

# FAMILY ACTIVITIES

## PACKET 7





# THOUGHT of the WEEK



From Holly Delgado, Early Childhood Specialist at HighScope Educational Research Foundation

## Proactive Solutions to Challenging Behaviors

A daily conversation between my husband and my kindergartener:

My husband: "Max, time to put that away and do school work."

Max: "NOOOOO!!! I don't want to do it!"

Then: "CRASH! STOMP! BOOM!" as Max flings his toy across the room and stomps away.

During this time of school closure and disrupted routine, our three children have become increasingly less tolerant and more explosive when asked to complete simple tasks. We suddenly are faced with a refusal to eat what we are serving for dinner, a deep sigh when asked to let out the dog, and an angry defiance when requested to clean their bedroom. These behaviors, although not unusual for young children, are becoming more frequent the longer we remain cooped up with limited outlets for interactions with anyone and anything beyond the four walls of our small home.

So, how do we deal with these challenging behaviors? What can my husband and I do to prevent a simple request from turning into a major explosion?

It is important to remember all behavior is ultimately a form of communication. When a child yells, stomps, throws, or runs away, they are telling us that they are not okay. In that moment, they might be upset, disappointed, or overwhelmed. Their emotions may have gotten the best of them. They may lack the ability to verbally describe the problem and, instead, are acting out their feelings.

The behaviors that we as adults often view as disobedience or defiance, might actually be a call for help. Instead of becoming escalated alongside our child, we need to shift our focus to understand the source of behavior. As the adult, we need to maintain a calm and supportive environment.

In our home, we have found transition warnings and the use of visuals helpful. Instead of springing expectations on our son, my husband now provides him with a countdown: "Max. You have two more minutes to play before it is time to work." Because time is an abstract concept, using a visual timer – such as a sand timer, egg timer, or a downloadable app on a cell phone or tablet – has helped Max manage his remaining time before he is required to move to the next activity. A visual schedule of our day also helps establish a routine and set our expectations. For more information about how to create a visual schedule at home, visit <https://360.coradvantage.com/>

We have also found building breaks into Max's day – opportunities for him to either tune out or exert physical energy - helps reduce his frustration and limits his outbursts. It has become extremely important that my husband and I watch his body language during the time he is engaged in academic or required tasks. When he starts to become fidgety or whiney, we know that it is time to shift gears. At that point, we say something like, "Let's finish one more problem and then take a break." In addition to raising our awareness, we have also empowered Max to ask for his own breaks. By honoring his request, we help him gain self-awareness and advocacy skills, as well as let him know we value and trust his judgement.

Encouraging children to make choices is another way to reduce challenging behaviors and help children maintain a sense of control. As adults, we can offer two or three acceptable options and offer them to children as choices. The following are some examples we have used this past week in our home:

- "It is quiet time. You can choose a book or a puzzle."
- "Do you want to do your math or reading work first?"
- "Would you like broccoli or green beans?"
- "Do you want to go outside to play now or after we practice writing?"

Whatever strategies you choose to use, stick with them. Consistency is key in finding a new normal. It may seem hard in the beginning, but it will become easier on both you and your child over time. And when you feel like it is tough, remember, tomorrow is a new day! You got this!

# INFANTS

When it comes to infants, you play the most important role in their development. You are the first “material”. Closeness and attention from a caregiver are the most important contributors to healthy development at this stage. These activities are designed for you to engage with your baby in, and also can be completed with a variety of materials or things laying around the house--these ideas are not limited to what we have provided as examples here. Enjoy!



## Art, Music and Movement: **Kitchen utensils musical band**

This activity may be best suited for babies that are sitting up, scooting, or crawling, but can also work for babies during tummy time. As a disclaimer, this can get a bit noisy, so grab your earplugs! To “set the stage,” put out a blanket or sheet on the floor. Place several pots and pans upside down, and one bowl or pot right side up. This is a really adaptable activity, and you can utilize utensils in your kitchen and get creative! “Drumsticks” that work well for this include wooden spoons, whisks, and other large and rounded serving utensils. Place the utensils with the pots and pans to set up a little homemade repurposed drum set (avoid sharp objects and glass to maintain a safe playing environment). You could take a whisk and tap it or swirl it in a pop and look at your baby to see their reaction. If they are still on their tummy, see if they reach for it to make some noise with these objects!

