

Virtual School – Early Years - Carers supporting education at home:

As more families face social distancing and self-quarantine as a result of COVID-19, it's possible to feel stressed—not only about health issues, but also with the reality of suddenly being at home for many days with energetic little ones. By planning early for this possibility and having some activities and experiences ready, you can feel less stressed and more prepared! Here are some ideas:

Toy Rotation

If you have a variety of toys, try a toy rotation. Pick a few toys to leave out for your child to play with and put the rest away out of sight. After a week or so, switch out the toys they've been using for the ones stored away, and boom, it feels like they have new toys!

We know their toys will only entertain for so long and then boredom can set in. Boredom for infants and toddlers may not look the same as it does for us. Signs your little one is bored:

- Fussing or whining
- Struggling to focus or engage in play
- Becoming more aggressive

Parent-Child Play Ideas

As you look for activities to do with your child, consider offering different types of play to meet their needs and keep the fun going. Independent play (when children play by themselves with you nearby) is also an important type of play—and parents shouldn't feel guilty about giving their babies and toddlers a chance to play on their own.

Here are some different ideas for play that you can try with your young child:

Outside time: Getting outside will probably be refreshing and a great change of scenery for all of you even if it's just the garden. Though to maintain social distancing, playdates are a no-go. Avoid touching playground equipment. Instead, run, roll down hills, jump like kangaroos, or lie back and look at the clouds. Wash hands thoroughly after returning into the home from any outdoor play.

For infants:

- Bring their pushchair outside for a walk or a story.
- Lay a blanket on the grass for tummy time (weather permitting).
- Enjoy bubbles, listen to music and sing together, talk about what you see outside.

- Park the buggy or hold your baby so they can watch an older sibling or other children play.

For toddlers:

- Play 'I spy' (keep it simple, "I spy something blue", "I spy something that moves").
- Collect rocks or leaves, then sort them by size, colour, and shape.
- Kick, roll, or toss a ball back and forth.
- Dig in the dirt (don't forget buckets, bowls, measuring cups, spoons, gardening tools, whatever you have!).
- Play with chalk: draw pictures, trace one another's outline, and more.
- Paint with water. Fill a cup with water and give your child a brush to "paint" the garden, door, etc.
- Blow bubbles.
- Play "I'm going to catch you."
- Pretend to be the different animals you might see in your neighbourhood: Birds, squirrels, rabbits, deer, etc.

Most play that happens inside the house can also happen outside, so if the weather allows, bring some blocks outside, read together outdoors, colour, or paint a cardboard box in the garden.

Physical Play: Little ones need to move and work their bodies and voices. They will need opportunities to be loud, run, climb, and jump. This may happen outside or inside.

Here are some ideas:

- Turn on some music and have a dance party.
- Put couch cushions on the floor and crawl, walk, or jump from one to the next (don't touch the floor, it's hot lava!).
- Use a bedsheet as a parachute (open it wide and raise it up above your heads, then bring it down to the floor). For infants, raise and lower a light blanket over them while playing peek-a-boo.
- Build a fort with sheets, blankets, couch cushions, pillows, chairs, and more. You can even "camp-out" indoors!
- Create an obstacle course using furniture, pillows, and toys.

Quiet Play: Children (and you) will also need some quiet time each day. This is great for relaxing, recharging, and maybe even allowing you to get some work done.

- Read together or independently (toddlers can flip through books and talk about what they see in the illustrations)
- Colouring

- Puzzles
- Block building
- Sorting objects
- Pretend play with stuffed animals, dolls, trains, cars, or kitchen items for “playing house”
- Stickers on paper – you can draw large shapes, letters, or numbers on paper and your child can line the shape with stickers
- Tape on paper – you can cut short pieces of masking tape and your child can stick it to a piece of paper (sounds boring, but little ones love it).

Remember that one of the most favourite types of play for children is helping you with “real” work. Think about whether your toddler can help with meal preparation, setting the table, sorting or putting away laundry, cleaning up (for example, putting shoes in the closet) or putting new toilet paper rolls in a basket in the bathroom (if you managed to get some!) . These tasks may take a bit longer with our toddlers, but it’s fun for them and also teaches the value of cooperation.

