



# BABY STEPS

**STEM FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS:  
WITH THE POWER OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**



Joyce R. Laiosa  
Mohawk Valley Library System  
Baby Steps: A STEM Program for Babies and Toddlers  
May 2019

## THE BIG PLAY DATE

A program that can be scheduled for your library as often as you are comfortable with crowds of very young children!

- Every child or family unit of baby/toddler with siblings MUST have parent or caregiver accompany the youngest participant.
- Set up an entire area with “stations” for play – from a sensory corner to a “grocery store.”
- In each station, have instructions and prompts for parents and caregivers. Also, stress safety issues for each activity.
- Here are some other ideas for “stations:” four zones: baby, active, blocks, and activity tables, each zone will have about 4-5 different activities. An example of each includes sensory crawl in the baby zone, a sticky wall in the active zone, cardboard boxes in the block zone, and pipe cleaner/colander sculptures on the activity tables.
- Still more ideas: sensory bins filled with rice, beans, or cooked spaghetti; as well as the messy and HUGELY popular “Un-Sand Box” a shredded paper-filled blow up pool.
- Sensory floor mats: tape together rug pieces with different textures from soft to rough; bubble wrap; shiny silver mailing envelopes.
- Activity center: drawing paper on the wall with crayons, markers, stickers all on the eye level of babies and toddlers.
- Sticky wall – tape contact paper with the sticky side out for kids to put items up on the “board” and see all the things that stick from cardboard shapes to paper towel rollers, egg cartons (cut-up), buttons (large ones!), pom-poms, lots of leftover craft supplies.
- Have a group of board books easily accessible to everyone. You might have large pillows in a corner for the board book corner.

**The ideas are limitless – it is space and imagination.**

- Start small, and let it grow by how it is received in your community. If it is all positive (including from staff and janitorial staff), think about scheduling it more often. There is nothing wrong with making it only an annual or quarterly program.
- Use some of your regular storytimes to include one or two of the activities, depending on what activities you include each week. The hand-out

“recipe” cards are perfect for people who want more. The “recipes” are very simple for parents to do at home.

Here are many resources that were used for MVLS’ “Baby Steps” program.

<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2019/02/big-play-big-fun/>

<http://readplaygrow.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/129763347/Read%20Play%20Grow%20SLJ%20July%202013.pdf>

<http://readplaygrow.pbworks.com/w/browse/#view=ViewFolder&param=Play%20STEM%20Recipes>

<https://jbrary.com/babytime-beginners-guide/#>

<https://storytimekatie.com/songs-rhymes/babies/>

## Knowledge/Content

### Science – study of natural world

- Life Sciences – living things
- Physical Sciences – physical properties of objects
- Earth & Space Sciences – earth environment, weather, solar system

### Technology – Tools

Something a person designed or designated to carry out a task or to make a job easier

### Engineering – How things are built, designed and why

### Math – Measurement

Numbers & Operations  
Geometry & Spatial Relationships  
Characteristics, Patterns  
Measurement & Comparison  
Time & Sequence

## Processing/Thinking

- Observing
- Exploring
- Questioning
- Making predictions
- Noticing Cause & Effect
- Experimenting
- Collecting Data
- Analyzing Data
- Estimating
- Comparing/Contrasting
- Sequencing
- Drawing Conclusions
- Problem Solving
- Thinking Creatively
- Wondering
- Exploring how things work
- Exploring different perspectives
- Noticing patterns

## Communication

- Using non-verbal & verbal language
- Saying what happened
- Saying what observed
- Explaining reasoning
- Sharing discoveries, ideas, challenges
- Asking for help
- Asking questions
- Using science/math vocabulary
- Using process thinking vocabulary
- Representing with drawing, findings, charts
- Learning collaboratively

| Age     | Activity   | STEM skill/concept                      |
|---------|--|---|
| Infant  | Recognize mom, dad, and other caregivers                                 | Categorization,<br>Comparisons, sorting |
| Infant  | Play peek-a-boo  | Cause and effect                        |
| Infant  | Cry to signal the need for help  | Logic, reasoning                        |
| Toddler | Anticipates the ends of songs and stories                                | Pattern recognition                     |
| Toddler | Says "red ball – Names objects and identifies characteristics of objects | Classification                          |
| Twos    | Predicts what happens next in simple books                               | Cause and effect,<br>sequencing         |
| Twos    | Plays with a shape sorter and learns how to place objects inside         | Problem solving                         |

# VOCABULARY FOR BUILDING

**Blocks**

**Stack**

**Build**

**Count**

**Move**

**High**

**Stable**

**Low**

**Tall**

**Short**

**Wide**

**Height**

**Base**

**Tumble**

**Side by side**

**Bridge**

**Engineer**

**How high should we make it?**

**We need a wide base for a tall building.**

**Tell me what you are making.**

**What if you add another block? Let's see what happens.**

# VOCABULARY FOR SENSORY PLAY

**Roll**

**Swirl**

**Bottle**

**Rock**

**Movement**

**Observe**

**See**

**Sink**

**Float**

**Up**



**Down**

**Drop**

**Fast**

**Slow**

**What do we see in the tubes?**

**What sound does it make?**

**Can you make it go slow?/fast?**

**What colors do you see?**

**Soft**

**Hard**

**Scratchy**

**Rough**

**Smooth**

**Colors**

**Touch Pat stroke**

**Texture**

**Sticky**

**Bumpy**

**Shiny**

**What colors do you see?**

**Can you mix the colors?**

**How does that feel?**

**What can we make in the paint?**

**Tell me what you are drawing.**

**Can we make shapes? Circles? Boxes?**

**VOCABULARY FOR MOTOR SKILLS**

**Push**

**Pull**

**Over**

**Under**

**Motion**

**Movement**

**Tug**

**Gravity**

**Incline**

**Roll**

**Slide**

**High**

**Low**

**What do you think will happen with the ball and these tubes?**

**Can you make that happen?**

**Which tube will be the fastest?**

**Which tube will be the slowest?**

**What is the difference?**

## **INQUIRY QUESTIONS FOR GROCERY STORE**

**What shall we buy today?**

**What do you want to eat?**

**How many items do you want/need?**

**What food is your favorite?**

**What do you want to try?**

**Let's check out our groceries.**

## STEM BOOKLIST FOR MANY EASY IDEAS!

Anderson, Sally with the Vermont Center for the Book. *Where Does My Shadow Sleep?: A Parent's Guide to Exploring Science with Children's Books.* Gryphon House, 2012.

Very few of these ideas are for babies, but most are very appropriate for preschoolers. Each lesson has a list of books (usually 3) and an experiment, plus all the things you will need to do and talk about. Very useful for a series of science programs.

Barbre, Jean, G., EdD. *Baby Steps to STEM: Infant and Toddler Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Activities.* Redleaf Press, 2017.

So many ideas for activities that also include the STEM concepts, outcomes, materials, suggested books, inquiry questions and comments, and home-school connections. It's all there!

Brown, Sam Ed. *Bubbles, Rainbows and Worms: Science Experiments for Preschool Children.* Gryphon House, 1981, 2004.

The experiments at first glance, may seem too much for babies and toddlers. However, there are great descriptive lists of words for some of the experiments which are helpful for parent prompts. Most of these experiments are for preschoolers, but I think that it is helpful to look through and glean a few ideas.

Castaldo, Nancy. *The Little Hands Nature Book: Earth, Sky, Critters & More.* Williamson Publishing, 1997.

This book has activities for ages 2-6. Older children will enjoy the activities, too, with less help from adults. There are many activities that will be fun for toddlers and babies, just remember to use VOCABULARY to help the youngest scientists start learning new words to describe their PLAY!

Castaldo, Nancy. *Rainy Day Play: Explore, Create, Discover, Pretend.* Chicago Review Press, 1997, 2005.

This is filled with PLAY ideas when children are stuck in the house on a rainy day. From art projects to games to book ideas you will find plenty to use in your STEM program, and activities to pass along to grown-ups.

Connors, Abigail Flesch, MEd. *Shake, Rattle, and Roll: Rhythm Instruments and More for Active Learning.* Gryphon House, Inc., 2015

Are you tired of all your old songs and instruments? This book is filled with songs (all with familiar tunes) with new words and activities for your rhythm instruments. Using different vocabulary to sing what you are doing, with phonological fun this will liven up your storytimes.

Dziengel, Ana. *STEAM, Play and Learn: 20 Fun Step-by-step Preschool Projects about Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math!* Quarto Publishing Group USA Inc., 2018.

These are all for preschoolers, filled with colorful photographs and easy instructions.

Wilhelm, Laura, Ed.D. *Treasure Basket Explorations: Heuristic Learning for Infants and Toddlers*. Gryphon House, Inc., 2017.

Short book with great photographs and good ideas for simple boxes and baskets for explorations. It is definitely a place to find easy ideas.

#### FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Ardizzone, Leonisa, EdD. *Science: Not Just For Scientists!* Gryphon House, 2014.

Similar to other books on this list, except that there are photographs illustrating techniques that are helpful guides for your programs. This is aimed at preschoolers and early elementary-age children.

Blakely, Nancy. *Lotions, Potions, and Slime: Mudpies and More!* Tricycle Press, 1996.

Lots of good ideas and recipes. Some may be appropriate for preschoolers, but not too many. Blakely has a handprint logo that helps you know what is easy and what is truly messy!

Castaldo, Nancy. *Keeping Our Earth Green*. Williamson Books, 2008.

This seems to be for ages 8-13. Many great projects and explanations. It is not for babies, toddlers or preschoolers.

Castaldo, Nancy. *Leap Into Space*. Williamson Books, 2008.

This is for ages 8-13 with great information and activities. It is not for babies and toddlers, or even preschoolers!

Castaldo, Nancy. *Winter Day Play!: Activities, Crafts, and Games for Indoors and Out*. Chicago Review Press, 2001.