### Children experience:

- Exploring a variety of sounds!
- Making their own music

Let your baby use the utensils to hit the pots and pans to explore the sounds of the drumming. Watch them have fun getting a little noisy. They will be able to explore the different sounds that are created by each combination of utensil and pot. If possible, incorporate other hollow, clean household items, such as a tin bowl. You could even build on this activity by filling a bowl with clean, reused baby food jar lids and let your baby explore the sounds made by swirling these around!



## Communication, Language, and Literacy: **So Big!**

### Children experience:

- An introduction to the word “big”
- A fun, silly exercise and way to interact with you

A simple phrase to repeat with your child are the words “so big!” Try singing them, or saying them in a sing-songy voice. While your baby is lying on their back, you can gently stretch their arms up over their head and say “so big,” drawing out the word “so” to “soooooo,” and then saying “big” in a short, quick manner while simultaneously bringing their arms back down to their chest. You will likely get many laughs out of this simple interaction while also starting to teach them the concept of the word “big.” Another way to iterate with this

phrase is to show them with your body what big is by outstretching your arms up to the sky while singing “so big!” and quickly bring them back down. There is a lot of value in this simple interaction, from helping to develop language and communication skills for your baby to connecting with them in a silly and fun way!



# INFANTS



## *Early Math and Discovery:* **DIY light box for light exploration!**

Light is an exciting element that leads to discovery and wonder and can also enhance the exploration of different materials! For this activity, we will give an example of how you can create your own light box at home for your little one. To make a DIY light box, you can use tap lights (or flashlights if you don't have a tap light on hand) and a clear plastic storage container. Place the tap light inside the clear plastic container, and you may also want to put a translucent scarf, sheet or cloth over it just in case it seems too bright for your baby's eyes.

Then you can start to place different items that you have for your baby on top of the light box. These could vary from clear, plastic cups or bowls of different colors, to pieces of colored paper, cellophane, old paper towel and toilet paper tubes that are clean, or other toys or items that you think you would look neat when explored with the backdrop of your light. You could even incorporate their artwork into this, or if your container is large enough, try using your light box as a surface for painting on top of. Watch your baby explore and play on top of and around the light box! Introduce new objects and see what your baby is the most curious about. This is a great tool to weave into many other activities and is versatile for exploration for your baby.

### Children experience:

- Playing with light
- A layered play experience
- Seeing different shapes, colors and shadows block out light to varying degrees

### Materials:

- A plastic storage container
- A tap light or flashlight
- Clear cups, bowls, or pieces of paper



## *Myself and Others:* **Sensory Board**

### Children experience:

- Exploring different textures of materials
- Preference forming

First, you will need a large piece of construction paper or a tray. A piece of cardboard cut from a large box would work for this is, as well. Once you have your surface ready to go, collect various small objects of different textures and colors. These will be divided up into different sections and taped to the surface to create a sensory board for your baby to explore! Some examples of objects you could incorporate include: brightly colored pieces of yarn cut about 3-4 inches long (line these up and tape them down on top and bottom, displaying them as vertical or horizontal lines), feathers taped on the pointy end, a square of crinkly tin foil about 2 inches in diameter, plants collected from outside, and more! It is a very versatile activity, and you can explore what is available to you in your home. Once you have selected the objects, tape them into different segmented areas on the surface.

Present the sensory board to your baby and watch as they reach for different objects and sections depending on what interests them. Observe their facial expressions as they touch different objects to notice what they like and do not like! What do they engage with the most? What do they avoid? This will help build foundational skills for social-emotional development as your baby has an opportunity to form preferences, while also allowing for you to get to know those preferences.

# INFANTS



## *Physical Development and Healthy Habits:* **Make your own playdough**

For this activity, we encourage you to let your baby play with playdough! You can place the playdough on a tray or on some parchment paper for easy clean up and put it in an airtight container when they are finished playing with it. This is also a great activity for the high chair.