Thinking About Your Daily Routine

Try to keep daily routines as stable as possible during this time. As much as possible, try to stick to daily routines, with wake-up times, meals, naps, and bedtimes as usual.

Children thrive on predictability, and it’s good for their caregivers, too. (It’s much easier to deal with a long day with little ones if it’s divided into smaller, more manageable pieces.)

Play through the Seasons

March



March's theme is *Rain*. Try these fun activities to explore weather, both inside and outside:

Talk Together

- **For your baby:** Sing songs like *Rain, Rain Go Away* and *Itsy Bitsy Spider* with your baby. Try using hand gesture while you sing *Itsy Bitsy Spider*—your baby loves to watch you entertain her! Watch your baby—after she sees you do the gestures several times, she may try to copy you!
- **For your toddler:** Sing songs like *Rain, Rain Go Away* and *Itsy Bitsy Spider* together. Teach your child the gestures that go with *Itsy Bitsy Spider*. Talk about different rain words: puddles, rain boots and raincoats, umbrellas, pouring, sprinkling, misting, fog, wind, and clouds. Look outside: How many of these words do you see outside your window?

Read Together

- Read some rainy day books together. For babies, try *Rain Feet* by Angela Johnson or *Gossie and Gertie* by Olivia Dunrea, featuring Gossie the duck who loves her red galoshes. For older toddlers, good choices include *The Little Cloud* by Eric Carle, *Rain or Shine: All About Weather* by Danielle Denega and the ultimate rainy day fantasy, *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss.

Play Together

- **For your baby:** Play with “rain” inside. In the bathtub, you can pour water out of a plastic pitcher to make rain. Does your baby prefer the water to come out slowly or quickly? Does she try to grab the stream of water? Try pouring water through a strainer and watch it sprinkle out. You can also pour water onto a plastic plate and let it splash every which way. Blow bubbles while your child is in the bathtub and sing Rain, Rain Go Away as the bubble “raindrops” float over her head.
- **For your toddler:** Make a weather chart. Every morning look outside the window with your toddler: “What do you see? Is it rainy, cloudy, or sunny?” Draw a sun, clouds, or raindrops on a piece of paper with the appropriate word underneath. Let your toddler help by coloring and drawing with you. Post each day’s forecast and talk about the week’s weather on Friday. Can your child remember the words for each type of weather? A variation on this activity is to let your older toddler draw the weather him/herself. You could also trace symbols of each kind of weather—a sun, an umbrella, a cloud—onto paper and let your older toddler cut out the shape and then glue it to her weather chart.
- **For older toddlers:** Go for a rain walk. Bundle up in raincoat and rainboots; put a rain shield over the stroller. Open the umbrellas. Go out in the rain (but not when it’s thunder-and-lightning out). What do you see? Raindrops on leaves? Worms? Puddles? Don’t worry if your toddler gets wet while he’s exploring; have some dry clothes and a towel right inside the door so he can warm up and talk all about what you’ve just seen.

April



April's theme is *Colors*. Try these fun activities to learn colors and to try some new artistic activities:

Talk Together

- **For your baby:** Notice the colors that fill your baby's world. Point out his red hat, the green leaves, the orange tabby cat. Have a snack of yellow bananas, red strawberries, and purple grapes. Look out into the black night and try to find yellow stars winking in the sky.
- **For your toddler:** Once your child knows the names of colors, you can begin to use these words in context: "Can you get your red sneakers?" "Would you like a green apple or a yellow apple for snack?" You can also begin to expand your child's understanding of color by pointing out the difference between grass green and lime green, lemon yellow and golden yellow. April is the time when color begins to bloom outside with flowers and trees. What colors can your child find in the world around her?

Read Together

- Read some colorful books. For babies, try *Spot Looks at Colors* by Eric Hill, the *Colors* board book by DK Publishing, *My Very First Book of Colors* by Eric Carle, or *Color Zoo* by Lois Ehlert. For older toddlers, good choices include *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See* by Bill Martin, Jr., *Frederick* by Leo Lionni, *What Makes a Rainbow* by

Betty Ann Schwartz, *Planting a Rainbow* by Lois Ehlert, and *My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Seuss.