Many outdoor activities that can be used by preschoolers, but a lot is for early elementary, too.

Englehart, Deirdre, EdD; Mitchell, Debby, EdD; Albers-Biddle, Junie, EdD; Jennings-Towle, Kelly, EdD; and Forestieri, CDA. *STEM Play: Integrating Inquiry into Learning Centers*. Gryphon House, 2016.

Wonderful resource for preschool and early elementary library programs. This is set up for children to work on their own, with directions from teachers/librarians and inquiry-led activities. This would work with parent helpers and teen volunteers.

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MVLS – Baby Steps

## ALSC Blog (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/>)

Pursuing excellence for library service to children

Early Literacy (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/category/early-literacy/>)

# BIG Play = BIG Fun!

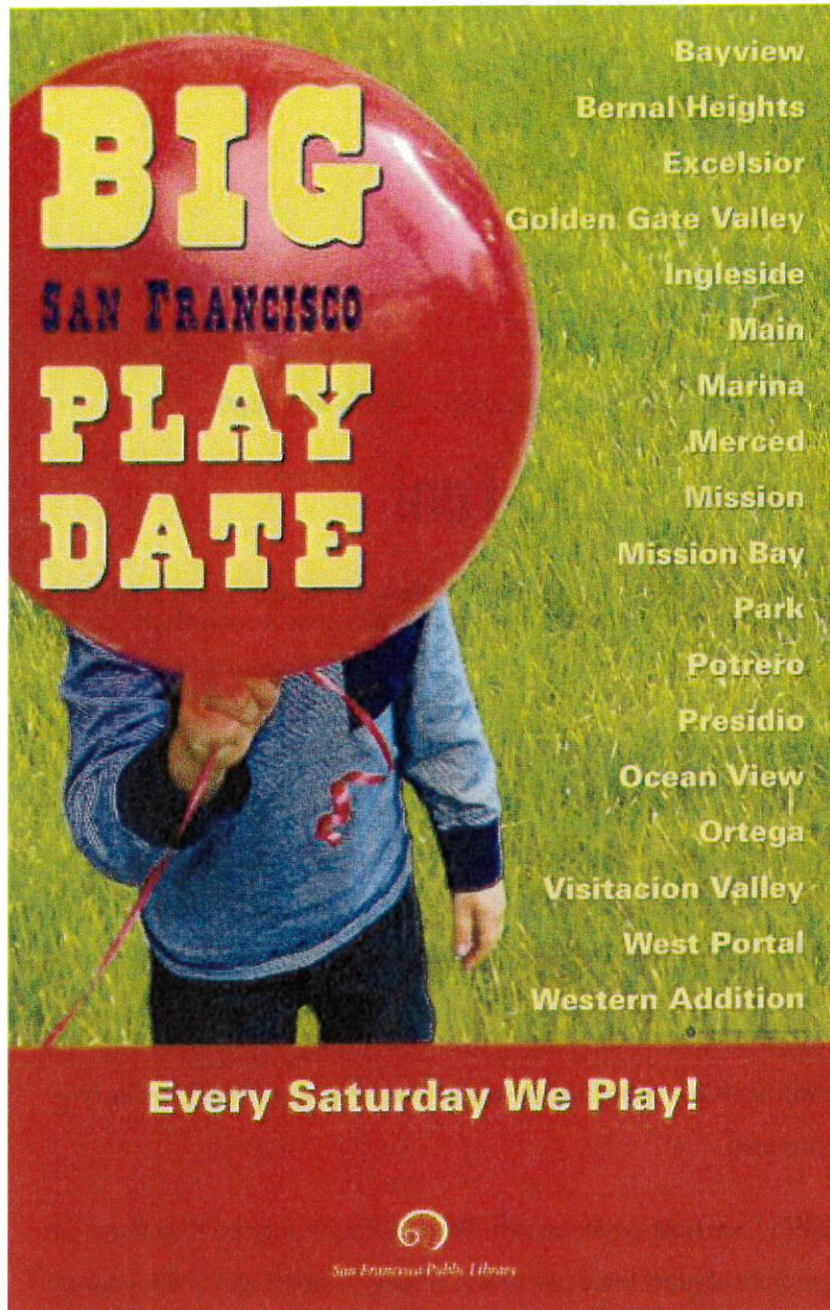
February 22, 2019 (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2019/02/big-play-big-fun/>) | Early Childhood Programs and Services committee (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/author/early-childhood-programs-and-services-committee/>)

A firefighter, a chef, a magician, and two elephants are creating an elaborate, imaginary world in the dress-up tent. Engineers are building cardboard forts and testing the strength of their structures. An acrobat is crawling and peeking through a small tunnel. Three printmakers are working on a collaborative piece of rubber stamp art. And a pair of tiny zoo keepers are inspecting, touching, squeezing, (and maybe even chewing on) a variety of soft, stuffed animals. Where are all these little ones doing all these things all in one place? They are at their library's Big Play Date, and they are loving it!

Inspired by Brooklyn Public Library's innovative idea, libraries all over the country are hosting Big Play Dates and growing community, providing big fun, supporting parental learning, and strengthening the brains of our youngest patrons in the process.

Here at San Francisco Public Library (SFPL), we host what we call "The Big San Francisco Play Date" at each of our 28 locations plus the bookmobile at least once per year. We will be hosting our 6th year of Big Play Dates in 2019. Many of our libraries host Big Play Dates during April, the month of the young child, but each branch chooses what works best for them.





(<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Big-SF-Playdate-poster-sans-date-1-1.jpg>)

Here's how SFPL describes our Big Play Dates:

*Big San Francisco Play Date allows families with young children the opportunity to engage in accessible activities that promote growth and exploration in a safe and welcoming environment. Geared for children aged 0-5, we welcome caregivers and older siblings to play along with them. Big Play encourages side-by-side play, choice, turn-taking, and making new friends while providing*

*the grown-ups an opportunity to learn about the importance of play. During Big Play our library locations offer a varied menu of activities. Libraries are encouraged to offer self-made or easy to replicate activities that are accessible and budget conscious.*

## SFPL Big Play Date Basics

**For ages 0-5.** Big play dates are most decidedly early childhood programs. As we know, little ones learn so much through play, so we're just creating an environment where they can have a great time with their families and peers while stimulating cognitive development.

**LOTS of activities.** We choose activities that support growing brains in many areas. You can create stations, zones, activity tables, or all of the above.

**Large Building and Movement.** Large building toys and movement activities support gross motor skill development and interactive play. Ideas: [Large Cardboard Bricks](#)

(<https://www.lakeshorelearning.com/products/blocks-manipulatives/building-sets/jumbo-cardboard-blocks-master-set/p/CB214>), [Giant Octoplay](http://www.polydron.co.uk/giant-octoplay/giant-octoplay-set-3.html) (<http://www.polydron.co.uk/giant-octoplay/giant-octoplay-set-3.html>), [Big Bilder](https://www.bildopolis.com/collections/bildopolis-big-bilder-kit) (<https://www.bildopolis.com/collections/bildopolis-big-bilder-kit>), [Peek-A-Boo Tunnel](#)

(<https://www.discountschoolsupply.com/Product/ProductDetail.aspx?product=16633&Category=>)



(<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/bisexual-blue-boy-1449934-1.jpg>)

**Small Building and Manipulatives.** Small building toys, play dough with tools, and manipulatives support fine motor skill development and can be a great place for families to play together and practice communication

skills. Ideas: [Magnatiles](https://www.lakeshorelearning.com/products/blocks-manipulatives/light-tables-accessories/magna-tile-sup-sup-starter-set/p/DG546) (<https://www.lakeshorelearning.com/products/blocks-manipulatives/light-tables-accessories/magna-tile-sup-sup-starter-set/p/DG546>), [Design and Build Engineering](https://www.lakeshorelearning.com/products/stem/building-engineering/design-build-engineering-centers/p/PP750X) (<https://www.lakeshorelearning.com/products/stem/building-engineering/design-build-engineering-centers/p/PP750X>)

**Make Believe.** Growing imagination and skills at playing with others, this can be a tent with dress up clothes/costumes in it, a kitchen with play food and pots and pans, a vets' office, or even a library with plenty of board books and a cardboard book drop.

(<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/boy-bubbles-child-160917.jpg>) **Creativity.** Artistic and collaborative play are inspired by rubber stamps, finger paint, bubble blowing, and a sticky table (tape contact paper to the table, sticky side up, and provide

bowls of all kinds of things to stick to the table: pompoms, feathers, craft sticks, yarn, paper shapes, etc.).

