpet square or marked area).

Explain that we will get our bodies ready to do some jumping. First, demonstrate and encourage each toddler to stand with his/her feet apart (but not a wide distance from each other). Explain that this helps us keep our bodies from tipping when we move different parts of our bodies. Demonstrate what it means for our body to tip by leaning your body slightly to a side.

Then lead toddlers in simple movements that help them focus on balance. Possibilities include:

- raise arms so they are straight out, then up next to our heads, then down so our arms rest on the sides of our bodies
- slowly move arms up and down; pretend we are big bird gently moving our wings
- lift one foot slightly off the floor, stand briefly on our other foot, put the raised foot back on the floor, and then repeat these movements with our other foot

Explain that we will jump in different ways. Demonstrate and then lead toddlers in the following types of jumping:

- Jumping in place. When you demonstrate a jump, draw attention to how your knee bends and how your body moves down slightly when we jump. Point to your knee and encourage toddlers to do the same. Emphasize that both of our feet leave the floor and then land on the floor when we jump. Lead toddlers in jumping in place 3–5 times. Provide a pause between each jump so toddlers do not fall and have a little time to think about what they are doing next. Remind toddlers that we are staying in our own area (carpet square or marked space) to jump.

**Option 1 continued**

- Jumping forward. Lead toddlers in jumping out of their own area (off their carpet square or on the outside of their marked space), pausing, turning around, pausing again, and jumping forward again to return to their own area. Point out that we jump one time each way. Emphasize the word forward when you describe that we are jumping forward. Again, draw attention to how our knees bend and how both feet leave the floor and then land on the floor when we jump.
- Jumping from a squat position. Invite toddlers to pretend we are frogs. Demonstrate a squat position, including lightly touching the floor with both of your hands. Point out how much our knees bend when we squat. Explain that touching the floor with our hands helps us keep our body in place and not tip over. Lead toddlers in jumping from this squat position out of their own area, pausing, turning around, pausing again, and jumping back to their area again from a squat position. Remind toddlers that both of our feet leave the floor and then land on the floor when we jump. Remind toddlers that we are jumping forward, beginning with our hands lightly on the floor while we pretend to be a frog.

Conclude the session by inviting each toddler to sit in his/her area, take 2–3 deep and slow breaths, and tell what we did. Kneel or sit to participate in this conversation. Emphasize that, when we jump, we bend our knees, lift both feet off the floor, and then land on the floor with both feet. Remind toddlers that we worked hard to keep our bodies from tipping. Emphasize that each jump was different.

👁️ What to Look For—Option 1

Be prepared to see and positively acknowledge a range of gross motor actions, including (1) lifting and landing on each foot at different times in a jumping effort, (2) not leaving a carpet square or defined area when jumping forward, (3) stepping, not jumping, to return to a carpet square or defined area, and (4) reluctance to lift one foot and stand on the other foot (opening segment). A toddler may prefer to watch only or to participate in one of the types of jumps only.

Toddlers may prefer to jump from a squat position rather than to jump from a standing position because lightly placing hands on the floor when squatting supports balance and stability. You may wish to flip the order of the second and third jumping approaches if you anticipate maintaining body balance will be a challenge. Squatting is offered last in the activity description because it involves an extra set of movements compared to jumping forward from a standing position (second approach).

Look for possible signs of limited confidence in jumping. Providing verbal support and moving closer to a toddler often can increase self-assurance. It is important for each toddler to have a positive experience with one or more of the movements in this activity. Avoid any type of competition or comparison, including louder cheers or more excited expressions of excitement for one toddler's accomplishment.

Some toddlers may try to move quickly through the movements. The activity description includes a pause after each major movement (a jump, turning around) so toddlers can regain their balance and think about what to do next (motor planning). Explain that we are not in a hurry to jump. We are not trying to find out who can jump the fastest. Encourage toddlers to wait (pause) after jumping to make sure their body is steady (won't tip) and before jumping so we have time to think about what we are going to do with our body.

**Option 1 continued**

The current activity builds on practice in jumping offered in Block 10 by offering different types of jumping. The prior activity included jumping off a low platform.

More Scaffolding Tips—Option 1

Extra support ■ In the opening segment of getting our bodies ready to jump, offer a hand to a toddler who seems concerned about losing balance when lifting one foot at a time. ■ Repeat the opening segment's movements focused on balancing our bodies, especially raising one foot slightly off the floor. ■ Omit the request to jump forward when toddlers jump from a squat position (pretending to be a frog). It is fine to jump in place from a squat position. ■ Demonstrate and describe how to turn around as part of jumping forward and jumping from a squat position. Provide verbal support as appropriate. ■ Remind toddlers that different means things are not the same. We are jumping in different ways, not in the same way.

