

Nursery Rhymes and Child Interactions

Using rhymes during interactions with toddlers helps them explore the sounds and purposes of language. Songs, finger plays, and rhyming games provide opportunities for toddlers to have fun during interactions with adults while building skills for understanding and using language.

Watch a video of
this Learning Guide

Learning Guide: Using Rhymes with Young Children

- During everyday interactions with toddlers in your classroom, pay attention to the materials and activities they like to do and the things that hold their attention. Use these interests as the focus of songs and rhymes they will enjoy (e.g., “Tyrese loves to build with blocks/ the color of his bright red socks!”).
- When you notice children engaging in sound or word play, join in their play and respond positively. Repeat their sounds and words, and expand on what they say by introducing new or novel rhyming sounds/ words (e.g., Noticing children making farmyard sounds as they play with a barn and animal figures: “Jan’s cow just said, ‘Moo!’ Can you moo? I can too!”).
- Use familiar rhymes or songs or create new ones using a child’s name or words a child often says. Point out or emphasize the words that rhyme. Make rhymes silly and fun to keep a child engaged (e.g., “Ben put a hen in the pen. Matt put a hat on a rat.”).
- Put action and meaning to the story of the rhyme by combining rhymes with finger plays or body movements. Demonstrate the motions while saying the rhyme; then repeat the rhyme while helping children do the motions. Encourage the children to say or sing the rhyme while acting out the motions independently; show your excitement about their participation (e.g., Have toddlers hold hands while sitting facing one another. Show them how to rock back and forth to the music while singing *Row Your Boat*).
- Provide multiple opportunities for children to use favorite rhymes, finger plays, and songs in different classroom activities and throughout the day (e.g., when children are having a snack, playing outside, transitioning between activities, getting ready for nap, and so forth).



A Quick Peek

The children in Jolynn’s class loved singing songs and looking at rhyming books. Several children gathered around Jolynn as she read a book about animals. When they reached a page with a spider, Cade exclaimed, “Spider song! Spider song!” Jolynn grinned at him and said, “Shall we sing *Eensy Weensy Spider*?” Cade and Evie clapped their hands in approval of the familiar song, and Jolynn sang the song through, showing them how to make the motions. “Let’s do it together next,” she encouraged them. Cade and Evie joined in, trying to sing and make the motions as Shea and Addie watched and listened intently. Singing “Out came the sun...”, Jolynn helped Evie hold her arms up. Later, she noticed Cade and Evie helping Addie and other children try to sing and act out the song.

You'll know the practice is working if ...

- Children participate more often in interactions involving rhyming games
- Children enjoy engaging in word play and manipulating vocal sounds
- Children use new sounds and words in their everyday interactions with you and other children

Other helpful resources on adult-child interactions using rhyming and music include:

- [“Songs and Rhymes as a Springboard to Literacy”](#) from Early Childhood NEWS
- [“Beyond Twinkle, Twinkle: Using Music with Infants and Toddlers”](#) from NAEYC