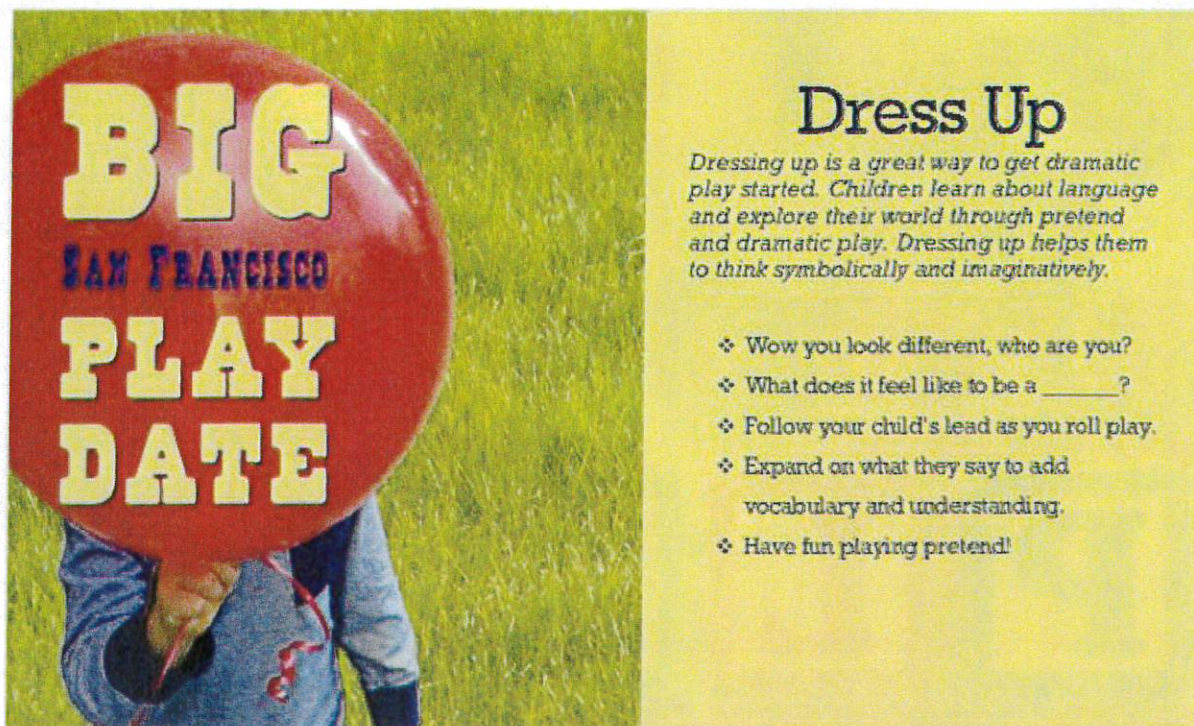


<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/baby-pool.png>

**Baby Zone.** Babies learn with their senses, by touching, looking, and chewing, so we put soft baby toys as well as lots of stuffed animals into a blow-up baby pool, to keep the babies a bit away from the fray, but still a part of the fun. There are many ways to create a little safe zone for babies with soft baby-appropriate objects.

**So Much Learning.** In conjunction with cognitive development in multiple areas, each of the playdate activities provide opportunities for social/emotional development; sensory experiences; and communication, language, and vocabulary skill building.

**Supporting Parents.** An essential part of our Big Play Dates is showing parents the importance of play, modeling activities that they can replicate at home, and sharing specific ideas about how to engage in the play with their children. At the various stations, we post signs (see sample below) that give parents ideas for interactions that they can use at the Big Play, and these ideas will resonate with them at home and thus support play and their children's brain development wherever they are.



<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Dress-Up-1.jpg>**Logistics.** Since we do multiple playdates on different days, we have kits (with manipulatives, building blocks, bubble supplies, etc.) that our Youth Services Department routes to locations depending on requests made by each individual branch. We also make homemade activities like creating bowling games out of disposable plastic water bottles, using food boxes to make building blocks, and putting beans in a bin to create counting and sorting opportunities (see “Additional Resources” for more ideas).



## Big Play on the Road

Library systems across the country do their own version of a big play date, which demonstrates how versatile and flexible the programs are (this is your friendly reminder to take this information and adapt it however works best for your library and community).

**Akron-Summit County Public Library.** The Main branch of the Akron-Summit County Public Library in Ohio will be hosting a *Play Date Pandemonium* for the Week of the Young Child in April 2019. They'll be celebrating local iconic institutions through their play activities. Some ideas include: creating a tire roll mural for Goodyear Tires, having a restaurant dramatic play area for a popular pizza parlor, and setting out matchbox cars and ramps for the Soap Box Derby.

**New York Public Library.** Inspired by a visit to Brooklyn Public Library's *Big Brooklyn Playdate*, New York Public Library (NYPL) is hosting its first *Big Playdate* May 2019, with the intention of making it an annual event. The *Big Playdate* will be one large, system-wide program, and they are piloting smaller, themed playdates, called "traveling playdates" in five branches.

Activities will be divided into four zones: baby, active, blocks, and activity tables, each zone will have about 4-5 different activities. An example of each includes sensory crawl in the baby zone, a sticky wall in the active zone, cardboard boxes in the block zone, and pipe cleaner/colander sculptures on the activity tables.

**Salt Lake County Library.** Inspired by Brooklyn and San Francisco's Big Play Dates, Salt Lake County's version is called *Get Curious!* They hold one big play date on a Saturday morning and invite all their families with little ones to join in the fun. They have several fun stations for families to move through including building, animal habitats, a sensory area with all sorts of gooey stuff, a light center with light tables and manipulatives, a shadow center with puppet play, and a weather center which includes a wind tunnel!

**Brooklyn Public Library** (the originator of Big Play Dates). The *Big Brooklyn Playdate* takes place at their Central Library, with more than 100 babies and toddlers plus caregivers in attendance. One large room (usually used for gallery exhibits) turns into an early learning play space. Their "play stations" include large boxes collected from the mail room with cuts-out for window and doors for playing in and peeking out of; sensory bins filled with rice, beans, or cooked spaghetti; as well as the messy and HUGELY popular "Un-Sand Box" a shredded paper-filled blow up pool.

So, go for it – host your own big play date – it's a lot of work AND so much fun. But, be forewarned: you will most certainly hear from parents and caregivers, "Can we do this **every** week?"

*Thanks to Kimberly Alberts, Akron-Summit County Public Library; Eva Shapiro, New York Public Library; Susan Spicer, Salt Lake County Library; and Rachel Payne, Brooklyn Public Library for sharing their Big Play programs. And, thanks to SFPL's Maricela Leon-Barrera and Christy Estrovitz for the information they provided.*

## Brooklyn Public Library Resources

The Big Brooklyn Playdate (<https://www.bklynlibrary.org/event-series/big-brooklyn-playdate>)

[Read Play Grow Curriculum](http://readplaygrow.pbworks.com/w/page/84901624/Read%2C%20Play%2C%20Grow%21%20Curriculum)

(<http://readplaygrow.pbworks.com/w/page/84901624/Read%2C%20Play%2C%20Grow%21%20Curriculum>)

Read & Play: Branch Playdates (<https://www.bklynlibrary.org/blog/2019/01/29/read-play-branch>) by

Liz Blake

Read & Play: The Big Brooklyn Playdate (<https://www.bklynlibrary.org/blog/2018/04/20/read-play-big-brooklyn>) by Jenn Wagner

## Additional Resources

### Child Development

The Children's Therapy & Family Resource Centre (<http://www.kamloopschildrenstherapy.org/home>)

[I Can Teach My Child: Developmental Domains of Early Childhood](https://www.icanteachmychild.com/domains-of-early-childhood-development/)

(<https://www.icanteachmychild.com/domains-of-early-childhood-development/>)

[Nova Natural: The 7 Domains of Early-Childhood Development](http://blog.novanatural.com/2014/11/09/the-7-domains-of-early-childhood-development/)

(<http://blog.novanatural.com/2014/11/09/the-7-domains-of-early-childhood-development/>)

## Homemade Big Play Activities

[53 Educational Activities and Games using Pompoms](http://www.learnwithplayathome.com/2015/11/53-educational-activities-and-games.html)

(<http://www.learnwithplayathome.com/2015/11/53-educational-activities-and-games.html>)

[Alphabet Activity – Pretend Play with Letters](https://www.notimeforflashcards.com/2013/02/alphabet-activity-pretend-play-mail-with-letters.html)

(<https://www.notimeforflashcards.com/2013/02/alphabet-activity-pretend-play-mail-with-letters.html>)

[Bubble Wrap Fun](https://teachingmama.org/bubble-wrap-fun/) (<https://teachingmama.org/bubble-wrap-fun/>)

[Bubble Wrap Runway](https://handsonaswegrow.com/bubble-runway-popping/) (<https://handsonaswegrow.com/bubble-runway-popping/>)

[Indoor Hopscotch](https://happyhooligans.ca/indoor-cardboard-hopscotch/) (<https://happyhooligans.ca/indoor-cardboard-hopscotch/>)

[Kitchen Puzzle](http://growingplay.blogspot.com/2012/06/kitchen-puzzle.html) (<http://growingplay.blogspot.com/2012/06/kitchen-puzzle.html>)

[Paper Plate Ring Toss Game](http://alittlelearningfortwo.blogspot.com/2010/11/paper-plate-ring-toss-game.html) (<http://alittlelearningfortwo.blogspot.com/2010/11/paper-plate-ring-toss-game.html>)

[Toddler Car Wash](http://wehaveears.com/summer-fun-toddler-car-wash/) (<http://wehaveears.com/summer-fun-toddler-car-wash/>)

[Woven Paper Placemats](https://www.messforless.net/woven-paper-placemats/) (<https://www.messforless.net/woven-paper-placemats/>)

*Additional Resources provided by Maricela Leon-Barrera, Early Learning Coordinator, San Francisco Public Library*

**Please comment below and share what Big Play programming YOUR library does or would like to do, any great resources you have, and of course any questions you want to ask.**


*Meredith Steiner is a Children's Librarian in the [San Francisco Public Library](https://sfpl.org) (<https://sfpl.org>) system and a member of the [ALSC Early Childhood Programs and Services Committee](http://www.ala.org/alsc/aboutalsc/coms/pg1childadv/als-pspe) (<http://www.ala.org/alsc/aboutalsc/coms/pg1childadv/als-pspe>).*

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Midwinter Musings (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2019/02/midwinter-musings/>)

The Rule of Three: A Simple Formula for Building Dynamic Children's Programs  
(<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2019/02/the-rule-of-three-a-simple-formula-for-building-dynamic-childrens-programs/>)



## 2 comments



### Tami Morehart

February 26, 2019 at 12:19 pm (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2019/02/big-play-big-fun/#comment-4242439>)

The Wagnalls Memorial library has opened a Creative Play space for all ages to enjoy. We have a home space with a kitchen and dolls. Then there is the grocery store, pet center, doll house, balance beams, magnatiles, Keva planks, LEGOs, farm set, puzzles..... and so much more! We have a core of play materials that are always out, then rotate other items weekly. It is a lot of upfront work, but well worth the effort! We have had the center for a little over a year now, and have lots of families visiting each day. It is located in a large room just off the children's library. The room was funded with grant money and donations.