Play Together

- **For your baby:** Make color trays. Take a muffin tray and in each opening place an object that is red, for example. You could place a strawberry, a red teether, a piece of red watermelon, a red mitten or sock, and a red foam ball (make sure it is not a choking hazard). Let your baby touch and play with these objects, but supervise closely since babies this age are likely to “mouth” things they find interesting in order to learn more about them. As your baby plays, you can repeat the word “red”—a red ball, a red strawberry, a red sock. Try making trays of different colored objects.
- **For your toddler:** Toddlers love to help out doing “real” jobs around the house. For colors, try a cooking project where you make a rainbow snack together. Pick out a range of healthy foods of different colors—yellow bananas, red watermelon, green grapes, blueberries, etc. Let your child choose what to have as his snack and talk about all the different colors he can eat. What does he think is the best-tasting color?
- **For babies and toddlers:** Make a color book. Staple together 6 pages of construction paper (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple) to make a book. Write the appropriate color’s name on each page. Let your child color pictures on each page. Cut photos from magazines and have your child glue these pictures on the right color page (e.g., a photo of a red apple goes on the red page). Read your book together—what is her favorite page? An alternative is to take six photos of your child wearing a shirt of each color and gluing them to the appropriate pages.

May



May's theme is *Animals*. Try these fun activities to learn about animals and play pretend:

Talk Together

- **For your baby:** What animals do you see outside? Name these different creatures for your baby: birds, squirrels, ducks, dogs, cats, rabbits. Which animal does your baby seem most interested in? Make each animal's sounds. Which sound makes your baby giggle?
- **For your toddler:** Baby animals are a special part of spring—can you spot any where you live? Go on a "safari walk" with your toddler and ask her to tell you when she sees an animal. Does she know the animal's name? The sound it makes? Does she know where it lives (nest, pond, trees, etc.)? Watch these animals with your child and talk about what you see.

Read Together

- Read books that feature different kinds of animals. For babies, try: *Whose Nose and Toes?* by John Butler, *Does a Kangaroo Have a Mother, Too?* by Eric Carle, *Good Night, Gorilla* by Peggy Rathmann, *Baby Animals* by DK Publishing, and *Country Animals, Farm Animals, and Pet Animals* by Lucy Cousins. For older toddlers, good choices include *Over in the Meadow* by Ezra Jack Keats, *Make Way for Ducklings* by Robert McCloskey, *Mrs. Brown Went to Town* by Wong Herbert Yee, *Cock-a-Doodle-Do! Barnyard Hullabaloo* by Giles

Andreae, *The Napping House* by Audrey Wood, and *I Love My Mama* by Peter Kavanagh.

Play Together

- **For your baby:** Babies are often captivated by watching animals outside or through the window. Stick with your baby and let him watch as long as he wants, though be very cautious about approaching animals you do not know. Teaching your child animal safety begins early. You can support your baby's interest in animals by, for example, installing a bird feeder to encourage birds to visit. For an indoor activity, you can give your baby swatches of fake fur and feathers to touch.
- **For your toddler:** Cut pictures of animals out of magazines and glue them to sturdy cardboard. Make sure there are matches—2 pictures of horses, 2 pictures of sheep, etc. Lay these pictures out (face up) on the floor and see if your child can match the animals that are the same. Matching games build thinking skills in your toddler. You can also play "barnyard." With your child, walk and "talk" like an animal—perhaps meow like a cat or "trot" and neigh like horse. Which animals does your child like to be? Turn a big cardboard box into a barn and see if your child would like to pretend to trot in and out.

June



June's theme is *Fruits and Vegetables*. Try these fun activities to learn more about healthy foods:

Talk Together

- **For your baby:** Name the foods that your baby eats. During meals, ask your baby "Would you like some banana? How about more carrots?" Though she doesn't understand you yet, by talking about these objects over and over you are helping your baby understand that a word ("strawberry") stands for a thing (a sweet red fruit). When you are at the supermarket, you can also point out the fruits and vegetables that your baby likes to eat. Soon, your baby may be pointing out the ones she recognizes all by herself!
- **For your toddler:** June is when gardens begin growing and when early crops (like strawberries) are ready. During meals, talk about the different fruits and vegetables your child is eating. Ask her which she likes best. Talk about their colors and textures. When you are at the supermarket, talk about and show your baby the variety of fruits and vegetables in the produce section. When you get home and after washing let her touch the spiny pineapple, the fuzzy kiwi, the smooth pepper, the bumpy broccoli. Let your toddler pick one new fruit or vegetable to take home and try to eat. Does she like this new taste or not?

