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Introduction

If you are looking for hundreds of ideas to help infants and toddlers grow and learn, this book is for you!

More intellectual growth occurs in the first three years of life than at any other time. Infants and toddlers absorb information every minute of the day. They do this by chewing and tasting, listening, babbling, and eventually producing words. They rattle and drop, touch, feel, explore, and discover. The rapid growth in the first three years of life is nothing short of miraculous!

You are key to what the children learn, whether you are a teacher, caregiver, or parent. The experiences you provide children play an important role in the hard-wiring of their brains. The Encyclopedia of Infant and Toddler Activities provides an array of activities that stimulate learning through exploration and discovery. Many of the activities happen during normal daily routines, and all activities are fun and enjoyable.

Teachers, child care directors, caregivers, and other early childhood professionals who work with infants and toddlers contributed these activities. Because every moment a child is awake is a “teachable moment,” the activities in this book are intended for use throughout the day. Some chapters are based on daily routines, such as arrival, naptime, and departure. Other chapters are helpful in developing children’s skills, such as language and motor skills, while other chapters provide ideas for fingerplays, outdoor play, and easier transitions. Because young children love to explore the world through their senses, there is a chapter of sensory activities.

Developmental Levels

While there is a fairly predictable sequence of growth and development for all children, within this framework, children grow at their own rates. In addition, each child has his or her own personality, temperament, and learning style. All children have different experiences and family backgrounds, as well. As a result, children who are the same chronological...
The Encyclopedia of Infant and Toddler Activities

age can be at vastly different developmental levels. To meet the developmental needs of the children in your care, it is important to be familiar with stages of development, so you can choose activities that are appropriate for the children you teach.

In general, the stages of development are as below:

**Birth to 12 Months**

- Sucks fingers, hands, and other objects
- Responds to his or her name
- Grasps and releases objects
- Observes hands and clasps them together
- Knows the difference between familiar people and strangers
- Vocalizes with vowel and consonant sounds
- Sits without support
- Pulls self to stand
- Begins to crawl
- Anticipates being lifted or fed
- Tries to cause things to happen

**Younger Toddler (1 to 2 years old)**

- Begins to use single words
- Puts large pegs in holes
- Turns book pages two or three at a time
- Points to familiar objects upon request
- Starts to drink from a cup
- Walks alone
- Shows interest in peers
- Identifies two or more body parts

**Older Toddler (2 to 3 years old)**

- Identifies body parts
- Combines two to three words to express ideas
- Feeds self with a spoon
- Uses names of self and others
- Walks up and down stairs
- Scribbles and imitates horizontal strokes
- Stacks six or more blocks
How This Book Is Organized

The Encyclopedia of Infant and Toddler Activities is intended for teachers, caregivers, and parents of infants and toddlers between birth and three years of age. It is organized into the following chapters:

- Arrival
- Cleanup
- Departure
- Discovery
- Dramatic Play
- Fine and Gross Motor
- Fingerplays, Songs, and Poems
- Games
- General Tips
- Language
- Literacy
- Math
- Naptime
- Outdoor Play
- Science
- Sensory
- Snack
- Social-Emotional
- Transitions
- Working With Families

Although each activity is identified as an infant activity, an infant and toddler activity, a younger toddler activity, or an older toddler activity, you are the one who knows the specific needs and abilities of the children in your care. Select activities that are appropriate for them.

Activities

Infant Activities

Infant activities are for babies up to 12 months old. The activities fit easily within an infant’s daily routine of feeding, eating, diapering, and playing and will stimulate learning at the same time. Some examples are listening to classical music, looking in a mirror, tracking an object, and, for an older infant, crawling around an obstacle course.

Safety Note:

Because children younger than three put objects, including toys, in their mouths, they are at the greatest risk of choking. Before you use any object or toy, test it with a choke tube (available at school supply stores and catalogs). If it fits into the tube, do not use it because it poses a choking hazard. In addition to using a choke tube, regularly examine the toys in your classroom with the children's safety in mind.
Infant and Toddler Activities
Infant and toddler activities are experiences that all (or many) children between birth and three years of age can enjoy. These activities promote learning in a fun way, such as finding hidden objects, watching the light of a flashlight, feeling different textures, and banging pots and pans.

