

Especially for parents of toddlers! 

Toddler Fingerplays and Action Rhymes

 *Rhymes and Sound Awareness*

Toddlers find it fun and exciting to explore the world of language while moving their fingers, arms, and bodies. Fingerplays and action rhymes can help toddlers build word skills and add new words they know and use. These important early literacy activities spice up language learning with fun!

What is the practice?

Fingerplays and action rhymes are brief stories—often with rhymes—that are paired with finger or body motions. Fingerplays and action rhymes help toddlers learn about rhyming words and poetry. They get toddlers to listen, speak, and pair words with actions.

What does the practice look like?

Sometimes your toddler says a rhyme and uses her fingers, hands, or body to “act it out.” When she does these things, she is playing a fingerplay or action rhyme. *The Eensy-Weensy Spider* is an example of a fingerplay.



How do you do the practice?

Enjoy fingerplays and action rhymes often with your toddler. He'll look forward to these times with you, playing with language and moving his body. You can play them while waiting for a table at a restaurant. Or play while watching a brother's soccer game or with friends who come to visit. You can find ideas on the Internet by searching **fingerplays** and **action rhymes**. You can also have great fun inventing your own!

- Fingerplays and action rhymes can be about any subject that interests your toddler (dolls, animals, firefighters, food, etc.). The sillier the rhymes are, the more she will want to do them again and again.
- If the fingerplay or action rhyme is a new one, teach it with pleasure. It doesn't matter if you get it “right”—your enjoyment will inspire your child!
- Repeat the fingerplay or action rhyme slowly. Help your toddler make the finger or hand motions.
- You start the fingerplay or action rhyme. Ask your toddler to join in if she has not already started saying the words.
- Let your toddler lead the fingerplay or action rhyme as much as possible, even if she makes mistakes. Let her lead, and watch how proud she is!
- Trying new fingerplays or action rhymes is fun for your toddler, but don't forget the old favorites. Repeated play is important for learning. Be sure to keep playing familiar fingerplays or action rhymes along with new ones.
- Encourage your toddler to try fingerplays and action rhymes. Smile and comment on her successes. Your participation and interest will go a long way in keeping your toddler involved.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your toddler do fingerplays or action rhymes more often?
- Is your toddler enjoying doing fingerplays or action rhymes?
- Does your toddler try to make up her own fingerplays or action rhymes?

More introducing fingerplays and action rhymes

Eensy-Weensy Spider

At 18 months, Sophia had never done a fingerplay. Knowing that Sophia was always waving her arms, Mom decided to teach one. As Sophia waved her arms, Mom took her into her lap. She snuggled Sophia and placed her arm around her. Mom began to sing **Eensy-Weensy Spider** and move Sophia's hands to make the motions. After she finished, she waited to see Sophia's reaction; Sophia smiled up at her mom and moved her arms. Mom began the song again, doing the motions with Sophia's hands. By the third time through, Sophia was trying to do the motions on her own. She showed clearly how much she enjoyed it and wanted to continue playing.



Action-Rhyme 'Rowing'

Maya, 23 months of age, is a powerhouse of energy. Maya's mom decided doing an action rhyme like **Row, Row, Row Your Boat** would be something "Miss Energy" would enjoy. She asked Maya to sit facing her, on her lap, so that they could hold hands. Mom showed Maya how to lean forward as she pulled Maya forward. How to lean back and pull her mom toward her. They did the motion a few times. Then Maya's mom began to sing *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* in time to their rocking. When they finished, Maya wanted to do it again and again!

'There was a little turtle...'

Kara is a toddler who has a hard time sitting still while listening to books or songs. Her mom knows how much Kara loves her pet turtle. She finds a fingerplay about a turtle on the Internet (**There Was a Little Turtle Who Lived in a Box**). She recites it to Kara every day while Kara feeds or plays with her pet. She even changes the words to include the turtle's name. Once Kara is familiar with the rhyme, she begins trying the motions. Kara loves pretending to "snap" at fleas and mosquitoes with her fingers. Soon she can recite the rhyme. Along with her mom, she does the motions. Sometimes she even stresses the rhyming words at the end of each line!

