

Family Activities

Packet 2

Supporting Emotional Development

“Stop it!” “That’s Mine!” “I was using it first!” “I don’t want to do that!” “Mom” “Give it Back” “It’s my turn now!”

Does this sound familiar? If so, you're not alone! Many families are working to establish new daily routines, playtime is confined to smaller areas with the same toys as yesterday, and our social circles are limited to immediate family members. The stress of adapting to a new normal can lead to heightened emotions, changes in children’s behavior, and increased conflicts.

Anger, anxiety, disappointment, and sadness are very real and appropriate feelings. Young children haven't yet learned how to navigate and cope with these emotions in healthy ways. Instead, they might yell, hit, kick, or lash out at a sibling. Fortunately, there are strategies to help manage these behaviors and support emotional development.

By introducing calming activities and providing a structured environment, children can learn to handle their emotions better. Additionally, modeling appropriate ways to express feelings can teach children valuable coping skills.

1. **Stay Calm:** Approach conflicts with a neutral body language to understand all viewpoints. Stop any harmful behavior with statements like, “Hitting needs to stop.”
2. **Acknowledge Feelings:** Use simple, descriptive words to reflect your child’s emotions, helping them release their feelings and think clearly.
3. **Gather Information:** Listen to each child’s perspective on what happened, focusing on concrete actions and materials involved.
4. **Restate the Problem:** Clarify the issues using the children’s descriptions and ensure they agree with your restatement.
5. **Brainstorm Solutions Together:** Respect and explore all ideas, even unrealistic ones, and help children think through the specifics of potential solutions.
6. **Provide Follow-Up Support:** Check in with children to ensure the solution is working, offering additional support if needed.

Infants

Art, Music, and Movement: Sing, Sing, Sing

Kids will engage in:

- Growing calm or becoming alert to sounds, tones or music
- Responsive to other people singing by joining in with vocalizations or motion

You can start this activity at any time, whether during your infant's alert moments or when they are having difficulty sleeping. Choose a song to sing based on your child's mood—a quiet lullaby if your child is upset, or a more upbeat song if they are happy.

If your infant is upset or trying to sleep, softly sing a lullaby or gently repeat their name with comforting words in a melodic way. Often, infants will stop crying, calm down, or fall asleep when they hear the soothing sound of a parent's or familiar caregiver's voice. If your infant is happy, sing an upbeat song or one that includes movements and allows you to improvise the words. For example, you could sing, "If You're Happy and You Know It" and adapt the lyrics like this: "If you're happy and you know it, nibble Anna's toes" or "If you're happy and you know it, kiss LeVar's tummy." An older infant may "sing" with you or join in with familiar hand or body movements. For instance, you might sing and clap, "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands," and your child might clap along.

When introducing hand and body movements, consider your infant's developmental level and the milestones they have reached. Customize the song to encourage what your child can do, such as including "If you're happy and you know it, wave bye-bye" if your child waves. Other ideas could include "Lift your arms," "Kick your feet," "Shake your head," "Pound the floor," and "Bounce up and down."

This activity not only engages your child but also helps with their motor skills and cognitive development. Singing and moving together strengthens the bond between you and your child, making these moments enjoyable and beneficial.

Communication, Language, and Literacy: Beginning with Books

Find a cozy place to sit, position your infant comfortably on your lap, and introduce a book. With an older infant, offer a couple of books and ask which one they want to read (depending on their level of understanding, they may or may not choose a book). Have several other books nearby to keep your reading time uninterrupted.

Kids will engage in:

- Touching, grasping or mouthing books
- Turning the pages of books

Give your child time to handle the book before you open it. Infants may grasp it, turn it over, open and close it, drop it on the floor, or put it in their mouth—all normal behaviors and necessary steps in their learning about books. In fact, exploring the book can be an activity in itself, without even reading it to your child. If you'd like to read, let your child continue exploring the book while you choose another one to read.

As you look at a book together, slowly read the words or simply talk about the pictures (let your child hold the book if they want to). If there are textures to feel, guide your child's hand to the interesting textures on the pages and describe each one. Older infants may explore textures in a book independently and may spend more time looking at the pictures or "talking" by babbling or saying simple words. When you and your infant are ready to move on to the next page, encourage your child to help you turn it.

Remember that when infants explore books on their own, they may hold the book upside down. At this stage, they are more focused on the process of looking through the book and turning the pages than on viewing the pictures correctly. As infants gain more experience with books, they will become more interested in the pictures and start holding the book right-side up.

Encourage your child's curiosity by providing books with different textures and interactive elements. This not only makes reading enjoyable but also stimulates their sensory and cognitive development.