Place the different objects near the playdough to see how your baby interacts with squishing the playdough. They may even just want to explore it with their fingers, and that's ok too! Try squishing the playdough against their feet and toes if they are non-mobile, and then show them their imprints. In addition, this is a great sensory experience. As with all of the activities provided, if possible, let them explore for as long as they are interested!

### Children experience:

- Using wrist and hand muscles to squish playdough
- A calming sensory experience
- Manipulating an object

### Materials:

- Playdough (Visit this site for a recipe on how to make edible, baby-safe playdough: [www.familyeducation.com/fun/playdough/play-doh-recipes](http://www.familyeducation.com/fun/playdough/play-doh-recipes))
- Hard surface to place the playdough on
- Kitchen roller, cups, cookie cutters

# TODDLERS



## *Art, Music and Movement:* **Things That Roll**

Gather together balls and tubes of various sizes (all should be large enough to prevent choking hazards but also small enough that they are easy for children to hold). Anything around your house that can roll will work, as well as tubes of various lengths and diameters, including small tubes such as paper towel or wrapping paper tubes cut into small lengths that children can use for rolling as well as large tubes that children can use to roll balls through. Be sure to have a variety of options so that they can explore the materials in different ways.

Let your child know that they are going to be exploring things that roll. Start by offering the balls and tubes. You can model for children how to roll by rolling a ball or tube on the floor or dropping a ball inside a tube. Once your child gets started, look for them to:

- Chase or follow materials they have put in motion or that are put in motion by you, or express excitement as they observe the results of their actions.
- Copy your ideas, or use 1–2 words to describe the outcome or their excitement upon observing the results of their actions.
- Try out different ideas and ways to make the balls move faster, in another direction, or with another body part, or describe what they are doing or the outcome using 3–4 words or a short phrase.

As your child begins to lose interest in the activity, gather the materials that are no longer being used. Maybe allow your child to bring a small ball or a small tube with them to the next part of the day.

### Children experience:

- Exploring objects
- Object permanence
- Cause and effect
- Experimenting, predicting, and drawing conclusions



## *Communication, Language, and Literacy:* **A Firefighter Story**

### Children experience:

- Pretend play
- Thinking about jobs and careers
- Learning new words

To begin the activity, get your child's attention by making the sound of a fire truck siren. Next, tell your child you would like their help telling a story about firefighters. Ask them to share what they know about firefighters and write their ideas on a piece of paper.

Now have your child create associated actions for each of their ideas. Have them demonstrate these actions. For example, if they say that firefighters slide down a pole, have them act that out. Using all of your child's ideas, tell a simple story about life as a firefighter. Have the children act out the story as you tell it. You can make up a name for your firefighter, and imagine where

he or she lives, and maybe even what kind of dog they have at the fire station. You may want to use photos or videos of firefighters as a way to prompt discussion and support your child in sharing ideas.

Once you have completed the story, you can also try to make your sequence of events into a song with your child. Maybe later in the day you can take a walk by your local fire station.

# TODDLERS



## Early Math and Discovery: **Exploring Fabrics**

For this activity you'll need 3–5 types of fabrics of various sizes and textures (you can choose different articles of clothing). Let your child know that today they will be exploring different materials and textures. Lay fabric out where your child can reach it or move to it. Describe the different materials by using words like rough, smooth, slippery, soft, and fuzzy. Here are some examples of things you can try:

- Describe the textures your child is feeling as they explore the materials; rub fabrics against their feet and legs, and repeat textures your child responds to favorably by smiling or laughing.
- Describe how your child is using the materials; engage with them by playing peekaboo or dragging the materials across their feet and legs; comment on their reactions to the materials.
- Play peekaboo! Use the materials in the same way the children do; comment on the textures of the materials your child is holding and describe how they feel the same or different.

### Children experience:

- Exploring objects
- Object permanence
- Exploring same and different
- Observing and classifying objects

As children begin to lose interest in the activity, start cleaning up the materials. Perhaps ask your child what type of activity they want to try next.