Younger Toddler Activities
Younger toddler activities are for children between the age of one and two years old. You might select a color or animal matching game, teach them a cleanup song, or have them dump and fill an container with objects. Many of the activities in this category are also appropriate for older toddlers.

Older Toddler Activities
Older toddler activities are for children between the age of two and three years old. Many of the activities for older toddlers involve developing their language skills and making discoveries. You might choose activities that ask the children to sort groceries and put them away, or to pick up blocks and sort them by color. Also included are ideas for helping children make drums and horns, do a variety of artwork, or act out a story.

As with everything involving young children, it is critical that you know the children in your care and select activities that are both stimulating and appropriate for them. Use your judgment to decide whether an activity is appropriate for an individual child or a group of children. Adapt activities to take into account individual strengths, interests, and needs.

Materials
Each activity includes a list of needed materials. You will probably already have most of them. Parents are great resources for materials. You might want to ask local businesses if they have items they want to donate, even empty cardboard boxes.

Note: Some materials should be used only by teachers and caregivers. Give children only the materials that they can use safely.

What to do
Every activity lists directions in a step-by-step format. Once you’ve collected the materials and read the directions, you are ready to begin having fun with the children.

More to do
This section includes enrichment ideas to extend the activity into other areas of the curriculum, such as dramatic play, language, literacy, and art.

Related books, songs, and poems
Some activities provide a list of related books. This is a great time saver! Look in this section for both original and new versions of familiar songs and poems.
Final Thoughts

When working with infants and toddlers, always remember their developmental level and interests.

**Infants and toddlers:**
- take in information through all of their senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching)
- learn best in a safe and stimulating environment
- require prompt responses to cries (It is their way of communicating wants and needs.)
- need to be understood, respected, and valued
- deserve your tender and loving care

If you work with infants or toddlers, you have the unique opportunity of observing children learn and grow every day. We, the early childhood teachers and professionals who wrote these activities, as well as the staff at Gryphon House, hope that this book helps you enrich the lives of the children you teach.

**One final note:** Any advance preparation should always be completed before the children arrive.

*Monica Hay Cook, Tucson, AZ*
Terrific Today

**Materials**
- white board outside of classroom
- dry-erase markers

**What to do**
Each morning, write a note on the white board to the parents about the day so they can talk with their child about what to expect for that day. For example:

**Terrific Tuesday**
- Singing Songs
- Walk Outdoors
- Pots and Pans Band

---

Welcome Bulletin Board

**Materials**
- photographs of each child
- colorful paper
- child-safe scissors
- glue
- bulletin board by entrance

**What to do**
1. Take photographs of each child or ask the parents for one.
2. Decide on a theme, such as flowers, snowflakes, or leaves.
3. Make one theme-related shape for each child.
4. Attach the child’s picture to the shape.
5. Add the photographs to the bulletin board with a catchy title, such as “Friendships Are Blooming,” “Each Snowflake Is Special,” or “Fantastic Friendships Are Forming This Fall.”

---

Sandy L. Scott, Meridian, ID
**Arrival Ideas**

**Materials**
- photos of children in your class
- photos of children’s families

**What to do**

1. Take pictures of each child and make several copies.
2. Post each child’s picture and name by her cubby, the diaper area, and other places in the classroom. This lets parents know that each child has her own special place. It also helps children begin to recognize their cubbies and identify their pictures.
3. On a low wall or the back of a shelf, display photographs of all the children’s families so the children can see them. If the children can see photographs of their families throughout the day, it may ease their separation anxiety.
4. Plan to have one or two inviting activities ready for the children when they arrive to help them transition into the classroom. The activities will make them want to come into the classroom and start playing, helping them to transition from their parents to the classroom. Also, one teacher should be sitting on the floor with the children so they have someone to play with.
5. Have a note pad close to the sign-in sheet where parents can write any information they need you to know for the day.
6. Make sure to greet each child with a happy voice and smile and then greet the parents.