Early Math and Discovery: Cool Tool

Kids will engage in:

- Reading to an objective
- Exploring a tool in their play

If you are nursing or bottle-feeding your infant, position yourself in a comfortable chair. If your infant is older and accustomed to eating baby cereal or other foods, secure them in their highchair and sit nearby.

As you prepare to nurse or give your infant a bottle, observe how they respond by turning their head toward the milk. Older infants may place their hand on your breast or reach both hands to hold the bottle. For older infants, use a spoon designed for infants. They may be a bit clumsy at getting the food to their mouth with a spoon, so alleviate some of this frustration by feeding

your hungry infant most of the food before handing over the spoon. Place the spoon in your infant's hand, demonstrate how to scoop, guide the spoon and food to their mouth, and describe what you are doing. Then give your child a chance to use the spoon. Remember that your child might explore the spoon in various ways, such as putting it in their mouth without any food on it, throwing it on the floor, or putting it in their hair. These are all normal ways for an infant to explore an object. Describe what your child is doing, for example, "You're using the spoon to pound on your tray."

If your infant's attempts to use the spoon aren't immediately successful, they might simply pick up pieces of food with their hands. Keep in mind that it takes time and experience for young children to learn how to handle tools and for their muscles and coordination to develop enough to manipulate tools successfully. When your child is successful, offer encouragement, such as, "You scooped up the carrots with the spoon and put them in your mouth!"

This process not only helps with their fine motor skills but also supports their understanding of cause and effect. Additionally, these moments provide opportunities to introduce new vocabulary and reinforce positive interactions around mealtime..

Myself and Others: Playing with Piggies

Place your infant on their back, either on a soft blanket on the floor, a bed, a changing table, or in a bouncy seat. An older infant can sit up on the floor, in a highchair, or in the bathtub.

Lean in close, massage and kiss your infant's hands and feet, and say something like, "I'm going to find your toes." If your child is wearing socks, pull them off, massage their feet a bit more, and give their toes a few more kisses. The tactile experience of having their feet and toes exposed to the air, massaged, rubbed, and kissed can be an engaging activity in itself. Give your child plenty of time to enjoy the sensation before moving on. Wriggle each toe on one foot, beginning with the big toe, and recite the nursery rhyme "This Little Piggy," moving to the next toe with each line:

"This little piggy went to market.

This little piggy stayed home.

This little piggy had roast beef.

This little piggy had none.

And this little piggy went wee, wee, wee, wee all the way home."

Kids will engage in:

- Putting their fingers, thumbs or foot in their own mouth
- Awareness of self by indicating something is there.

Traditionally, this nursery rhyme ends with adults tickling children's feet during the "wee, wee, wee, wee" part. Along with tickling your child's foot, move your fingers up their legs and onto their stomach. Repeat the rhyme and activity on the other foot, and continue alternating feet until your infant loses interest.

This interaction not only provides a fun bonding experience but also helps stimulate your baby's senses and supports their social and emotional development. You can also incorporate gentle stretches and movements to enhance their physical development further.

Physical Development and Healthy Habits: Pick It Up

Kids will engage in:

- Opening and closing their hands
- Using small muscles to handle or pick up objects

Observe how your child uses their hands and fingers. Keep in mind that their ability to handle toys depends on their age, developmental level, and prior experiences.

Offer your child one or two objects to hold, as too many choices can be overwhelming. Understand that they may only hold the object for a short time before letting it fall. Make sure to give the object back to your child so they can try to hold it again. With practice, children will begin grasping objects with their whole hand for longer periods. As they develop, they'll be able to reach for a toy, pick it up, bring it to their mouth, and transfer it from one hand to the other. Many infants enjoy dropping an object from a highchair onto the floor, watching it fall, and waiting for an adult to pick it up. Engage in this game with your child, even if it becomes repetitive, because it is crucial for their development and offers invaluable opportunities to practice grasping and handling objects.

As infants grow, they'll be able to pick up smaller objects, first by sliding their thumb to the side of their index finger, and later using a pincer grasp with their thumb and finger. This skill often develops around the same time children are ready to eat finger foods. Offer small amounts of finger food so they aren't tempted to put too much in their mouth at once. Although it may be tempting to feed infants yourself to avoid messes, allow them to feed themselves to develop their fine motor skills.

Encourage your child by praising their efforts and providing a variety of objects to explore. This hands-on experience is essential for their cognitive and physical development.

Toddlers

Art, Music, and Movement: No-Worry Painting

Set up a child-sized easel outdoors on a flat surface. Pour a small amount of paint into two cups, placing one cup on the easel tray and keeping the other one aside for later. Attach a piece of paper to the easel. Prepare for cleanup by filling a bucket with water and gathering some towels.

