Early Head Start
Take Home Activities

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## Development of Play Skills for Infants and Toddlers

### Babies Birth to 4 Months
- Smile (usually around 6 weeks of age) and begin to coo (make sounds like “ooo oo” or “aaaaa”) (usually around 4 months)
- Prefer human faces over objects or toys
- Turn toward familiar voices and faces
- Follow objects with their eyes and recognize familiar faces and objects
- Begin to explore their hands by bringing them to their face or putting them in their mouth

### Babies 4-7 Months
- Enjoy social games with a caregiver such as peek-a-boo and patty cake
- Bring toys to their mouth
- Can use their fingers and thumb to pick up objects
- Enjoy looking at themselves in a baby-safe mirror
- Laugh and babble (saying things like “ba-ba-ba-ba”)
- Distinguish feelings by listening to the tone of your voice and the voices of other loved ones. (Babies can tell when you are sad, upset, or happy just by the tone of your voice.)

### Babies 8-12 Months
- Might begin to make recognizable sounds (like “Ma” or “Da”) and repeat or copy sounds/word they hear you say, like “Hi!” or “Bye bye!”
- Communicate nonverbally by pointing, gesturing, pulling up, or crawling
- Play games such as peek-a-boo and patty cake
- Use some objects correctly to imitate actions, like holding a toy phone to their ear or holding a cup to their mouth
- Explore objects by shaking or banging them
- Might become shy around strangers
- Might cry when Mom or Dad or a primary caregiver leaves

### Toddlers 13-24 Months
- Enjoy playing with objects such as wooden spoons, cardboard boxes, and empty plastic food containers. Toddlers also enjoy toys like board books, balls, stackable cups or blocks, dolls, simple puzzles, etc.
- Have fun filling containers up with water, sand, or toys and then dumping them out
- Enjoy watching other children play. Your child might carefully look on or smile as other children play, but might not want to join the group
- Usually plays alone or next to other children
- Might offer toys to caregivers or other children, but might want them right back
- Might choose to play close to other children using the same kind of toy or materials, but not necessarily interact with them
- Will struggle with sharing and turn taking

### Toddlers 25-36 Months
- Might play with other children but in an occasional, brief, or limited way. For example, a child might play “monsters” or run around chasing other children for a brief period
- Older toddlers might begin to cooperate with other toddlers in a shared play activity. For example, children might work together to build a block tower. Or, they might work together to paint a picture together, complete a puzzle, or take on roles and act out a story. One child might pretend to be the “baby,” while another is a “mom.”
- Begin to use their imaginations in their play. For example, toddlers might pretend to give a doll a bottle, pretend to do household chores like cooking or cleaning, or pretend that the shoebox is a garage for toy cars
- Still play alone frequently
- Will struggle with sharing and turn taking
Come and Go

Primary Objectives
2a. Forms relationships with adults

Why It’s Important
Separations can be challenging for some children. Your child has bonded with you and trusts you to take care of her. It is hard for your child to understand that she will be cared for even in your absence and that although you leave, you will return. Playing simple "disappear, then reappear" games with your child will help her learn that your absence is only temporary.

Materials
Your child’s favorite toys

What You Do
1. Choose a time to play this game when your child is feeling comfortable and secure.

2. Show your child the teddy bear and say, Teddy is going now. Wave bye-bye to Teddy.

3. Wave to the bear and move it out of sight, either behind a piece of furniture or behind your back.

4. Ask your child, Where is Teddy? Encourage her to look for the toy.

5. Show your child the toy again and say, There’s Teddy. Teddy came back for you. Let your child hold the toy.

6. You can take the game further by telling your child, I’m going to go but I’ll be right back. Offer a reassuring touch.

7. Walk to another part of the room where she cannot see you. Return shortly, smile, and say, I’m back, as you hug your child. This will give her practice watching you come and go. Remind her in a reassuring tone, Sometimes I go away, but I always come back.