Read Together

- Read books about fruits and vegetables and all the yummy things we can make with them. For babies, try: *The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear* by Don Wood, *Planting a Rainbow*, *Eating the Alphabet*, and *Growing Vegetable Soup*, all by Lois Ehlert, and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. For older toddlers, good choices include *Jamberry* by Bruce Degan, *Blueberries for Sal* by Robert McCloskey, *How Are You Peeling?* by Joost Elffers, and *Lunch* by Denise Fleming.

Play Together

- **For your baby:** For babies on solid foods, you can slice into bite-sized pieces several different fruits and vegetables. Let your baby play with the food, touch it, and lick it. Maybe he will even taste it. Which ones does he like the best? You can also let your baby touch different fruits and vegetables so he can experience their very different textures and colors. Which ones does he like to touch? Which ones doesn't he like?
- **For your toddler:** Plant some seeds (carrot or bean seeds often work best) in a square of dirt outside or in a pot to keep inside. This is a fun project for toddlers who love to shovel dirt, pour water, and get messy! Watch your seed grow over the next few weeks (remember to water every few days). Have a garden snack when your plant has grown big enough to "harvest"! You can also have a "taste test" with your toddler as you lay slices of various fruits and/or vegetables out on a plate. Let your child decide which to try, which to touch, and which to avoid. Talk about how each one looks and tastes. What fruits and vegetables are your child's favorites? Try doing a cooking project with your toddler by squeezing your own orange juice, making fruit salad (put your toddler in charge of dropping blueberries or pre-sliced fruit into the bowl) or by making a special summer drink together (blend vanilla yogurt with fruits like strawberries, blueberries, and/or bananas).

July



July's theme is *Body Parts*. Try these fun activities to help your child learn more about their body:

Talk Together

- **For your baby:** During your baby's bath, you can sing Head and shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes, knees and toes, head and shoulders, knees and toes. This is baby's body! Eyes and mouth and ears and nose, ears and nose, ears and nose. Eyes and mouth and ears and nose. This is baby's body! As you sing, be sure to gently touch each body part.
- **For your toddler:** Ask your toddler Where's your...NOSE? After he shows you, ask Where's your...KNEE? Continue the game, giving him a kiss on each body part. With toddlers who are potty training, it is especially important to give them words to talk about their private parts. This helps children understand what is happening during potty training and to communicate more clearly with you when they feel a need to use the potty.

Read Together

- Read books about all of our different body parts. For babies, try: *Where is Baby's Belly Button?* and *Toes, Ears, and Nose!*, both by Karen Katz, and *Ten Little Fingers* and *Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes*, both by Annie Kubler. For older toddlers, good choices include *My First Body Board Book* by DK Publishing, *Horns to Toes* and *In Between* by

Sandra Boynton, *From Head to Toe* by Eric Carle, and *Clarabella's Teeth* by An Vrombaut.