_Holly Dzierzanowski, Brenham, TX_
Matching Photos

**Materials**
- Photographs of the children with a parent (double prints)
- Construction paper (optional)
- Contact paper
- Child-safe scissors

**What to do**
1. Cover the photographs with contact paper. Make sure you have two of each photograph.
   **Note:** Let the parents know that you will be covering the photographs with contact paper.
2. If you mount the photographs on construction paper, cover the photo and construction paper backing with contact paper, sealing them together.
3. Give the child her photograph and a photograph of one or two of her friends.
4. Show the child the matching photographs of the ones she is holding.
5. Seeing a photograph with herself and her parent may help ease any separation anxiety.

*Phyllis Esch, Export, PA*

---

Welcome Song

**Materials**
- None

**What to do**
1. Sing the following song to the tune of “Mary Had a Little Lamb.”
   You can sing it when each child arrives or after all of the children have arrived.
2. Encourage the children to clap and give a cheer when prompted by the song.

   *(Child’s name) came to school today,*
   *School today, school today.*
   *(Child’s name) came to school today,*
   *We’re so glad she’s here.*
Let's all clap for (child's name) now,
(Name) now, (name) now.
Let's all clap for (child's name) now,
And give a great big cheer.

Greeting the Children

**Younger Toddlers**

**Materials** none

**What to do**
1. Greet the children at their parents’ cars.
2. Ask the parents to tell the children they will see them after the children are finished with their day. Because it is the child who is leaving to do something, rather than the one who is being left, this may ease the child's transition to the classroom.

**Edda Sevilla, Bethesda, MD**

Good Morning Flowers

**Older Toddlers**

**Materials**
- small photo of each child and teacher
- colored construction paper
- child-safe scissors
- permanent marker
- clear contact paper
- large craft sticks (1 per child and teacher)
- glue
- 2 large buckets or flower pots (approximately 12” diameter)
- sand
What to do

1. Cut the face of each child or teacher into a circle about 1”–2” in diameter.
2. Cut out flower shapes from different colors of construction paper. The flowers should be about four inches in diameter.
3. Glue the photos onto the flowers.
4. Write the child’s (or teacher’s) name on each flower, either on the craft stick handle (see step #6) or on the back of the flower.
5. Cover the flowers with contact paper.
6. Attach each flower to the end of a large craft stick.
7. Fill each bucket or pot with sand approximately 1/2 full. Label one pot “Good Morning” and the other “Goodbye.”
8. Set the “Goodbye” pot on a table outside the classroom door and the “Good Morning” pot in a prominent spot inside the classroom.
9. When the children and teachers arrive each day, they find their flower, bring it into the classroom, and put it in the “Good Morning” pot. Parents may need to help their children do this. When they leave at the end of the day, they put their flower back in the “Goodbye” pot.

More to do

Have several smaller pots throughout the classroom. Children can use their flowers to make a choice about where they will begin their day.

Group Time: Use the flowers during group or circle time to talk about who is present and who is absent.

Home-School Connection:
Encourage parents to talk with their children about who is already at school and who hasn’t arrived as they look for their flower in the pot.

Megan Friday, Baltimore, MD
**Name Necklace**

**Materials**
- yarn
- child-safe scissors
- tagboard or poster board in various colors
- black marker
- contact paper

**What to do**
1. Cut yarn into pieces about 24”–30” long. Tie the ends of each piece together to make necklaces.
2. Cut different colors of tagboard into 6” x 1” strips.
3. Fold each tagboard strip in half so that each side is 3” long.
4. Let each child choose her favorite color of tagboard.
5. Write the child’s name on the tagboard using a black marker.
6. Place the fold over the piece of yarn so that the child’s name is visible.
7. Cover in contact paper to make it more durable and to attach the nametag to the yarn.
8. Place the necklaces on a table or on hooks so that the children can find their nametags in the morning.
9. At the end of the day, have the children place their nametags on the hooks or table.

*Safety Note:* Supervise closely to minimize the possibility of choking.