8. Repeat the activity as long as your child is interested. If she becomes upset or distracted, stop the game and try it again another time.
Fill and Dump

Primary Objectives
7a. Uses fingers and hands

Why It’s Important
Children at this stage love to experiment with cause and effect by filling up a container and dumping it out. You can encourage your child’s fine-motor development as she fills and dumps by providing materials that are the right size for her to pick up with a thumb and index finger. When you demonstrate how to pick up and drop the materials into small containers, you give your child the opportunity to imitate your actions.

Materials
Small blocks or beads; large containers; small containers

What You Do
1. Place the small blocks into a large container and arrange several small containers next to it.

2. Show the materials to your child. Allow her to explore the materials on her own.

3. If she does not use the materials for filling, pick up a block using your thumb and index finger and drop it into a small container. Then dump it out.

4. Your child may imitate your play or continue to use the materials another way. Acknowledge her efforts. You are banging the red block on the floor. You dropped the green block into the cup.

5. Stay nearby and periodically acknowledge her play. This will help her sustain her attention to the experience.

6. Allow your child to continue with the activity for as long as she is interested. Leave the materials where she can find them to use again during play.
Sticky Stairs

Primary Objectives
4. Demonstrates traveling skills

Why It’s Important
In motivating children to learn, an added element of fun always comes in handy. For instance, to help your child focus on the skill of alternating feet, try using stickers. Giving him something to focus on while he practices walking up and down stairs breaks the challenge into smaller and more manageable goals.

Materials
Set of stairs; colorful stickers

What You Do
1. Invite your child to use the stickers to decorate the stairs: one sticker for each step. Talk about what each sticker looks like as you place it on the step.

2. Once there is a sticker on each step, start with your child at the bottom of the staircase and prepare to walk up together: We are going to walk up the stairs now. Remember to try and put one foot on each sticker as we go.

3. He may need help with balance as he walks up. If he cannot easily put one foot on each step, allow him to use both feet. Encourage his efforts.

4. Going down the stairs may be more challenging, so be sure to offer assistance when needed.

5. You can extend this activity by encouraging your child to count the stickers as he moves up and down the stairs. If you want to make the experience more challenging, you can add more stickers to more stairs for him to climb.
Stair Song

Primary Objectives
4. Demonstrates traveling skills

Why It's Important
Climbing stairs requires your child to have advanced coordination. Rehearsing the steps and singing while performing the task will help your child concentrate on foot placement and timing as she walks up each step.

Materials
None

What You Do
1. Observe your child's willingness to climb stairs. Look for opportunities to walk with your child up and down the stairs.

2. As you climb the stairs with your child, sing the following song to the tune of "Are You Sleeping?" "I put one foot next to the other foot, as I walk up the stairs. I put one foot next to the other one as I walk up the stairs."

3. Offer as much support as needed for your child to climb successfully to the top. Acknowledge her achievement: You walked all the way to the top step!

4. Assist her as she goes back down the steps.

5. Encourage your child to put both feet on each step. If the song distracts her from the task, you can hum the tune or wait until she has finished climbing before you sing.

6. If you do not have stairs in your home, do this activity whenever you find a short staircase in someone else's home or a quiet public place. Be sure to find a staircase with a handrail that is comfortable for your child to hold as she walks.
Building Towers

Primary Objectives
7a. Uses fingers and hands
11b. Persists

Why It’s Important
Using blocks to build a tower will help your child develop her fine-motor skills. She will also learn about how things relate to space and develop pride in what she can do by herself.

Materials
Blocks; box or dishpan

What You Do
1. Put a set of blocks into a box or dishpan. Set out the box for your child to explore.

2. As she plays with the blocks, encourage her to see how high she can stack them.

3. When the tower eventually falls, have her count the blocks that made up the tower. You had a lot of blocks in your tower! Would you like to help me count them?

4. Encourage your child to continue building towers. When the tower falls, she can count the blocks and stack them up again or play with the blocks in her own way. Support her persistence in approaching the task.