Play Together

- **For your baby:** Try some infant massage techniques on your baby. Talk to your Health Visitor if you are unsure. Wait until your baby is relaxed, fed, and in a good mood. Then give it a try. Ask your baby if you can touch her, and then gently rub and massage her legs, arms, feet, and hands. (Use lotion or a physician-okayed body oil, if you'd like.) If your baby gets distressed or doesn't like to be touched this way, stop and try again another time. As you touch your baby, talk about her different body parts. Activities like this help your baby know where her body begins and ends (a concept called "body awareness").
- **For your toddler:** Toddlers love challenges, especially as they are growing stronger and more coordinated physically. Ask your child "Can you lift your leg? Can you touch your hands to your knees?" Using the names of her body parts in context helps her learn, and also gives her a chance to show you all that she can do with her growing body. You can play a similar game outside by turning a hose on (keep the spray low so that it is about the same height as your child). Then ask your toddler, Can you put your foot in the water? Can you put your hand in the water? Can you jump your whole body through the water? Make the most of July's warm weather (hopefully) by doing footstep paintings outside. Pour washable paint into a shallow metal dish. Lay a piece of paper in front of the dish and then another shallow pan of water on the other side of the paper. Have your child step (barefoot) into the paint, then walk all around the paper, then step into the dish of water to wash off. Have a towel handy to dry her toes. Another (less messy) idea is to trace your child's hand or feet onto a piece of paper. Let your child color in or decorate the tracing. Then trace your hand or foot. Whose is bigger or smaller? If you can find a roll of wallpaper you can even try tracing your child's entire body. You can talk about, draw, and color all your child's different body parts.

August



The theme for August is *Bubbles*. Try these fun activities to help your child learn more about bubbles, sounds, and cleaning:

Talk Together

- **For your baby:** As you and your baby play with bubbles, focus on repeating the words “bubble” and “pop.” Point at the bubbles floating away: “Look at the bubbles go!” Cue your baby to “Pop the bubbles.” See if your baby tries to imitate you. Listen for “buh” or “pa” sounds.
- **For your toddler:** Talk to your toddler about the “ingredients” for making bubbles. First you open the soap suds and dip the bubble wand inside. Then you gently blow and then the bubbles fly away. You can do all sorts of things with bubbles: catch them, pop them with your finger, clap them between your hands, pile them up on your palm. You’ll be amazed at all the different words you can use to talk about bubbles!

Read Together

- Read books that include some bubbles in the story. For babies, try: *Clifford Counts Bubbles* by Norman Bridwell, *Squeaky Clean* by Simon Puttock, and *Jesse Bear, What Will You Wear?* by Nancy White Carlstrom. For older toddlers, good choices include *Bubble Bubble* by Mercer Mayer, *Bubbles Bubbles* by Kathi Appelt, and *The Scrubbly-Bubbly Car Wash* by Irene O’Garden.

Play Together

- **For your baby:** Sit outside with your baby and start blowing bubbles. What does your baby do? Does he reach out to touch them? Follow them with his eyes? Catch a bubble on the bubble wand. Ask him if he wants to pop it and then let him “grab” it with his fingers. Let your baby play with oodles of bubbles. Seat him in his high chair. Meanwhile, squirt some dish detergent in the bowl and then run water into the bowl, making lots of bubbles. Scoop a handful of bubbles out and put them on your baby’s high chair tray. Watch him touch and explore these funny bubbles. Just be careful he doesn’t eat them!
- **For your toddler:** Play “Pop the Bubble” outside. Tell your child that her job will be to try and “catch” as many bubbles as she can and pop them. Start blowing bubbles and watch her dash to catch them. As you play, you can sing (to the tune of Pop Goes the Weasel): Round and round the grassy yard my baby chases bubbles, Pop goes the bubbles! Make bubble art. Mix about a cup of bubble solution with about 1–2 tablespoons of washable paint. Hang a piece of paper outside (use binder clips to hang on a fence) and have your child blow bubbles at the paper. An alternative is for a grown-up to put a plastic straw into the bubble-paint solution and blow, forming lots of bubbles (careful, don’t swallow). Children can then press the paper into the bubbles that are overflowing out of the bowl.

September



September's theme is *Cars, Trucks, and Buses*. Try these fun activities to help your child learn more about cars, motion, and the world around them:

Talk Together

- **For your baby:** Take a walk see how many vehicles you can spot. Point them out and repeat their names: Truck! Bus! Car! Start to help your child make sentences as you watch the traffic zooming by: Cars go. Trucks go. The bus stops. Now it goes. Watch and listen for your baby's attempt to tell you when he spots a four-wheeled wonder. Listen for *ka*, *tuck*, and *ba* sounds. Watch for your baby to point and gesture at a bright yellow bus.
- **For your toddler:** This is an exciting time of year with school buses taking to the streets once again. Watch the traffic go by with your child. Use descriptor words to expand his vocabulary; notice the red car, the Silver rubbish truck, the Purple bus. Use the actual terms for vehicles like bulldozers, front-end loaders, and cranes. Talk about how the school bus and the normal bus are different. Read the stop signs with your child. Which cars does your child like best?