[Reply](#)



### Meredith Steiner

March 1, 2019 at 1:55 pm (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2019/02/big-play-big-fun/#comment-4243825>)



Tami: That sounds like such a wonderful place for learning, socializing, and parent-child bonding. And they can go every day. That's like a Big Play Date all year round. Awesome!

[Reply](#)

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Blogger Alexa Newman (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/category/bloggers/alexa-newman/>)

## Play Areas in Libraries

February 26, 2019 (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2019/02/play-areas-in-libraries/>) | Alexa Newman  
(<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/author/alexa-newman/>)

*Indoor Playground?*

*Early Learning Area?*

*Playland?*

*Seventh Circle of the Underworld?*

Play areas for the youngest library patrons are most common in public libraries, although some school libraries have them as well. They range from the simple: an area rug with a train table or puppet theater and some puzzles; to the elaborate: dedicated themed spaces, with corporate sponsors, that are changed out on a quarterly basis.



With our recently completed remodel and expansion my library created a new, dedicated, larger space for creative play. It has quickly become one of the most popular spots in the library. There are busy times where we have upwards of 40 people (children and caregivers) in the space at once. Mornings are usually the most hectic. It can be quite lively at times. (Okay, maybe raucous is a more accurate descriptor.)

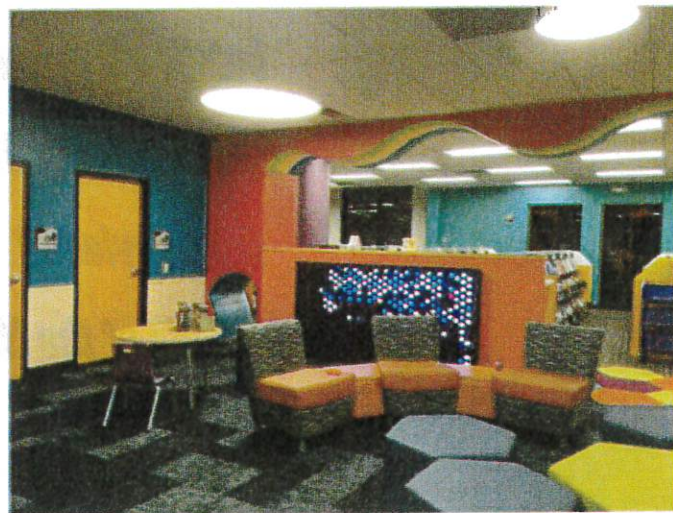
Located in the youth services department, it offers an engaging, free, indoor space for children to explore creative play. It is tucked into a far corner of the department, adjacent to the picture book and board book collections. This spot helps to reduce noise carrying through the library.

It has full walls on three sides, and pony wall on the fourth to help contain noise (and runaways!). Our play area is roughly 13' x 16' and includes two family style restrooms, a nursing room, and an entrance to our storytime room.

## Features

Permanent features include a large combination train and LEGO table. It is both durable and substantial. We are confident that it will stand up to abuse. We also have a play house that inspires a lot of imaginative play. There is a pint-sized tunnel / door that is enjoyed by many of the kids visiting.

On the technology side we have a koi pond projector. It is really fun to watch the little ones try to chase and catch the fish. My favorite piece in the play area is our Everbright interactive light board. Inspired by the classic Lite Brite toy, it has dials that, when turned, change colors. You can make all kinds of cool images, or, just watch the colors change.



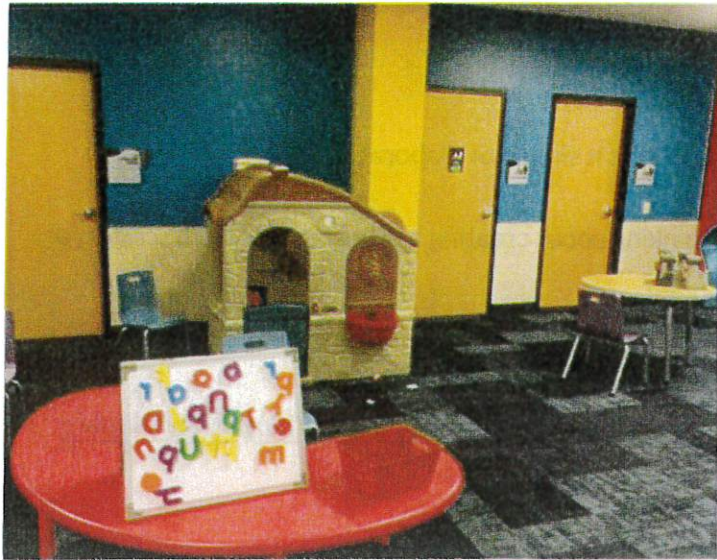
There is a revolving collection of toys, which include puzzles, play vehicles, giant blocks, play food, dinosaurs and jungle animals, play food, a magnet board, puppets.

Another fun corner of the play area changes every couple of months. So far we've had a grocery store, a veterinarian's office, and a sandwich shop.

For the caregivers we offer comfy seating, a counter with stools that overlooks the play area. The counter has outlets and a charging station for devices. Many adults, and older siblings take advantage of this spot to get work done. We also have a browsing collection current adult magazines.

For the staff we have security cameras to monitor activity. It really helps to be able to see when young adventurers decide to scale that play house. The pony wall is also a boon to staff, as mentioned above, because of noise and runaways.

## Rules



The rules of conduct are pretty straightforward:

Caregivers need to monitor their charges.

No food. (The library has a cafe area where patrons can eat.)

Covered drinks only. (We did get a specially treated carpet that repels liquids, but why tempt fate?)

Noise kept to a dull roar ("inside voices, please" says Miss Alexa).

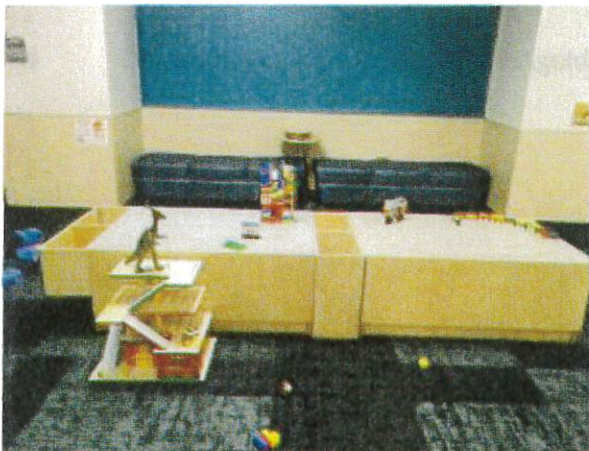
No hitting. (Admittedly a challenge on some days.)

Clean up after you have finished playing. (We offer stickers as incentive to our helpers.)

## Benefits

It has boosted library use, and brought in repeat visitors from neighboring library districts. Our play area has become a destination for area families. Most importantly, our youngest patrons have a location where they can engage in creative play.

## Drawbacks



The remoteness of room. This is both a benefit and a drawback, to be honest. The drawback is that it isn't in our direct line of sight. The security cameras help alleviate the problem. The camera help me last night, when I spotted a youngster climbing on the roof of the play house. I had to run full out to get there before he fell. I then had to coax him to climb down. The other drawback is destruction of toys and creative play items. Our play items are

well used and over loved. Sometimes we even joke that there is a mystery element in the local water supply that gives the kids super strength. But, this is, in the long run the desired outcome of the play area. We want it to be used.

## Do you have one? What's your take?

Do you have a play area in your library? How big is it? Is it simple or elaborate?

Can you offer any advice to librarians who are thinking about creating a play area one from scratch, or for those that are considering a revamp or remodel?

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📌 *imaginary play* (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/tag/imaginary-play/>), *interactive play* (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/tag/interactive-play/>), *play* (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/tag/play/>), *play areas* (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/tag/play-areas/>)



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(<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2019/02/coretta-scott-king-book-awards-celebrate-50-years-strong/>)

Snake oil salesperson? (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2019/02/snake-oil-salesperson/>)



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# storytime katie

one librarian's journey into storytimeland

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## Rhymes for Babies

[Master List](#) || [Opening & Closing Songs](#) || [Getting the Wiggles Out](#) || [Rhymes for Babies](#)

Instead of listing on every baby storytime write-up what rhymes/lifts/bounces I used, I'm just going to make a giant write up here.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M  
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

A

B

Tickle: "Baby's Fingers"

These are baby's fingers (*touch fingers*)

These are baby's toes (*touch toes*)

This is baby's belly button (*touch stomach*)

Round and round it goes! (*tickle*)

Credit: Co-worker

Bounce: "Bouncing Bouncing"

Bouncing, Bouncing Baby on my Knee (*bounce*)

Bouncing, bouncing 1 2 3! (*lift or big bounce*)

Clapping, clapping with baby on my knee (*clap*)

Clapping, clapping 1 2 3! (*big clap*)

Hugging, hugging baby on my knee (*hug*)

Hugging, hugging 1 2 3! (*hug or tilt*)

Credit: [Read Sing Play](#)

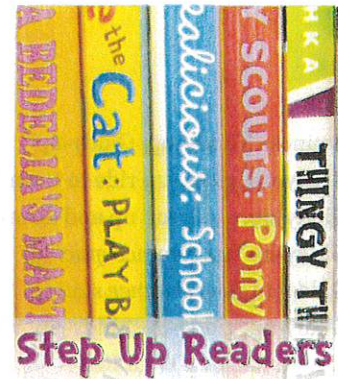
C

Rhyme: "Cheek Chin"

Cheek chin cheek chin cheek chin, nose (*touch baby's nose*)

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Cheek chin cheek chin cheek chin, toes (*touch baby's toes*)

Cheek chin cheek chin, up baby goes! (*lift baby*)

Credit: [Read Sing Play](#)