Kids will engage in:

- Exploring art materials
- Using art materials to make discrete marks

Dress yourself and your toddler in play clothes. Show your child how to dip the paintbrush into the paint cup and brush the paint onto the paper. If your toddler prefers to explore the paint with their fingers, let them use their hands to paint on the paper. Older toddlers may try using a paintbrush but will need practice. As they learn to control the paintbrush, they will start making distinct marks on the paper and notice how different arm movements create various lines and shapes. Describe your child's movements and talk about the marks they create. Before finishing the activity, introduce a new color of paint or another paintbrush. If you've used two primary colors, discuss with your child how the colors mix and change.

For children who are beginning walkers or not accustomed to standing for long periods, place the paper on the ground and secure it with heavy rocks or tape instead of using an easel. Encourage your toddler to experiment with different painting techniques and celebrate their creativity. This activity not only fosters artistic expression but also enhances motor skills and color recognition.

Communication, Language, and Literacy: Write Away

Kids will engage in:

- Making marks and scribbles
- Writing letter like forms

Cover your table and ensure your child is safely seated. Place a piece of paper in front of your child, and consider taping it down to prevent it from sliding. Let your child choose which color marker or crayon they want to use.

(Markers are often easier for toddlers because they don't require as much pressure to make a mark.) If this is your child's first time using a writing tool, you may need to demonstrate how to use it and help remove the cap from the marker (note that marker caps can be a choking hazard).

Younger toddlers might simply make random marks on their paper. Although this may seem insignificant, this exploratory stage is crucial for their development in learning how to write. It's common for toddlers to put items like crayons in their mouths, so if this happens, gently remind them that crayons and markers are for writing on paper. Demonstrate how to make marks on your own piece of paper and talk about what your child is doing, using your own writing tool to mimic their actions.

Hang up your child's creations at their height so they can see and appreciate their work. Encourage them by praising their efforts, which will boost their confidence and interest in writing. This activity not only helps with motor skills but also fosters creativity and self-expression.

Early Math and Discovery: A Walk in the Park

Find a suitable area for you and your children to walk and explore, such as a paved pathway, an open grassy area, a short trail through the woods, or an area near a pond. Plan for this activity to be a relaxed stroll, as naturally curious toddlers will enjoy discovering objects to pick up and examine. As long as the objects of interest are safe, encourage your child to explore them. While your younger toddler does this, name the objects and briefly comment on them (e.g., "You found a rock. It looks heavy!"). Older toddlers may start naming different objects they see.

Kids will engage in:

- Exploring natural objects or materials
- Naming objects

To understand new things they encounter, children relate these experiences to the knowledge they already have. For instance, they might say "Doggy" when they see a squirrel. Understanding this aspect of toddler development will help you assist your children in making sense of new information. You might respond with something like, "It looks like a dog because it's running across the grass. That's called a squirrel." Expand your child's language and knowledge by adding more information, such as, "The squirrel is furry and has a long tail like our dog at home, but it climbs trees...watch!"

Encourage your child to observe and describe other animals and objects they find. This helps develop their observational skills and enriches their vocabulary. Make sure to praise their curiosity and participation, reinforcing their love for exploration and learning.

Myself and Others: Just Another Ordinary Day

Kids will engage in:

- Indicating the end of an event
- Anticipating the next event in a familiar sequence.
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Observe the natural routines you've already established with your toddler, such as having dinner, taking a bath, and reading a book before bed. Creating a consistent yet flexible order of daily activities provides comfort, security, and reassuring predictability for children. However, remain mindful of unexpected events that might alter your routine, like your child being interested in watching a garbage truck.

These moments are rich with opportunities for language and learning, so make sure to embrace them!

Once you've developed a routine that works, try to follow it consistently. Label each part of the day for your child, such as saying, "It's lunchtime!" As you follow the routine, your child will begin to anticipate what comes next. If you think your toddler knows the sequence, ask them what comes next, for example, "Bath is all done. Do you know what we're going to do next?"

Establish a routine for ending activities by giving a warning for cleanup time, such as singing a song to signal that cleanup time is approaching. Consistent routines help children feel secure and can make transitions smoother. Encouraging your toddler to participate in the routine also fosters independence and responsibility.

Physical Development and Healthy Habits: Poke, Pull, Squish

Allow your toddler time to explore a mound of play dough. Mimic your child's actions and introduce new vocabulary words to describe what they are doing or experiencing, such as squishy, poke, flat, heavy, and salty.

Observe how your child interacts with the dough. If they poke it, offer other items that are good for poking, like popsicle sticks or plastic pegs. If they pull it apart, provide a plastic bowl or cup to fill with play dough pieces. If they pound the dough, offer a lightweight wooden or plastic hammer. Use your mound of play dough and other materials in the same way your child is using them and describe what you are doing.