Read Together

- Read books with wheels! For babies, try: *My Car and Machines at Work* by Byron Barton, *My First Truck Board Book* by DK Publishing, *Wheels on the Bus* by Annie Kubler, *Truck Duck* by Michael Rex, and Richard Scarry's *Cars and Trucks from A to Z*. For older toddlers, good

choices include *Cars, Trucks and Things That Go* by Richard Scarry, *Miss Spider's New Car* by David Kirk, *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* by Virginia Lee Burton, *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* by Mo Willems, and *My Race Car* and *My Fire Engine* by Michael Rex.

Play Together

- **For your baby:** Seat your baby in her high chair. Pour a little washable paint onto a paper plate. Tape a piece of paper to your baby's high chair tray. Dip the wheels of a die-cast car into the paint and let your baby "drive" it over the paper. Voila! Car art! Have a "car conversation" with your baby. Seat your baby on the floor and sit across from her. Roll a toy car to her and encourage her to roll it back. See if you can get this back-and-forth game going. Turn-taking activities like this one are practice for both "real" conversations later on, as well as sharing skills that will be developing over the next few years.
- **For your toddler:** Play stop and go. Color one side of a paper plate red and write the word "stop" on it. Color the other side green and write the word "go." If you'd like, glue a popsicle stick to the bottom so you can easily hold it. Let your child pretend to be a car (encourage him to make brum brum honk honk noises). You will be the traffic light. The "car" has to stop at the red sign and can go at the green sign. Once your child has the hang of this game, see if he'd like to tell you when to stop and go. Have a car wash. Let your child pick out a few of his toy cars or a bicycle to wash. Fill a bucket with soapy water and give your child an assortment of rags and sponges. Watch him get everything squeaky clean. Have a towel nearby to make drying off easy when he is all done.

October



October's theme is *Pumpkins*. Try these fun activities to help your child learn more about this season and cooking:

Talk Together

- **For your baby:** Look at pumpkins in the pumpkin patch or at your local supermarket. Let your baby touch the pumpkins. Talk about how they look and feel—they're big, and round, and orange. Are they smooth or bumpy? Knock on the pumpkin. Is your baby interested in this sound? Let her try to knock on the pumpkin, too.
- **For your toddler:** Look at pumpkins at your local supermarket. Talk about the pumpkins with your toddler—their color, texture, shape, and size. Use new words to describe the pumpkins; this helps expand your child's vocabulary. For example, you can talk about the scratchy stalk or the tough vine. You can talk about where pumpkins grow—in a pumpkin patch. You can talk about how pumpkins grow—from seeds (think about buying a packet of pumpkin seeds to show your child). Which of the pumpkins is your child's favorite? Why?

Read Together

- Read stories about this most special part of fall—round, orange pumpkins! For babies, try: *Plumply Dumplly Pumpkin* by Mary Serfozo, *The Little Pumpkin Book* by Katy Bratun, and *My Jack-O-Lantern* by Nancy J. Skarmeas. For older toddlers, good choices include. *Apples and Pumpkins* by Anne Rockwell, *It's Pumpkin Time* by Zoe Hall,

Pumpkin Pumpkin by Jeanne Titherington, and *Too Many Pumpkins* by Linda White.

Play Together

For your baby: Purchase a tiny pumpkin (or gourd) and let your baby finger-paint it using washable paints.

- **For your toddler:** Line a table with newspaper or a plastic tablecloth. Cut the top off a pumpkin (adults only) so that your child can help you reach inside with a big spoon and take out all the seeds. Let your child play with the seeds and “pumpkin innards.” This kind of sensory play is great fun for toddlers who love to get messy. Be aware, though, that some children won’t like the feeling of the smushy pumpkin and will want to get washed up right away. When you are done emptying the pumpkin, your child can paint it using washable paints or draw on it using washable markers. Adults can cut out a face for Halloween, it doesn’t need to be scary.