Song: “Colors Over You” *Tune: Twinkle, Twinkle*

Red and yellow, green and blue, these are the colors over you

Red as a flower, green as a tree

Yellow as the sun, and blue as the sea

Red and yellow, green and blue, these are the colors over you

Credit: [Read Sing Play](#)

## D

## E

## F

## G

Bounce: “Giddy-up, Giddy-up”

Giddy-up, giddy-up ride to town (*bounce babies on knees*)

Giddy-up, giddy-up up and down (*lift baby up and down*)

Giddy-up fast (*bounce quickly*)

Giddy up slow (*bounce slowly*)

Giddy-up, giddy-up, giddy-up, whoa! (*dip baby backwards gently*)

Credit: [Reading With Red](#)

## H

## I

Bounce: “I Bounce You Here”

I bounce you here, I bounce you there

I bounce you, bounce you everywhere

I tickle you here, I tickle you there

I tickle you, tickle you everywhere

I hug you here, I hug you there

I hug you, hug you everywhere

Credit: [Read Sing Play](#)

Bounce: “Icka Bicka Soda Cracker”

Icka bicka soda cracker, icka bicka boo

Icka bicka soda cracker, up goes you! (*lift baby*)

Icka bicka soda cracker, icka bicka boo

Icka bicka soda cracker, I love you! (*hugs and kisses*)

Credit: Co-worker

## TAGS

afternoon storytime

alphabet

storytimes also

author storytimes babies

(spring 2014) babies

(summer 2014) baby

bundles book

bundles bookgardeners

clothespin crafts coloring

crafts color storytimes

discovery! explore the world

fall 2010 fall 2011 fall 2012

fall 2013 fall 2014 (toddler)

fall 2015 (toddler) fall 2016

(toddler) families (fall2014)

families (fall2015) families

(spring2015) families

(winter2015) families

(winter2016) finger

puppets

flannelboard

foam crafts growing

readers in case you missed it

kids art little hands art mask

crafts numbers storytime

opposites storytimes

outreach (business)

outreach (preschool) painting

pajama storytime paper

crafts paper plate

crafts parenting packs

picture book city play center

preschoolers (fall 2016)

preschoolers (spring 2016)

preschoolers (spring 2017)

preschoolers (winter 2017)

props puppet crafts

scratch art shake

shimmy &

dance show me the

awesome siblings (spring2016)

siblings (winter2016) spring

2010 spring 2011 spring

2012 spring 2013 spring

2014 (toddler) spring 2015

(toddler) sticker crafts

**J****K****L****M**

Song: “Milkshake, Milkshake” (*shake baby’s hands, use egg shakers, or gently shake baby*)

You take a little milk, pour some milk

And you take a little cream, pour some cream

You stir it all up

You shake it and you’ll sing...a 1,2,3,4

Chorus:

Milkshake, milkshake shake it up, shake it up

Milkshake, milkshake shake it all up!

Milkshake, milkshake shake it up, shake it up

Milkshake, milkshake shake it all up!

Credit: Co-worker, [Old Town School of Folk Music](#)

**N****O**

Song: “Open, Shut Them”

Open, shut them, open, shut them

Give a little clap, clap, clap

Open, shut them, open, shut them

Lay them in your lap, lap, lap

Creep them, crawl them, creep them, crawl them

Right up to your chin, chin, chin

Open up your little mouth, but do not let them in

Credit: Co-worker

**P**

Fingerplay: “Peek-a-Boo”

Peek-a-boo, peek-a-boo

I see you! I see you!

I see your button nose and your tiny toes

Peek-a-boo! I see you!

Credit: [Read Sing Play](#)

Tickle: “Pizza, Pickle, Pumpnickel”

Pizza, pickle, pumpnickel

[summer 2010](#) [summer 2011](#)  
[summer 2012](#) [summer 2013](#)  
[tissue paper craft toddlers](#)  
[\(winter 2017\) wearable](#)  
[crafts winter 2010 winter](#)  
[2011 winter 2012 winter 2013-](#)  
[2014 winter 2015 \(toddler\)](#)

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My little baby deserves a tickle  
 One for her nose, one for his toes  
 One for the tummy where the cracker goes  
 Credit: [Read Sing Play](#)

Movement: “Popcorn, Popcorn”  
 Popcorn, popcorn, put it in the pan (*swish hands back & forth*)  
 Shake it up! Shake it up (*shake body*)  
 (pause)  
 BAM! BAM! BAM (*stomp feet or clap hands for each BAM*)  
 Credit: Co-worker

## Q

## R

Movement: “Rock the Baby”  
 Rock the baby, rock the baby, 1-2-3  
 Watch the baby, watch the baby, smile at me  
 Bounce the baby, bounce the baby, on your lap  
 Don’t forget to teach the baby how to clap: clap, clap, clap, clap!  
 Credit: [Read Sing Play](#)

Movement: “Roly, Poly”  
 Roly poly, roly poly  
 Up, up, up  
 up, up, up  
 Roly roly poly  
 roly roly poly  
 down, down, down  
 down, down, down  
 Credit: [Jbrary](#) (With my babies, I only do the first verse)

Tickle: “Round and Round the Garden”  
 Round and round the garden like a teddy bear (*swirl finger around palm*)  
 One step, two step (*walk fingers up child’s arm*)  
 Hidden under there! (*tickle child’s underarm*)  
 Credit: Co-worker

## S

Bounce: “A Smooth Road”  
 A smooth road, a smooth road, a smooth road, a smooth road (*bounce baby gently*)  
 A bumpy road, a bumpy road, a bumpy road, a bumpy road (*bounce baby faster*)  
 A rough road, a rough road, a rough road, a rough road (*bounce baby faster*)  
 A hole! (*drop baby gently between your knees*)  
 Credit: Co-worker

**T**

Rhyme: “Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear”

Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn around  
 Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch the ground  
 Teddy bear, teddy bear, reach up high  
 Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch the sky  
 Teddy bear, teddy bear, touch your knees  
 Teddy bear, teddy bear, sit down please  
 Credit: Childhood

Rhyme: “This Little Piggy”

This little piggy went to market,  
 This little piggy stayed home,  
 This little piggy had roast beef,  
 This little piggy had none.  
 This little piggy went...  
 Wee, wee, wee, all the way home!  
 Credit: Childhood

Rhyme: “This Little Train”

This little train ran up the track (*walk fingers up baby’s arm or leg*)  
 It went Choo! Choo! (*tap baby’s nose*)  
 And then it ran back (*walk fingers back down baby’s arm*)  
 The other little train ran up the track  
 It went Choo! Choo!  
 And then it ran back.  
 Credit: [Read Sing Play](#)

Lift: “Tick Tock”

*Start by swaying baby from side to side*  
 Tick tock, tick tock  
 I’m a little cuckoo clock  
 Tick tock, tick tock  
 Now I’m chiming one o’clock *lift once*  
 More verses: Two o’clock, three o’clock  
 Credit: My co-worker

Bounce: “Tiny Little Babies”

*Tune: Shortenin’ Bread*  
 Tiny little babies love bouncin’ bouncin’  
 Tiny little babies love bouncin’, yeah  
 Tiny little babies love bouncin’, bouncin’  
 Tiny little babies love bouncin’ so  
 Bounce to the left, bounce to the right  
 Now hug that baby nice and tight!  
 Credit: [Read Sing Play](#)

Bounce: “Toast in the Toaster”

I’m toast in the toaster  
 And I’m getting very hot!  
 Tick, tock,

Tick, tock  
Up I pop!  
Credit: [Jbrary](#)

U

V

W

X

Y

Z

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## 22 comments on “Rhymes for Babies”

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**Denise Lester**

April 6, 2016 at 9:00 pm #

Thanks for all the great lapsit rhymes!

*Reply*



**Katie**

June 7, 2016 at 1:18 pm #

You're welcome!

*Reply*

## Trackbacks/Pingbacks



# Baby Storytime: A Beginner's Guide

Posted on August 28, 2014

by Lindsey Krabbenhoft

Recently on the **Storytime Underground Facebook group**, people have been asking questions about how to run a baby storytime. Baby storytime is also known as simply babytime or lapsit. Yes you get to be surrounded by super cute babies, but I find interacting with caregivers, especially with regards to providing early literacy training, a key component to a successful babytime. I thought I'd create a resource guide for anyone new to the field or just starting a baby storytime at their library.

As always, please leave a comment with your ideas or links to resources I can add to this list.

## Our Babytime Series:

- **Welcoming Activities at Babytime**
- **Favourite Fingerplays and Ticks**
- **Favourite Lap Bounces**
- **Focus on Newborns**
- **Favourite Dancing Songs**
- **Favourite Books for Baby Storytime**
- **Using Scarves and Egg Shakers with Babies**
- **Using a Parachute with Babies**
- **Putting it All Together: A Baby Storytime Program**

## Our Other Resources:

- **Baby Storytime Resources Playlist**
- **Lap Bounces**
- **Diaper Changing Songs**
- **Movement and Dancing Songs**

- [Lullabies and Soothing Songs](#)
- [Baby Storytime Books and Songs Pinterest Board](#)
- [Baby Storytime Outline](#)
- [Baby Storytime Outline with Play Ideas](#)
- [Lifting Songs for Babytime](#)

## Blogs with Baby Storytime Outlines and Ideas:

Please note, these links will take you directly to their baby storytime pages or blog posts.