Enrichment ■ Engage toddlers in a recall conversation about a frog book shared several weeks ago (Block 20 Cognitive activity). Show the cover of the book you shared (*Five Green and Speckled Frogs* or *Hop Jump*; see Optional Reading list). Remind toddlers about the story (pretend frogs jumping off a log or learning to dance) and support discussion of what toddlers remember. ■ Provide a second carpet square or defined area for a toddler to jump to/from as part of jumping forward and jumping from a squat position. Jumping to a defined target (another square) is more challenging than jumping to the floor. Put the squares next to each other.



24–36 Months

Option 2 One-to-One



Skill and Goal

Gross motor development

A toddler jumps from square to square.



Key Concepts

Jump
Knee
Forward
Tip
Look



Materials Needed

5–6 nonslip carpet squares (see Be Prepared)
Short piece of masking tape with color on it



Also Promotes

Cognitive
Communication/Language
Self-Regulation

Be Prepared: This activity is for a toddler who participated in Option 1 without major challenges. Arrange the nonslip carpet squares close together in a circle on the floor. If nonslip squares are not available, use masking tape on a carpeted or soft floor to define each square in the circle. Mark the starting point with colored tape that is affixed next to the square.

Invite one toddler to play a jumping game. Point to and explain there are squares in a circle. The toddler can jump to as many squares as he/she wishes. We jump once each time we jump. Try to land in the middle of the next square. It is not necessary to go all the way around the circle.

Demonstrate how to jump forward. Emphasize bending knees, lifting and then landing on both feet at the same time, and waiting (pausing) after we jump. Explain that waiting after we jump can help us keep from tipping and think about our next jump. Encourage the toddler to look at the square where he/she is jumping. Offer the option of pretending to be a frog by jumping from a squat position (hands touching the floor before jumping).

Walk alongside the toddler so he/she is aware of your presence. Give verbal support as appropriate without interrupting the toddler's focus. It may be helpful to offer quiet reminders about waiting after each jump and looking at where he/she is going next. It also may be helpful to remind a toddler that we jump from square to square in our game.

After a toddler has jumped 2–3 squares, ask if he/she wants to jump, stop, take a break, or jump to several squares. Fully support a toddler's preference.

Conclude the session by engaging the toddler in discussion of what happened. Enthusiastically acknowledge the toddler's efforts in jumping from space to space.

👁️ What to Look For—Option 2

This activity supports repeat practice in forward jumping. The squares offer a clear and consistent destination for each jump. Your midway check on whether a toddler wants to stop, take a break, or continue jumping is an opportunity to support a toddler's response to the activity. Look especially for signs of fatigue. Jumping and/or doing a gross motor action repetitively may be a new and tiring experience for some toddlers.

The activity promotes the self-regulation skill of focusing on the squares, not on the circle. The squares are arranged in a circle. But we are jumping from square to square, not around a circle that just happens to be formed by squares.

**Option 2 continued**

The game's rule that we jump only once to try to land in the middle of the next square may create a useful spatial problem for a toddler to solve. Example: A toddler's feet may land on the closest edge of the next square rather than in the desired middle of the next square. This creates more distance for jumping to the next square. The extra distance may mean the toddler cannot jump only once to get fully on the next square. If this occurs, define the problem (a long way to jump to the next square) and encourage the toddler to think about what to do. Offer possibilities for the toddler to consider only if he/she seems uncertain about what to do. Example: A toddler could get both feet in the middle of the square by taking small steps or doing a little jump.

More Scaffolding Tips—Option 2

Extra support ■ Arrange the squares in a line if you anticipate movement around a circle may be too challenging. Fewer squares can be offered in a line than in a circle.

Enrichment ■ If toddler interest and time permit, invite the toddler to jump from square to square going the opposite direction.

**Interest Area**

Materials Needed: 6–8 felt squares or blocks, people figure

Provide additional practice in jumping (Option 1 or 2) if constant caregiver supervision can be provided. An additional option is to encourage a toddler to organize the felt squares or blocks in different ways, such as in a circle or line or a curve, and move the people figure in a jumping movement from square to square. The idea is to act out with toys what is offered in Option 2. A toddler need not have participated in Option 2 to benefit from this type of play with the materials. Encourage a toddler to explore different ways of putting together the squares, and to have the people figure jump forward and backward.

**Family Child Care**

A preschool-age or older child may wish to offer demonstrations of different types of jumping in Option 1. Preschool-age children may enjoy the challenges of Option 2. A walking infant may signal interest in jumping. Sit on the floor facing a mobile infant, hold both of his/her hands, and say "jump." Do not lift the infant by the arms. The infant may simply bend his/her knees and make a jump-type motion with his/her body.