Do a cooking project with your toddler. Try making the easy pumpkin muffin recipe below. Involve your child in scooping, stirring, and dumping ingredients in. Be sure to keep him away, though, when it’s time to use the oven and let those hot muffins cool down before you dig in!

- **Pumpkin Muffins**
 - 1/3 cup sugar
 - 1/3 cup oil
 - 3 eggs
 - 15-oz. Tin of pumpkin pie filling (or alternative)
 - 3 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice (or substitute 1 tsp cinnamon, 1 tsp nutmeg, and 1 tsp cloves)
 - 1 box muffin cake mix
 - 1 bag mini chocolate chips (optional)
 - Blend the sugar, oil, eggs, and pumpkin together for 1 minute on high. (adults only)
 - Add the pumpkin pie spice and cake mix. Beat for 2 minutes on high. (adults only)
 - Mix the chocolate chips in by hand (if using).

- Pour the batter into muffin papers placed in a muffin pan. Bake as the cake mix box directs. Stick a toothpick in (should come out clean) to check for doneness. Makes about 1½ dozen muffins.

November



November's theme is *Trees*. Try these fun activities to help your child learn more about nature and fall:

Talk Together

- **For your baby:** Lay a cozy blanket down on the grass and lie underneath a tree with your baby. Talk about the tree, the branches, the leaves and the wind. Repeat the word tree and let your baby touch the tree's trunk and leaves.
- **For your toddler:** Take a walk with your toddler to see how many different trees and leaves you can find. Talk about how a Oak tree leaves feel different than a pine tree's needles. Feel the tree's bark; how does your child think the bark feels? Is it rough or bumpy, smooth or sticky with sap? Look at the leaves on the ground. Collect some of your child's favorites and line them up on the ground. Name their colors. Then line them up by size, from big leaves to little leaves. Pick some leaves to bring home.

Read Together

- Read books all about trees and their leaves. For babies, try: *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin, Jr., *Five Little Monkeys Sitting in a Tree* by Eileen Christelow, and *Leaf Baby* by Mary Brigid Barrett. For older toddlers, good choices include: *Caps for Sale* by Esphyr Slobodkina, *Go Dog Go* by P. D. Eastman, and *The Acorn and the Oak Tree* by Lori Froeb.

Play Together

- **For your baby:** Collect a few leaves, some crinkly, some not. Give them to your baby to play with and explore with his hands. Crinkle one so he can listen to the sound the leaf makes. Which leaves does he seem to like best? What does he like to do with the leaves? Play leaf peek-a-boo. Find a big leaf that you can use to cover (most) of your face. Hold it front of you and then pull it away: Peek-a-boo! See if your baby wants to take the leaf and play peek-a-boo with you.
- **For your toddler:** Choose a few different leaves for your child to paint with. Squirt washable tempera paint onto a paper plate. Show your child how to dip the leaves into the paint and then “stamp” onto paper. Make “secret boxes” for your child to explore. Take three shoeboxes and cut a hand-sized hole in the side of each. Put a different interesting item inside each box (a few acorns, concor, some crinkly leaves, a stick). Have your child put her hand inside and touch the object without looking. Can she guess what is inside? (Note: Some children may be reluctant to put their hand inside the box without knowing what is inside. That’s okay—modify the activity by having your child help you put the items inside each box. This might help her feel more comfortable with touching without seeing.)

December



December's theme is **Stars**. Try these fun activities to help your child learn more about space and nighttime:

Talk Together

- **For your baby:** Sing Twinkle Twinkle Little Star with your baby, using hand gestures to go along with the song. Bundle your baby up one evening before bed and show her the stars. Point them out, repeating the word star. Listen for her to try saying it—it might sound like tar, sa or sar.
- **For your toddler:** Sing Twinkle Twinkle Little Star and teach your toddler hand gestures to go with the song (flick your fingers for twinkling stars, wave your hands over your head for up above the world so high, etc.). Take your child outside before bedtime and look up into the night-time sky. Can he find any stars? What color are they? Are they bright? Are they twinkling? What else does he see in the night sky—a moon, an owl, a plane?