- [Mel's Desk](#)
- [Abby the Librarian](#) – plus her [What to Read at Baby Storytime](#) series
- [Read, Sing, Play](#)
- [Library Village](#)
- [Storytime Secrets](#)
- [One Little Librarian](#)
- [Storytime with Miss Tara and Friends](#)
- [Literary Commentary](#)
- [Jen in the Library](#)
- [Library Noise](#)
- [Anne's Library Life](#)
- [Time for Storytime](#)
- [Allison's Library](#)
- [Getting Giggles](#)
- [Laptime and Storytime](#)
- [Miss Meg's Storytime](#)
- [Storytime with Ms. Kelly](#)
- [Storytime Steph](#)
- [The Show Me Librarian](#) – [Best Books to Use in Babytime](#)
- [Reading with Red: My Baby Storytime](#)
- [MCLS Kids Wiki: Baby Storytime Resources](#)
- [librarykristen: How Mine Works](#)
- [Story Timeout](#)
- [Fat Girl Reading](#)

## Other Helpful Websites

- [Burnaby Public Library's Babies Love Books!](#)
- [Mother Goose on the Loose](#)
- [Storytime Share](#) (lots of great early literacy tips)
- [Zero to Three](#)
- [ALSC Storytime Resources](#)

## Books

- *Baby Storytime Magic* (2014) by Kathy MacMillan
- *What'll I Do With Baby-O* (2006) by Jane Cobb
- *Storytimes for Everyone: Developing Young Children's Language and Literacy* (2013) by Saroj Nadkarni Ghoting
- *Lapsit Services for the Very Young II* (2001) by Linda L. Ernst
- *Baby Rhyming Time* (2008) by Linda L. Ernst
- *Babies in the Library* (2003) by Jane Marino
- *Mother Goose on the Loose: A Handbook and CD-ROM Kit with Srippts, Rhymes, Songs, Flannel-board Patterns, and Activities for Promoting Early Childhood Development* (2006) by Betsy Diamant-Cohen
- *Early Literacy Programming en Español: Mother Goose on the Loose Programs for Bilingual Learners* (2010) by Betsy Diamant-Cohen
- *The Early Literacy Kit: A Handbook and Tip Cards* (2009) by Betsy Diamant-Cohen and Saroj Nadkarni Ghoting

← Storytming in the Wild: Mall Storytime

Young Conservationist Storytime Resources →

## 41 thoughts on “Baby Storytime: A Beginner’s Guide”

**Marge Loch-Wouters** says:

August 28, 2014 at 10:52 am

Yep, I'll just link to all your posts and my youth services grad course is taught! Another incredible resource post! You guys rock!! Prof. Marge

Reply

**Lindsey Krabbenhoft** says:

August 28, 2014 at 8:15 pm

Haha thanks Marge! We try to fill the need where we see it.

Reply

**Stephanie Rivera** says:

August 28, 2014 at 2:17 pm

# Read, Play, Grow!



Enhancing early literacy at Brooklyn Public Library

**By Rachel G. Payne**

PHOTOGRAPH ©PHILIP GREEBERG/COURTESY OF BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY

**A**T ONE OF HIS TODDLER PROGRAMS AT THE BAY RIDGE LIBRARY IN BROOKLYN, Chris Lassen covers a table with contact paper, sticky side up. Parents and caregivers look at him skeptically when he tells them what he had done, but the kids know exactly what to do. Little hands reach out and touch the table over and over again to feel this new sensation. In the process, brain cells are connected and the little ones hear and learn a new word: “sticky.”

Across the country at a library in Fort Vancouver, WA, Kendra Jones tapes zip-closure bags to her windows with two colors of paint inside. Toddlers squish and scribble the paint to enjoy “no-mess finger painting.” Through this tactile play experience, their fingers develop fine motor control and they begin to learn the science and art of color mixing. Kendra reports on her blog that both parents and children are quite chatty as they mush and mix.

Both of these library activities are prime examples of play driving language development and early literacy. Early childhood research has always highlighted the many benefits of play. The expanded and updated toolkit *Every Child Ready to Read* (ALSC/PLA, 2011, 2nd. ed.) features play as one of the five key early literacy practices parents should engage in with their children to promote reading readiness. A University of Iowa study reports that 18 month olds who play with diversely shaped objects learn new words twice as fast as those who play with more similarly shaped objects. A recent study of 1 to 2 year olds finds that those who play with blocks with their parents for just 20 minutes a day score 15 percent higher on language development tests and are 80 percent less likely to watch television. The research touting the benefits of play goes on and on.

## THE PLAY GAP

Studies notwithstanding, many parents are mystified as to how to play with a very young child, particularly one who is still gaining language. What do you say to a baby who can only babble? What do you do with an active toddler on a cold and rainy day when going to the playground is impossible? (I know, I've been there.) In the 2010 *Play Report*, a global survey of older children and their parents initiated by IKEA, 45 percent of parents said that they don't have enough time to play with their children. Even when parents do find the time to play, 26 percent said that they are “too stressed to enjoy it.” We also surveyed parents and caregivers at Brooklyn Public Library about their challenges playing with their children, and many mentioned struggling with how to engage a baby or toddler with a short attention span.

Even more troubling, research has also shown that low-income parents engage less in literacy-rich experiences than their wealthier peers. The landmark Risley & Hart study (*Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*, P. H. Brookes, 1995) notes that, by the time children are three, those from educated and high-income homes have heard 33 million words and their low income counterparts have heard only 10 million. The disparity in the amount of talk between babies and parents of different income levels and education backgrounds is enormous, adding up to massive advantages or disadvantages for children in language experience long before they start preschool. The study finds that the more parents talked to children, the more their lan-

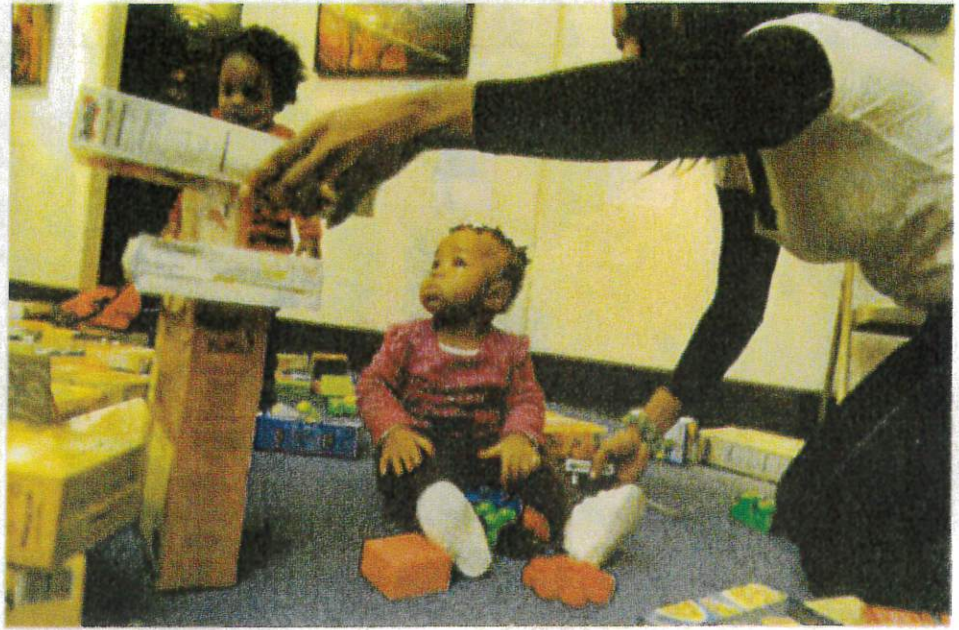
guage use increased, utilizing a richer vocabulary with more positive affirmations. When parents sit down to play and talk with their children they draw out babble and burgeoning language from babies and toddlers.

All parents want what is best for their children, and many often think that a very young child's activities must take a school-like approach. In the race to learn more and more, earlier and earlier, some parents turn to packaged programs for babies and toddlers that incorporate developmentally dubious flash cards and video, such as Baby Einstein or Your Baby Can Read. Many parents have not heard that play is itself a rich and unparalleled learning activity. A child stacking blocks is developing math skills. When babies pull books off the shelves, they are experimenting with gravity and figuring out the properties of books (much to a shelver's chagrin). Trips to the sandbox and bathtime water play are all early science experiments.

## ENTER READ, PLAY, GROW

Connecting the dots for parents between play, language development, and early learning has been the driving force behind First Five Years programs at Brooklyn Public Library. Since 2009—with special grant funding and some help from the staff of New York City's Infant Toddler Technical Resource Center—we have been creating an in-house curriculum of simple, easy-to-replicate play activities for babies and toddlers dubbed “Read, Play, Grow.” Our recipes for play are deliberately simple. Blocks are made out of cereal boxes. Play dough is edible. Peek-a-boo magic tricks can be performed with a scarf stuffed into a paper





feel of what a paper plate is and what it does, and are not yet ready to make it into a fish. This is why we have incorporated open-ended collage, process-based activities into our toddler programs. Sensory collage is one of my favorites. We give children a variety of things to glue to their papers, such as textured papers, cotton balls, burlap, and bubble wrap. Children get to explore these materials. They may never stick them down on their paper, and that is just fine.

### THE PLAYDATE, MULTIPLIED

For the past three years, our Central Library has hosted the annual Big Brooklyn Playdate. Each time, over 100 babies and toddlers (and their parents or caregivers) have come out to play. Brooklyn Public Library staffers transform the Dweck Center—usually the site of gallery exhibits—into a baby and toddler play space with various “play stations” around the room that parents, caregivers, and young children can explore together. Again, we place signs near activities to give parents tips of things to say and ways to interact. For the first time this year, we borrowed an idea from the Parent-Child Workshop playbook and invited “roving experts” (child development experts, a pediatric physical therapist, and a child sleep expert) to our event to be on hand to answer questions from parents.

The head of our mail room at the Central Library always knows when the Big Brooklyn Playdate is coming because we ask her for her largest cardboard box. We cut a variety of shaped holes and doors in it. Sometimes we give kids crayons or sidewalk chalk to decorate it with, but they are usually so engrossed in crawling in and peeking out of the box that this is unnecessary. Lots of language happens in and out of the box, with squeals and giggles offering delightful punctuation.