---

**Animal Adventure**

**Materials**
- play tunnel or chairs and a sheet
- flashlights
- stuffed animals

**What to do**
1. Set up a play tunnel near the door for arrival time. If you don’t have a tunnel, make one by lining up chairs and throwing a sheet over the chairs.
2. Put a few stuffed animals in the tunnel and a few at the end for the children to find.
3. When the children arrive, tell them they are going on an adventure to look for animals.
4. Give each child a flashlight as she enters the tunnel.
5. After the children have gone through the tunnel, ask them what they saw.
6. The children may want to do this over and over again.
7. Add and change the items for the children to look for.

Related book  *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* by Helen Oxenbury

**Whooo’s Here Today?**

**OLDER TODDLERS**

**Materials**
- construction paper
- child-safe scissors
- Velcro
- die-cut letters
- photographs of each child
- owls cut from construction paper, or purchased

**What to do**
1. Select a bulletin board within the children’s reach.
2. Cut out a large tree trunk with several branches from brown construction paper and leaves from green construction paper. (This example uses a tree, but you can use any shapes or scenes that relate to the season or your classroom focus.)

Sample provided by iActiveLearning.com, all rights reserved.
3. Attach Velcro to various leaves and parts of the tree.
4. Add the title “Whooo’s Here Today?” using die-cut letters.
5. Attach one of the children’s photographs to the front of each owl. Write the child’s name under the photograph.
6. Laminate each owl and attach Velcro to the back of each owl.
7. Place all the owls in a low-hanging pocket chart next to the tree.
8. As the children arrive each morning, they find their owl and attach it to the tree.

**More to do**

Change the tree as the seasons change and discuss the changes with the children. For example, use red, yellow, brown, and orange leaves for fall.

**Art:** Have the children color or paint owls.

**Literacy:** Point to each child’s name on the owls’ bellies to help with name recognition.

**Story Time:** Read books about owls, such as *Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell or *Olivia Owl* by Maurice Pledger.

*Shelly Larson, Round Rock, TX*
**Wishy Washy Time**

*Infants and Toddlers*

**Materials**  
terry washcloths

**What to do**  
1. This is a fun way to clean up children after snack or any other time of the day.
2. Using a terry washcloth (wet or dry), rub the child’s cheeks gently and sing the following song to the tune of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

   *Wash, wash, wash your cheeks, wash them every day,*  
   *When you do it every day the germs will wash away.*

3. Rub the child’s lips, ears, toes, nose, and forehead.
4. Change the song for each of the body parts.

**Related books**  
*The Eye Book* by Dr. Seuss  
*The Foot Book* by Dr. Seuss  
*Maisy Takes a Bath* by Lucy Cousins  
*Toes, Ears, & Nose* by Marion Dane Bauer

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**The Cleanup Race**

*Younger Toddlers*

**Materials**  
sand timer

**What to do**  
1. Use a sand timer to make cleanup time into a fun race.
2. Tell the children you will turn the sand timer upside down and they are to try to finish cleaning up before the sand runs out. If the sand runs out before children are finished, turn it back over and continue.

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*Monica Hay Cook, Tucson, AZ*  
*Renee Kirchner, Carrollton, TX*
CLEAN UP

Sing and Clean

YOUNGER TODDLERS

Materials none

What to do Invite the children to sing this song while picking up toys in the classroom. The tune is “Knees Up, Mother Brown.” If you do not know the tune, simply chant the words.

\[ \text{Clean up toys today.} \\
\text{Clean up toys today.} \\
\text{Clean up, clean up.} \\
\text{All work together} \\
\text{Clean up toys today.} \]

Jackie Wright, Enid, OK

Cleanup Song

YOUNGER TODDLERS

Materials none

What to do 1. Sing the following to the tune of “Mary Had a Little Lamb” when it’s time to clean up.

\[ \text{Who is going to pick up the blocks,} \\
\text{Pick up the blocks,} \\
\text{Pick up the blocks?} \\
\text{Who is going to pick up the blocks} \\
\text{And be a classroom helper?} \]

\[ \text{Reilly is picking up the blocks,} \\
\text{Picking up the blocks, picking up the blocks.} \\
\text{Reilly is picking up the blocks;} \\
\text{She is a classroom helper.} \]

2. Repeat the second verse, inserting the children’s names until everyone has been named.

Related book Max Cleans Up by Rosemary Wells

Sandy L. Scott, Meridian, ID