## Myself and Others: **Trying a New Fruit or Vegetable**

### Children experience:

- Observing the world around them
- Classifying objects

This is a great way to introduce your child to any new food! By engaging your child in exploring different types of fruit, encouraging them to describe and compare the attributes of the fruit (taste, texture, appearance), and record and analyze their fruit preference, they can experience more agency and comfort with their dietary preferences.

To start, ask the children if they have ever tasted the fruit you brought today. Then, ask them what it means to use their senses to examine something. Talk about how they learn about the learn around them by seeing new things, touching new things, etc. Tell them that they will be using four of their five senses (sight, taste, sound, smell, touch) to find out about different fruits.

Distribute the new fruit, another fruit they're familiar with, utensils, and a plate to your child. As they carefully cut up the fruit into pieces, imitate and describe their actions, and encourage them to communicate what they are doing and thinking. Write their thoughts and words on the prepared chart paper.

# TODDLERS

If the child has difficulty cutting or figuring out how to open the fruit, support collaborative problem solving as they try to figure out how to move forward with the task.

Finally, ask them to tell you how much they like the fruit they're familiar with, and the new one! In the future, you can reference these preferences so that your child feels like they have some control and influence over their food choices.



## *Physical Development and Healthy Habits:* **Collecting Objects Outside**

Provide your child with an easily portable container, such as a bucket, to collect items from the outdoors. Then take them on a walk in a safe place outside, if you can. Your yard will also work, or this activity can be adapted for indoor play.

Tell your child to start collecting items and place them in the bucket. Observe which items the child chooses and the way that they put items into their container. Allow your child as much time as they would like to collect natural items during outside time, and allow for a transition to another outside activity for children who indicate that they are done collecting.

### Children experience:

- Fine motor skills
- Interacting with tools and technology
- Filling and emptying



# PRESCHOOL



## *Art, Music and Movement:* **Nature Patterns**

First you'll need to collect some nature materials. Things like leaves, sticks, and stones will be perfect. You can even do this with your child on a nature walk. To begin the activity, show your child pictures of natural patterns. To find pictures of patterns that occur naturally in the environment, look on the Internet or in library books (e.g., *Alphabet City* by Stephen T. Johnson or *Andy Goldsworthy: A Collaboration With Nature* by Andy Goldsworthy). Alternatively, use pictures of natural patterns you have created beforehand.

### Children experience:

- Creating patterns
- Appreciating nature

Talk with them about what they see and explain what the pictures are of. Use the word pattern when talking to your child about the pictures. Tell your child that they can make their own nature patterns using the materials you have collected.

Talk with your child about what they are doing and the patterns they are working on. For example, you might say, "I see that you are putting your twigs in a row." Offer the photos you have collected as ideas that your child can look at when making their patterns. If you want, you might suggest that your child glue their patterns down on their piece of cardboard.

Let your child know that the activity will be ending in five minutes. Make sure to display your child's masterpiece at their eye level in your home! Or, you can ask your child if they might want to give it to a friend or family member to brighten their day!



## *Communication, Language, and Literacy:* **Story Can: Walking Through the Woods**

### Children experience:

- Creative storytelling
- Engaging with nature and the natural world

For this activity you'll need to create "story cans". These are small containers (anything you have in the house will do) filled with different materials. Think about loose parts like pieces of fabric, paper, or ribbon. Other pieces include small people figures (perhaps from a lego set), small stones, pine cones, sticks, any anything else you have handy. If your child has older siblings, you can include them in creating the story cans, and in the activity as well!

Start the activity by opening your own story can and pulling out the materials and setting them in front of you. Then tell a short story using the materials in your story can. For example, you might say, "Once upon a time there was a boy [the boy person figure] who was going on a walk through the woods. He had to move around all the tall trees [the pine cones] and over lots of tiny sticks [the sticks]. Then he came across some rocks [the pebbles] and heard some splashing noises. He looked over the rocks and saw a beautiful lake [blue fabric or paper]."

Now say to your child "I have some story cans for you. I wonder what kind of story you are going to tell." Give the child a story can. Listen to the children's stories, repeating some of the vocabulary they are using. Look for a natural play opening and join children's play in pretending with a person figure from your story can. Stay in character and follow the child's lead.