5. Explain to your child that the blocks will be available for her to use again at a later time.
Tell Me About Your Breakfast

Primary Objectives
9d. Tells about another time or place

Why It’s Important
Your child may be accustomed to seeing words and pictures together in books, but she must have opportunities to practice making the connection in her own work. When you ask for an explanation of a picture that your child has drawn, you develop her ability to create her own labels and stories to accompany her illustrations.

Materials
Markers or crayons

What You Do
1. At some point during the day, invite your child to sit at the table with paper and crayons and draw a picture of what she had for breakfast that morning. Encourage her to include additional details if she wishes.

2. Wait for your child to explain her picture to you before asking further questions. Be sure to ask open-ended questions that prompt her to talk about the details of her picture. I see that you drew a cup next to the plate. What is in the cup?

3. Allow her to add to the picture as she recalls more detail of the morning. Record her words next to her picture or on a separate piece of paper. Read her words back to her when you are finished writing.

4. You can extend this activity by encouraging your child to draw and dictate in order to express her ideas about events, emotions, dreams, memories, future plans, etc.
Telephone Talk

Primary Objectives
10b. Uses social rules of language

Why It’s Important
Role-playing different types of conversations helps prepare your child for future verbal interactions.

Materials
Two toy telephones

What You Do
1. Place the telephones in separate areas of the room, but close enough so that the two speakers can hear each other. Invite your child to have a telephone conversation with you.

2. Begin the conversation by saying hello and introducing yourself. Ask your child to say hello and state his name.

3. Ask simple questions that you know your child can answer easily. How are you today?

4. Encourage him to ask you a question. What would you like to ask me about?

5. Follow your child’s cues to determine how long the conversation should be. End the conversation with a common closing. It was nice to talk with you. Good-bye.

6. Encourage your child to use the phones with someone else to practice conversations at a later time.
Anytime Books

Primary Objectives
17a. Uses and appreciates books and other texts

Why It’s Important
Before children learn to read, frequent exposure to books piques their curiosity and helps them develop book handling skills. By offering your child a wide variety of books without restrictions on how he may use them, you encourage him to explore and gain a deeper understanding of what makes books so enjoyable.

Materials
A variety of books such as board books, cloth books, picture books, books with different textures, and informational books

What You Do
1. Create a comfortable, quiet “book nook” with a variety of books that your child can access easily.

2. Invite your child to enjoy the book nook with you. Explain that he may explore the books any way he likes. Allow him to play freely with whatever book(s) he chooses.

3. Observe how your child uses the books. Avoid limiting him to one book at a time or explaining what he should be doing with the books. Offer assistance only if your child asks for it.
Suds and Fun

Primary Objectives
7b. Uses writing and drawing tools
19b. Writes to convey ideas and information

Why It's Important
Children can learn writing skills using more than just pencil and paper. Introducing new materials for writing encourages your child to practice holding different types of writing implements and use them to form familiar letters and words.

Materials
Paintbrush; smock; shaving cream; table or large cookie sheet

What You Do
1. Invite your child to put on a smock and join you at the table. Put some shaving cream on the table or cookie sheet in front of her.

2. Encourage her to explore it with her hands and spread it out on the table. Talk with her about what it feels like and what it smells like. *What does this shaving cream feel like to you?*

3. Give her paintbrushes or toothbrushes, and show her how to use them to write in the shaving cream.

4. Encourage her to practice writing any familiar letters or words. *Would you like to try to write a few letters or words?*

5. Ask her to identify any letters or words she writes. Accept any attempts at forming letters.

6. Continue the activity for as long as your child is interested. Spread more shaving cream on the table, if needed.
Hickory Dickory Dock

Primary Objectives
15a. Notices and discriminates rhyme

Why It’s Important
Poems and nursery rhymes draw your child’s attention to the individual sounds of language. Reciting them with hand movements can help him participate more fully and develop oral language.

Materials
Large piece of paper; markers

What You Do
1. Write the words to "Hickory Dickory Dock" on a large sheet of paper. Post it where your child can see it.

2. Invite your child to join you in acting out "Hickory Dickory Dock." Read the rhyme through one time before incorporating the hand motions.