The surprise hit of the Playdate is an activity we call the “The Un-Sand Box.” It is two large tubs filled with shredded paper from our office shredder. Who knew recycled documents could be so much fun? The kids love throwing, tossing, and scrunching the “snow” as many of them like to call it. Of course, the paper does go everywhere, but it cleans up easily enough with a

push broom. The very first time we tried this, we hid small toys in the paper for the children to find, but we quickly learned it was pointless. The shredded paper was the thing.

The annual Big Brooklyn Playdate is the biggest event we do for babies, toddlers, and their caregivers at library. The feedback is that everyone wants us to do it again every week. We publicize it on several local mommy blogs and family websites, bringing in families with young children who have never been to the library before. Outreach efforts to local early childhood organizations also hook up a group of teen moms from a local high school.

Two years into Read, Play, Grow programs and after the first Big Brooklyn Playdate, we surveyed parents and caregivers about the program’s effectiveness. A full 74 percent of respondents reported gaining new ideas to use with their children and 44 percent said they use Read, Play, Grow activities at home.

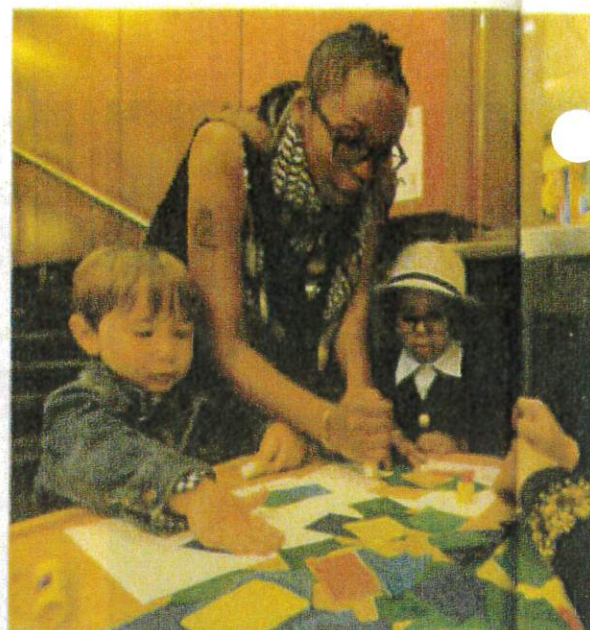
### COME OUT TO PLAY

With President Obama calling for more funding for early childhood education and a *New York Times* article from 2011 reporting high-powered Manhattan parents attending block-building workshops, it seems that the educational pendulum is once again swinging back to embracing the value of play. While it comes naturally to children, some of us grown-ups need help—and even permission—to get down on the floor and stack blocks, squeeze dough, and make a mess.

Brooklyn Public Library’s programs are just a few of the playful activities going on at libraries throughout the country. From play installations that would rival most children’s museums to in-house-developed play activities using materials rescued from the recycling bin, ours is just one of the many libraries putting play front and center.

Has your library come out to play?

*Rachel G. Payne is the coordinator of early childhood services at Brooklyn Public Library. She has reviewed children’s books for SLJ and Kirkus, served on the Caldecott Award Committee, and presented on early literacy at conferences nationwide.*



towel tube. We aim to show parents and caregivers how simple play can be for little ones and how easy it is to make it happen with everyday materials.

Read, Play, Grow activities are also designed to be easy to incorporate into existing baby and toddler programs. After storytime, librarians set up one to three play “stations” constructed from simple household materials. Parents and caregivers have ample time to interact with and observe their children in the act of playing and learning. Each station has a sign that explains the activity, and we offer tips for things to say to encourage early literacy development along with safety warnings, where warranted.

With these tips, we hope that we’re helping grown-ups to engage with their children. Recent research in early literacy has noted that parents who are supportive and responsive to their children’s chatter and other first attempts at language have children who perform better on early language assessments. It is also important for staff to model these interactions with children. When parents and caregivers see library staff or other adults get on the floor to play and talk with a child, they see first-hand how to engage with a child. From my experience, this kind of direct observation speaks louder than a million parenting workshops.

Talking with a baby or toddler during playtime can sometimes feel awkward, particularly when a child is not talking back. That is precisely why parents should see these interactions modeled. Here is a composite transcript of one exchange that occurred in our library programs during which an 18-month-old boy is stacking blocks made out of cereal boxes:

**LIBRARIAN:** “I like how you’re stacking the blocks.”

*Child looks at librarian for a few seconds and puts another block on top.*

**LIBRARIAN:** “You put another block on top of the blocks. You’ve got a tall tower! Are you going to knock it down?”

*Child looks at the librarian and then back at the tower and knocks it down with a smile.*

**EVERYONE LEARNS:** Brooklyn’s Read, Play, Grow is about sensory learning experiences, but without the sticker shock of specialized toys. Children explore boxes like they’ve discovered new worlds, get hands-on with tactile learning through colorful glueing, and find the joys of stacking and destroying towers made from everyday objects. All the while, parents and caregivers get tips on how to engage with their kids to stimulate learning, picking up strategies large and small, including keys to the language of play.

**LIBRARIAN:** “Boom, boom, boom! You did it! You knocked down the tower!”

While the child said nothing, he was obviously taking everything in and understanding what the librarian said. The librarian put his experience into words and modeled to the parent things to say while playing at home.

### GETTING HANDS-ON

While we love to show parents how they can make blocks out of cereal boxes, we also show them how they can check out blocks from the library—board book blocks. Parents sometimes look a bit dubious when we suggest playing with library materials, but it gives them permission to loosen up. We line the books up as dominoes or stack them into a tower. Usually a toddler will wander over and knock it over or start a domino rally going to complete the demonstration.

Another favorite activity for babies: tape tactile elements to the floor to create a sensory crawl zone. We have used bubble wrap, foam, textured bath mats, quilts, and pot holders. Visual elements also work well, such as black-and-white patterned bath towels or shiny paper. Little sitters and crawlers get to take in some new sensations as they explore, while staff and parents are talking to them about things that are “bumpy,” “smooth,” “soft,” or “rough.”

Many librarians want to create a program that results in something toddlers can take home. While the goal of giving the child a product based on a theme is laudable (I did this early in my career), all too often, the parents and caregivers complete the paper plate fish that requires motor skills that the toddler does not yet have. Young children are still getting the

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## **BABY STEPS @ STORYTIME**

Use STEM activities with the literature for some of your storytimes, lapsits and music programs for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. Whether your activity is an art activity (colored tissue paper cut into rectangles or squares for children to glue onto paper), or playing with sticker dots, you don't have to have a full BIG PLAY program. But you can incorporate STEM into smaller programs between a BIG PLAY program. Here are a few ideas with books and STEM:

### Art Activity with Dots

*Press Here* by Herve Tullet

*Ten Black Dots* by Don Crews

### Building Blocks/Bristle Blocks

*Goodnight, Goodnight, Construction Site* by Sherri Duskey Rinker and Tom Lichtenheld

*Tip Tip Dig Dig* by Emma Garcia

### Grocery Store with Food and Cash Register

*Apples and Pumpkins* by Anne Rockwell

*Eating the Alphabet* by Lois Ehlert

*How Are You Peeling?* By Saxton Fremann

*Planting a Rainbow* by Lois Ehlert

### Nuts and Bolts

*The Tool Box* by Anne and Harlow Rockwell

*Tools* by Ken Robbins

Stacking Toys/Sensory Toys/Muffin Tin or Egg Carton counting/color sorting OR using color (tissue paper, fingerpainting WITH A ZIPLOCK BAG)

*Baby Touch and Feel: Colors and Shapes* DK

*Brown Rabbit's Shape Book* by Alan Baker

*Roar!: A Noisy Counting Book* by Pamela Duncan Edwards

## Baby Paper

### Try It

Get some cellophane or crinkly paper and let your baby explore. You can place the paper inside a washcloth mitt or simple puppet to make it more engaging.



### Let's Talk

- Describe actions as they are taking place: "You're squeezing the paper and it's making a scratchy sound!"
- If using colored cellophane, talk about the different colors and let baby peer through the paper to see the world through the colors. Say, "I wonder what will happen when you look through this green paper."

#### STEM Connection

By scrunching the paper, your baby is learning cause and effect: the paper gets smaller when they squeeze it!

- Talk to your baby about what they see. "The paper is contracting and getting smaller. Now it's expanding and getting bigger!"

### Safety First

Don't let your baby chew the paper and always supervise them with homemade toys.

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

## Ball Drop

### Try It

Tape several paper towel or toilet paper tubes onto a wall and make ball chutes. Take a small ball, a yarn pom-pom, and/or a ball of aluminum foil and let your child drop them down the chutes. You can also invite your child to build their own arrangement of tubes.



### Let's Talk

- Challenge your child to make a prediction: "What do you think will happen if we put the ball into the hole? Where do you think it will come out?" Share your own thoughts.
- Experiment by dropping two different balls down different chutes. Ask, "What happened? What did you see?" You might say, "I noticed the rubber ball came out of the bottom faster than the pom-pom. Maybe because it is heavier."

#### STEM Connection

Your child is exploring the effects of gravity: when they put a ball in the hole, it always ends up on the ground!

### Safety First

Supervise your child as they play with these items.

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

## Board Book Blocks

### Try It

Various board books of different sizes make great blocks! You and your child can line them up on their sides like Dominos, build short towers to knock over, or even make a tunnel. Read the books together when you are done building.



### Let's Talk

- Boom! Make lots of sound effects as you knock books over to keep babies and toddlers engaged.
- When you line the books up like Dominos, ask, "What do you think will happen when we push the first book?" Talk about whether your predictions were right.
- Play peek-a-boo with the books. Hold them in front of your face and say "Where did mommy go?"

### STEM Connection

When your child pushes the first book in a line of books, she's witnessing the power of cause and effect to create a chain reaction: the first book falls into another, which falls into another, which falls into another!

### Safety First

Don't make any tower or building so high that it could fall on your child.