# PRESCHOOL

Give the children a time warning before the end of the activity. Ask the children to place all their materials back in their tins, and remind them where they can find similar natural materials in the home

Tell a story as a way to transition children to the next part of the routine. For example, you might tell a story such as this: "Once upon a time there a child and a grown up who were very hungry. They had to get up and wash their hands before they could eat. So they all stood up and tiptoed through their house to the sinks to wash their hands."



## *Math, Science, and Technology:* **Bowling for Bottles**

Set up a bowling experience for your child by finding something you can set up as pins-- perhaps blocks or pieces of wood. You'll also need a ball, like a tennis ball or some other soft ball. To start, if you have taken your child bowling before, ask him or her if they remember what it was like, and ask them to describe the activity. If you haven't, you might start by showing them some pictures or a video of bowling, like this one: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tbyp-FV7Nu0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tbyp-FV7Nu0)

### Children experience:

- Counting as part of a game
- Keeping score
- Playing a fun sport activity

Show your child the bowling "pins" and soft ball. Say "Today we are going to bowl!"

Demonstrate how to bowl by rolling the soft ball, knocking down some pins, and then counting how many pins you have knocked down. Now let your child try. Support their different stages in counting by commenting on what you see the children doing. For example, you might say, "Keith, I see you knocked down two bottles and there is one still standing."

Help your child count by pointing to each bottle as they say the numbers. Offer paper and pencils to children who are ready for an extension. Encourage them to "keep score" by placing tally marks on the paper (which is also a great way to encourage counting).

Offer children extra pins if they want an additional challenge. Give your child a two minutes warning before the activity ends, and let them know what you'll be transitioning to next.



## *Myself and Others:* **Follow the Leader**

### Children experience:

- Cooperative play
- Music and movement

Turn on some fun music and help your child explore ways of moving to the music; include materials, such as wind ribbons or scarves, if desired. After some dancing time, designate yourself as the leader and encourage your child to copy your movements. After a few minutes, let your child be the leader, and copy their movements! If you have multiple children, you can pass around the leader role so everyone can have a try. Next, take turns leading a parade around the room or yard. Once your child starts to lose interest, let them know the person who will have the last turn, then finish dancing!

# PRESCHOOL



## *Physical Development and Healthy Habits:* **Two Places to Tap**

Sit on the floor with your child, and start playing some fun music. Say that you have found one place to tap the beat (e.g., on your head) but you need another place and ask for a suggestion. Once your child comes up with a fun idea, tell the child to follow your two movements (e.g., patting your head and shoulders). Chant the following words as you continue the movements in sequence for children to follow:

Two places to tap,  
Two places to tap,  
Head and shoulders  
Two places to tap

Continue asking for additional ideas from children while facilitating patterning. Once your child has mastered the activity, challenge them to make more complex patterns (e.g., AABAAB, or AABBAABB) or change the words to Three Places to Tap for an ABCABC pattern.

To transition to the next part of the day, keep the rhythm going and move to your next activity.

### Children experience:

- Listening and comprehension
- Movement and gross motor skills
- Body awareness



# MORE RESOURCES



## Learn about Coronavirus with Sesame Street

Your favorite characters from Sesame Street stopped by CNN to talk to kids about COVID-19. You can find the full recording here:

[www.cnn.com/2020/04/25/app-news-section/cnn-sesame-street-coronavirus-town-hall-april-25-2020-app/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2020/04/25/app-news-section/cnn-sesame-street-coronavirus-town-hall-april-25-2020-app/index.html)



## Mondays with Michelle

Join PBS and former First Lady Michelle Obama for a fun story time:

[www.youtube.com/pbskids](http://www.youtube.com/pbskids)



## Feel-See-Do

Zero to Three has some helpful thoughts about how we can react to the inevitable meltdowns:

[www.zerotothree.org/resources/3374-setting-limits](http://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3374-setting-limits)



## Fun Activities with Beanstalk

Beanstalk is offering fun, educational, and interactive courses for children ages 18 months through preschool, and right now they're free:

<https://beanstalk.co/>