3. Use hand motions to mime the actions in the rhyme: Hickory dickory dock (hold up one arm, bent at the elbow), A mouse ran up the clock (run the fingers from your other hand up your bent arm), The clock struck one (clap your hands and then hold up one finger), The mouse ran down (run your fingers back down your arm), Hickory dickory dock.

4. Repeat the rhyme and encourage your child to do the hand motions with you. Offer assistance as needed.

5. Continue the activity for as long as your child is interested. You can extend this experience by thinking of hand motions to use in any familiar song that you and your child sing together.
How Many Steps?

Primary Objectives
4. Demonstrates traveling skills
20a. Counts

Why It’s Important
Providing your child with a goal to focus on while she practices her gross-motor skills may encourage her to move more readily, even with adult support. Counting each step slowly is a way to support your child’s efforts to move purposefully and methodically.

Materials
None

What You Do
1. When moving from one area of the room to another, hold your child’s hand or provide other appropriate support, and count together the number of steps you take.

2. Offer as much assistance as necessary for your child to move smoothly around the room. Acknowledge her movements. Walking up stairs is hard work. You are really using your strong leg muscles today.

3. Count when going up and down stairs, through doors, etc. One, two, three, four, five, six. Six steps to get to the sink.

4. When repeating a path already taken, ask your child if she can remember the number of steps it took the last time. Count again to see if the number matches. It took us six steps to get to the sink. Let’s see how many steps it takes to get back to the chair. One, two, three, four, five. Only five! Wow, you must have taken really big steps this time.

5. Notice if your child becomes tired or frustrated. Offer time to rest when needed. Offer physical and emotional support as well. You’ve done a lot of moving today. Let’s take a break and relax your muscles now.
Knob Puzzles

Primary Objectives
7a. Uses fingers and hands
21b. Quantifies

Why It’s Important
When your child begins to reach for and grasp objects, she gains independence and the ability to control her choices. Providing many opportunities for your child to practice reaching for objects supports the development of eye–hand coordination.

Materials
Puzzle with a round knob on each piece

What You Do
1. Place the puzzle on the table or floor within your child’s reach. Invite her to play with the puzzle.
2. Show your child how to grasp the knob on each puzzle piece to remove it. Encourage her to remove all of the pieces before putting any back.
3. Once all the pieces have been removed, invite your child to put them back one piece at a time. Describe the shapes you see as you guide her to find the appropriate puzzle piece. There are two holes left, and we have two pieces left. This piece is a circle. Where would you like to try to fit the circle?
4. Offer as much physical assistance as necessary. For example, your child may be able to pick up a puzzle piece, but she may need your help to guide it into its proper place and release it.
5. Make the puzzle available to your child and encourage her to play with it again later.
Teaching Emotions: Activity Ideas to Share with Families

Feel free to copy these and put in a newsletter or on a handout to send home to your families.

Share a story in a new way.

Read a story book to your child that shows characters who experience an emotion (e.g., sad, happy, scared, worried, confused, etc.). Stop on a page where the character is showing the expression. Ask your child “What do you think he is feeling?”, “Why is he feeling that way?”, or “Look at her face, how can you tell that he is ___?” Other questions could be “Have you ever felt____. What makes you feel that way?” or “What will happen next?” or “What should he do?” Do not pause too long on one page and only continue the discussion as long as your child shows an interest.

Make an Emotion Book with your child.

An easy project to do with your child is to make a homemade book. All you need is paper, crayons or markers, and a stapler. You can make a book about one emotion and have your child fill the pages with things that make him feel that way. For example, a “Happy Book” may have pictures that you and your child draw of things that make him happy or it may include pictures cut out of magazines that are glued on the pages. Another approach may be to devote a page to an emotion and have the book be about a variety of feeling words (happy, mad, surprised, scared, irritated, proud, etc.). For children who have a lot to say about their feelings, you may want them to tell you a sentence about what makes them feel an emotion and you write the sentence on the page. Then, your child can cut out a picture and glue on the book or draw a picture to go with the emotion. Warning, this activity will be enjoyable if you do it with your child, but would be difficult for your child to do alone.