Encourage your child to describe their actions and the textures they feel, enhancing their language development. This activity not only promotes sensory exploration but also helps build fine motor skills and creativity

Kids will engage in:

- Using the small muscles in their hands and fingers
- Hearing new vocabulary words

Art, Music, and Movement: Bookmarks

Kids will engage in:

- Creative Art
- Writing

Show the children any bookmarks you might have. If you don't have any, explain that a bookmark is used to hold a place in a book, instead of bending down the page or losing their spot. Show them strips of paper and explain that this is what bookmarks usually look like.

Put out markers and art supplies and tell them they can decorate their bookmark however they like. As they decorate, make encouraging comments like, "I see you're using a lot of colors," or "Tell me about your drawing." Once they finish decorating, cover the bookmarks with contact paper to preserve their artwork and make the bookmarks more durable.

Ask your children if they would like to read or look at one of their favorite books. When they are done, suggest they use their new bookmark to mark the page of their favorite picture or simply to hold their place for next time. This activity not only encourages creativity but also instills good reading habits and a love for books.

Communication, Language, and Literacy: Book Nooks

Share with the children your favorite book and explain when the story takes place. You can also read a simple story and explain that the place where it happens is called the setting.

Next, say something like, "Let's take some of your favorite books and read them in a new setting!" Let the children choose where they would like to go. Here are some location ideas to inspire you:

- Under a table
- In the bathtub during bath time
- Under a blanket
- Near a tree
- In the car (books on tape/CD are great fun)
- Someplace to read with a pet

Encourage them to think about how the setting might change the experience of the story. This can make reading more exciting and help them understand the concept of settings better. Additionally, discuss how different settings in books can influence the mood and events of the story.

Kids will engage in:

- Reading
- Alphabetic Knowledge
- Book Knowledge
- Bonding with a familiar adult

Math, Science, and Technology: Carrots and Celery

Beginning:

Kids will engage in:

- Making shapes
- Healthy Habits
- Geometry
- Personal Care
- Matching Shapes

You'll be cutting carrots and celery in various shapes. If your children are old enough, let them assist with the cutting. Carrots can be cut into circles, half circles, or long sticks, while celery should be cut into long sticks and half moons.

As you cut each shape, place one piece in a bowl and ask your children to scoop up the rest and put them in the correct bowl. They will be matching the shape in the bowl to the shape of the vegetable in their hands. Once all the vegetables are cut, get out two plates or cookie sheets. Put a few vegetable shapes on your plate and ask an open-ended question like, "What do you think I could make with all these shapes?" Listen to their responses and build on their ideas. If they suggest making a flower, then create a flower! Encourage them to take some pieces and discuss what they are going to make. Be sure to point out the different shapes they are using or creating with the food pieces. You might say something like, "Oh, I see you made a big circle using all the little carrot circles!" Then, enjoy eating your veggie creations together.

This activity not only helps with learning shapes but also enhances fine motor skills and encourages imaginative play. It's a great way to make healthy eating fun and educational.

Myself and Others: Pet Rock

Take your children to a gardening center to select their favorite rock, or purchase one in advance. Lay out all the materials and explain that they will be creating their own pet rock. Encourage them to plan their project and describe how they envision their rock before starting to decorate. Ask them to choose the materials they want to use before they begin. Allow the children to decorate their pet rock using the available supplies. Let the activity continue until they have finished their creations. This activity not only fosters creativity but also helps develop their planning and decision-making skills.

Kids will engage in:

- Art
- Creativity
- The natural and physical world
- Making plans and following through on them

Physical Development and Healthy Habits: Obstacle Course

Kids will engage in:

- Moving his or her body in many different ways
- Building gross-motor skills
- Cooperation play
- Following directions

Prepare the obstacle course in advance by designating each activity area. Gather the children at the starting point and explain that they will complete a specific task at each station. Walk them through the course in the correct order, demonstrating and explaining what they need to do at each station.

Indoor Obstacle Course Ideas:

- Slide around the kitchen in your socks four times
- Crawl under the bed twice
- Dance energetically in the dining room
- Jump up and down in the living room five times
- Lie on the couch for 20 seconds and pretend to be asleep
- Go to the bathroom and wash your hands

Outdoor Obstacle Course Ideas:

- Run two laps around the yard
- Jump over a stick or rock ten times
- Fly like a bird, flapping your wings seven times around the yard

Bring the children back to the starting point and say, "Go!" Watch as they complete the obstacle course. Encourage them to run to each station and pick up any items they may have used along the way.

These activities aim to support your child's development through engaging, playful experiences.