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

## Colander Sculpture

### Try It

Get some different colored pipe cleaners and/or straws and a colander from your kitchen. Let your toddler explore the pipe cleaners or straws and experiment with poking them through the holes of the colander. They can push them out the other end and then back again!



### Let's Talk

- Ask, "What do the pipe cleaners feel like?" "What do the straws feel like?" Model using descriptive language: "They feel prickly when I touch them." "Straws are smooth rather than prickly like the pipe cleaners."
- Share what you see your child doing with the pipe cleaners or straws using words like "through," "over," and "under."
- Talk about color: "What color should we put through next?"
- Encourage symbolic play. Is their creation a hat? An animal?

### STEM Connection

Pushing the pipe cleaners/straws through the holes in the colander will develop your toddler's fine motor skills.

### Safety First

Always supervise babies and toddlers with small objects. Pipe cleaners may be a choking hazard for younger babies.

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

## Light Table

### Try It

Put some white LED or string lights inside a clear storage bin. Close it tightly and tape it shut. Lay different materials on top of the bin, such as tissue paper, clear blocks, finger paint, natural objects like leaves, and anything your child finds interesting.



### Let's Talk

- Ask, "What do you notice about the light?"
- Comment on what your child is doing. You can say something like, "I like how you are layering the colors on top of each other."
- Talk about how the light makes the objects look: "How does this look different on the light table than on the floor?"

#### **STEM Connection**

Your child will notice that light does something special to some objects: it lets us see through them!

### **Safety First**

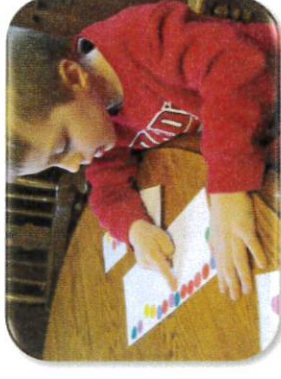
Supervise your child to ensure they do not open the storage bin or place materials in their mouths.

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

## Lots of Dots

### Try It

Read Hervé Tullet's *Press Here*, Donald Crews' book *Ten Black Dots*, or Craig Frazier's *Lots of Dots* for inspiration. Get paper and large round color coding labels. Encourage your child to turn the dots into a picture.



### Let's Talk

- Compare your child's picture to Donald Crews in *Ten Black Dots*: "He used black dots, but you used red, yellow, green, and blue dots!"
- Encourage your child to describe their creation. Write down what they say and attach it to their picture. Try creating your own story or book together using the dots.
- If your child is interested, count the dots in their pictures.

#### **STEM Connection**

To create a picture, your child must think about where to place the stickers on the page: on top of, under, or next to another sticker. This develops their spatial understanding, a skill used in engineering!

### **Safety First**

Supervise your child to make sure they don't put the stickers in their mouth.

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

## Mystery Bottles

### Try It

Take an empty, clear, plastic bottle and fill it half way up with water. Put in a little food coloring in whatever color you like. Fill the rest of the bottle up with vegetable oil or baby oil. You can also add glitter, small beads, or buttons. Close the lid tightly and tape it closed. Give it to your child to play with.



### Let's Talk

- Draw your child's attention to how the materials are moving in the bottle. Ask, "What happens when you shake it? What happens when you move it slowly? What do you see?"
- Talk about the colors or count the objects in the bottles.

#### **STEM Connection**

Your child is using their sense of sight to observe how oil and water move and separate.

### **Safety First**

**Make sure the bottle is tightly closed and taped shut.**

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

## No Mess Fingerprint

### Try It

Take a large gallon size zip-closure freezer bag. Fill it with two primary paint colors (red, yellow, or blue) or primary color and black or white. You don't need a huge amount. Squeeze the excess air from the bag and zip it closed. Tape the bag flat to a table with packing tape on all four sides. Or, tape to the top of the light box for a different look. Invite your child to move the paint around.



### Let's Talk

- Ask, "How does the paint feel? Does it feel soft? Does it feel squishy?"
- Talk about the colors in the bag. Ask, "Do you see anything else in the room that is the same color(s)?"
- Draw your child's attention to any color mixing. Ask, "What happens when these colors mix together?"

#### **STEM Connection**

When two colors meet during their painting, your toddler is learning about color mixing!

### **Safety First**

**Keep the bag taped to the table or the lightbox. If the bag opens, you can mend it with tape.**

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

## Sensory Bins

### Try It

Fill a plastic tub or storage container with sensory material, such as rice, potato flakes, peas, cooked spaghetti, cereal, sand, shredded paper, bird seed, shaving cream, or ice cubes. Add a few toys, small containers, and other objects to play with and search for. Let your child explore!



### Let's Talk

- As your child plays, ask, "What do you feel?" Use words like, "squishy," "flakey," "soft," "hard," "smooth," "rough," "light," and "heavy."
- Describe what your child is doing: "You're pouring the cereal with a cup!"
- Encourage imaginative play: "Oh no! How will Mr. Snake find his leaf buried beneath the sand?" Invite your child to act as a baker, scientist, or construction worker.

#### STEM Connection

Your child is a scientist when they play with a sensory bin! They are noticing how different objects look, smell, feel, and sound and problem solving as they scoop, pour, and move materials

### Safety First

Make sure your child does not put small objects in their mouth.

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

## Sticky Rollers

### Try It

Get some hair rollers of different shapes and sizes. You can attach larger ones to paper towel or toilet paper rolls. Let your baby or toddler explore the texture and stickiness.



### Let's Talk

- Comment on what your child is doing: "You are connecting those two rolls together!"
- Talk about texture. Ask, "What does the roller feel like?" Use words like "sticky," "spiky," "fuzzy," and "rough." Draw attention to the difference between how the rollers and the paper towel rolls feel.

#### STEM Connection

Exploring and talking about the texture of the rollers helps your baby learn how to describe objects.

### Safety First

Always keep an eye on your baby while they play.

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*



## To Market, To Market

### Try It

Get a laundry basket or large cardboard box to serve as a shopping cart, boxed foods from your pantry, and a paper or a reusable shopping bag. Set up a grocery store by placing items around the room. Show your child how to push the cart and place items in it. Encourage them to help you put items back in your pantry when it's time to clean up.



### Let's Talk

- Pretend to be a cashier, taking the food out of your child's cart and putting it in the bag. Say something like, "That will be \$20, please," and hold out your hand. See if they will pretend to give you money. Hand them the bag and say, "Thank you for shopping!"
- As you take items out of her basket, count them, say what each item is called, or talk about the letter each item starts with.

#### STEM Connection

By playing cashier with your child, you are developing their understanding of money, its value, and how it is exchanged for goods.

### Safety First

Use groceries that won't break if they fall and are light enough for your toddler to comfortably pick up.

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

## Bubbles

### Try It

Blow bubbles at the park, at bath time, and to help your child with transitions. This is a great sensory exploration for babies and toddlers.



### Let's Talk

- Encourage your child to catch, chase, and clap the bubbles! Talk about what they are doing and comment on where they are looking. Follow their lead.
- Expand your child's vocabulary by using words like "pop" and "float."
- Explore the bubble wand. What shape is it? How does it feel? Why do you need it? How do you use it?

#### STEM Connection

In order to make bubbles, your child has to blow air through the bubble wand. This lets them explore how air can fill things up and move around.

### Safety First

Always supervise babies and toddlers with bubbles.

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

## Tugging Box

### Try It

Get a box and punch some holes in it. Thread different types and textures of rope and ribbon through the holes and tie knots in both ends. You can use a pipe cleaner to help you with threading. Let your child explore the box.



### Let's Talk

- Encourage your child to feel the textures of the ribbons and rope. Are they soft? Bumpy? Prickly? Name the textures.
- Describe what your baby is doing using vocabulary like "pull," "push," "through," "open," and "close."
- Ask, "What happens if you pull the ribbon?" Draw your child's attention to the ribbon moving inside the box.

#### STEM Connection

Pulling on the ribbon builds your child's fine motor skills while helping them develop an understanding of cause and effect.

### Safety First

Always supervise babies and toddlers with small objects. String and ribbon can be a choking hazard for younger babies.

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

## Un-Sand Box

### Try It

Take paper from a paper shredder (larger shreds work better and are easier to clean up), or use paper "Easter grass" and put it in a large, wide bin or box, or take pool noodles and tape to the ground to create an "unsand box!" Add bowls or salad tongs if you'd like. You



can also bury some fun, safe objects under the shredded paper for children to find, but it is usually not necessary.

### Let's Talk

- Ask your child, "What does the paper feel like? What does it sound like?" If your child is talking, give him or her a moment to respond. If your child isn't a talker, you can answer your own questions: "I think it sounds like walking on dry leaves."
- Pose a challenge: "Can you put the paper in the bowl?" "Can you dump it out?" "Can you wave it through the air?"

#### STEM Connection

Playing with the shredded paper develops your toddler's fine-motor skills and engages their senses, which helps build connections in their brain.

### Safety First

If you think your child will put the paper in his or her mouth, save this activity for when he or she is older.

*This Play Recipe is courtesy of The Brooklyn Public Library.*

# BIG PLAY @ MVLS

## Stack, Nest, Play!

### Try It

If you don't have stacking or nesting blocks, you can easily make your own! Use empty plastic food storage containers with the lids on for stacking and off for nesting. Your child will also enjoy playing with a set of metal or plastic containers.



### Let's Talk

- Talk about the shapes and colors of the objects your toddler touches: "You have a big, red bowl."
- Challenge your child: "How tall can we make this tower?" Count the containers with your child as you place them on top of each other.
- As you put the nesting bowls/cups inside of each other, describe what you're doing: "I'm putting the bowls inside of each other." Ask, "Can you take them apart again?"

### STEM Connection

Stacking and nesting helps your baby develop fine-motor skills while they learn about size, shape, and balancing objects.

### Safety First

If you are giving your baby household objects to play with, make sure they have no small pieces that can come off and always monitor your child while they play.