Play Make a Face with your child.

You start the game by saying, “I am going to make a face, guess what I am feeling by looking at my face. Then, make a happy or sad face. When your child guesses the feeling word, respond by saying “That’s right! Do you know what makes me feel that way?” Follow by describing something simple that makes you feel the emotion (e.g., a fluffy kitten makes me happy, I feel sad when it rains and we can’t go to the park). Please note, this is not the time to discuss adult circumstances that are linked to your emotions (e.g., “When your Daddy doesn’t call me, I feel sad”). Then say to your child, “Your turn, you make a face and I will guess what you are feeling.” Don’t be surprised if your child picks the same emotion that you just displayed, it will take time before they can be creative with this game. Once you guess, ask your child to name what makes him have that emotion. Keep taking turns until your child shows you that he or she is not interested in continuing the game.

Play “Mirror, Mirror…what do I see?” with your child.

Using a hand mirror or a mirror on the wall, play this game with your child. Look in the mirror and say “mirror, mirror, what do I see?” Then make an emotion face. Follow by naming the emotion by saying “I see a sad Mommy looking at me”. Turn to your child and say “your turn”. Help your child remember the phrase “mirror, mirror what do I see?” You may have to say it with your child. Then, tell your child to make a face and help them say the next sentence “I see a happy Patrick looking at me.” Don’t be surprised if your child always wants to do the emotion that you just demonstrated. Play the game until your child loses interest.
How to Help Your Child Have a Successful Bedtime

Infants and young children need 10 to 12 hours of sleep daily in order to support healthy development. Parents also need to feel rested in order to be nurturing and responsive to their growing and active young children. When your child does not get enough sleep, challenging behaviors are likely to occur. Your child might be moody, short-tempered and unable to engage well in interactions with others. Lack of sleep can also have a negative impact on your child’s ability to learn. When a young child sleeps, her body is busy developing new brain cells that she needs for her physical, mental and emotional development. Babies and young children thrive on predictability and learn from repetition. It is important to establish a bedtime routine that you and your child both understand and helps everyone to feel calm and relaxed.

Try This at Home

- Watch for and acknowledge your child’s signs of sleepiness. She might pull on her ears, rub her eyes or put her head on your shoulder. For example, you can say, “I see you rubbing your eyes. You look sleepy. Let’s get ready for bed.”
- Teaching your child to label and understand her body cues will help her to use language instead of challenging behavior (e.g., whining, crying or temper tantrums) to communicate her needs.
- Use a visual schedule made with photos, clipart or other objects to help your child see the steps in her bedtime routine. A visual schedule can help her to understand the steps and expectations of the routine. To learn more about how to create a visual schedule, visit challengingbehavior.org and type “visual schedule” in the search box in the upper-right corner.
- Provide your child with activities, sounds or objects that help her feel calm and restful during the hour before bedtime. Make these activities part of your nightly routine. For example, reading books, listening to soft, calming music, and/or giving your child her pacifier, favorite blanket or stuffed animal will all help her to understand that it is time to calm down and prepare for sleep.
- Tell your child what will happen when she wakes up. She may be resistant to going to sleep because she does not want to miss out on an activity or have her day to come to an end. Reassure her that tomorrow will be filled with more fun and special time. You can also include tomorrow’s activity on the visual schedule (e.g., provide a picture of her teacher or preschool).
- Give your child your undivided and unrushed attention as you prepare her for bed. Bedtime can be a positive experience filled with quality time for you and your child.

Practice at School

For children who spend the day at school, nap time is an important time to rest and prepare for afternoon learning and activities. Teachers use a consistent routine so that children know what to expect and can participate in the process. Children can select and set up a napping area, get pillows or blankets from cubbies and choose a book to read. Routines might include brushing teeth, using the toilet, stories read aloud by teachers, or audio books or soft music for a period of time. Children understand the steps they need to follow to get ready for nap, how long they are expected to rest and what they can do when they wake up. When everyone understands the expectations and routine, nap time can be a relaxing and happy part of the day.

The Bottom Line

Bedtime is a daily opportunity for you to build and nurture a positive relationship with your child. Predictable routines make children feel safe and secure. When you provide a predictable bedtime routine, you are teaching your child the skills she needs to relax and transition from the busy activity of the day to preparation for sleep. When your child is able to get a restful sleep, you will also feel more calm and rested. A successful bedtime routine that you follow regularly will prepare you both for shared days of family fun and learning.

About this Series

The Backpack Connection Series was created by TACSEI to provide a way for teachers and parents/caregivers to work together to help young children develop social emotional skills and reduce challenging behavior. Teachers may choose to send a handout home in each child’s backpack when a new strategy or skill is introduced to the class. Each Backpack Connection handout provides information that helps parents stay informed about what their child is learning at school and specific ideas on how to use the strategy or skill at home.

The Pyramid Model

The Pyramid Model is a framework that provides programs with guidance on how to promote social emotional competence in all children and design effective interventions that support young children who might have persistent challenging behavior. It also provides practices to ensure that children with social emotional delays receive intentional teaching. Programs that implement the Pyramid Model are eager to work together with families to meet every child’s individualized learning and support needs. To learn more about the Pyramid Model, please visit ChallengingBehavior.org.

More Information

More information and resources on this and other topics are available on our website, ChallengingBehavior.org.

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### Finger Plays and Songs

**Open Shut Them**

Open, shut them, (open and shut fist)
Open, shut them,
Give a little clap, clap, clap. (clap 3 times)

Open, shut them, (open and shut fist)
open, shut them,
lay them in your lap, lap, lap. (put hands in lap)

Creep them, creep them, creep them, creep them, (walk fingers up your body)
Right up to your chin.
Open up your little mouth,
But do not let them in.

Roll them, roll them, (Make rolling motions with your hands)
roll them, roll them,
Roll them just like this.

Shake them, shake them (shake hands)
Shake them, shake them.
Blow a little kiss. (Blow kiss)

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**I'm a Little Airplane**
(to the tune of "I'm a Little Teapot")

I'm a little airplane
(Hold hand up to forehead to shade eyes looking into the sky and point with the other hand)

With my great big silver wings, watch me fly!
(hold arms out to side and tilt side to side)

When the piolet tells me, I'll come down,
(hold hands over both ears like you are holding the radio headphones piolets wear)

Swooping and gliding to the ground.
(hold arms out like wings and spin in a circle, then kneel to the ground.)
I Had a Little Turtle

I had a little Turtle, 
His name was Tiny Tim. 
I put him in the bathtub, 
To see if he could swim.

He drank up all the water 
And ate a bar of soap. 
And now he's in his bed, 
With bubbles in his throat.

Bubble, Bubble, Bubble, 
Bubble, Bubble, Bubble, 
Bubble, Bubble, Bubble 
Bubble, Pop!

---

Five Green and Speckled Frogs

**Use Frogs on Log Visual on Next Page**

Five green and speckled frogs sat on a speckled log 
Eating some most delicious bugs -- YUM YUM! 
One jumped into the pool where it was nice and cool 
Then there were four green and speckled frogs.

Four green and speckled frogs sat on a speckled log 
Eating some most delicious bugs -- YUM YUM! 
One jumped into the pool where it was nice and cool 
Then there were three green and speckled frogs.

Three green and speckled frogs sat on a speckled log 
Eating some most delicious bugs -- YUM YUM! 
One jumped into the pool where it was nice and cool 
Then there were two green and speckled frogs.

Two green and speckled frogs sat on a speckled log 
Eating some most delicious bugs -- YUM YUM! 
One jumped into the pool where it was nice and cool 
Then there was one green and speckled frogs.

One green and speckled frogs sat on a speckled log 
Eating some most delicious bugs -- YUM YUM! 
One jumped into the pool where it was nice and cool 
Then there were no green and speckled frogs.
Five Green Speckled Frogs