Read Together

- Read some starry books together. For babies, try: *Sleep Songs: Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star/Golden Slumbers* by Amanda Wallwork, *Little Bear's Special Wish* by Gillian Lobel, and the classic *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown. For older toddlers, good choices include. *Hush Little Baby* and *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, both by Sylvia Long, *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen, and *Forest Bright, Forest Night* by Jennifer Ward.

Play Together

- **For your baby:** Play “basketstar” with your baby. Buy a few star-shaped cookie cutters in different shapes or cut star shapes out of cardboard. Let your baby touch these and play with them. If you hold out a metal bowl, see if your baby will drop the cookie cutters in (they will make an exciting clatter). When she’s done, you can take them out and play “basketstar” all over again.
- **For your toddler:** Cut a large star out of heavy cardboard. Let your child paint or color the star any color he’d like. Decorating it with glitter is always fun, too! You can make a small hole at the top of the star, thread a short piece of string through, and hang in front of a window (adults only). Older toddlers can use the cardboard star as a model to trace onto a piece of paper and continue the activity as outlined above. Try making a starry night sky. Cut a few star shapes from a new kitchen sponge. Then give your child a piece of black or blue paper and pour a little washable yellow tempera paint into a bowl. Show your child how to dip the sponge star into the paint and then onto the “sky” paper. See how starry your child’s sky is. Make a starry snack. Using a star-shaped cookie cutter, let your child press stars out of cheese slices and pieces of bread. Ask your toddler: “What do stars taste like?”

Play Activities for 24 to 36 Months

Whether you're looking for games to build your toddler's language skills, or games to keep the young ones busy, here are some great play ideas for your little one.



Action-Oriented Activities

Frogs on a Lily Pad

Cut out big green circles from paper and scatter them across the floor. Suggest that your child pretend to be a frog and hop from lily pad to lily pad. Don't forget to "ribbit" together! Games like this build physical skills and coordination while encouraging imagination and creative thinking.

Soaking Up Sponge Fun

Grab some big sponges and get ready for some wet fun outside. You can toss a wet sponge to one another. You can also jump barefoot on a big soaking wet sponge to make the water come out. You might dip the sponge into a bucket of water and then squeeze it into a second bucket. How much water can you move from one bucket to the other? Activities like these help develop physical skills like hand-eye coordination. As with all water activities, it is critical to supervise children carefully as they play.

Shadow Shapes

On a sunny day, take your child outside in the garden and show him/her their shadow. See if your child would like to make his shadow dance, jump, wave, crouch, run, and more. This is great practice for your child's listening skills and also gets him/her moving outside. For a final bit of fun, trace your child's shadow with chalk and together the two of you can colour in his "shadow shape."

Marching Band

Is the weather making it impossible to play outside? Instead, grab an instrument (rattle, bell, whistle, tin and spoon, etc.) for yourself and your child, put on some wonderful marching music, and let your little one lead you around the house in a musical parade.

Quiet Play Activities

Match It Up

Print out 10 pairs of matching pictures from the Internet or use a set of stickers. Glue or stick each picture onto an index card (you should have 10 pairs of matching pictures). Mix the pictures up and lay them face-up on the floor. Together with your child, try to find matching pairs. This game teaches matching skills and turn-taking.

Birthday Party for Teddy

Find several stuffed animals and set them on a blanket on the floor. Have a "birthday party" with paper plates, cups, birthday hats, etc. You might even make a birthday cake for a Teddy using play-dough. What are the teddy bears doing at the party? What games do they like to play? Activities like this encourage your child to use her imagination to create a pretend story.

Painter Extraordinaire

Use a paintbrush and go outside and give your child a small bowl of water and let him "paint" the patio, the side of the house, the fence, their bike or other outdoor toys, etc. Point out how the wet portion looks and feels different from the dry. As with any activity involving water, supervise your child closely and dispose of all water when your child is done playing.

I'm Puzzled

Create a homemade puzzle for your child by cutting a photo of a person, pet, or place that she is familiar with into 3 pieces. Laminate or cover each piece in clear contact paper to make it sturdy. See if your child can put the pieces together again. (If this activity is difficult for her, you can provide a copy of the photo to use as a guide.) As your child gets older, you can try cutting a 5x7 or 8x10 photo into 4, 5, or 6 pieces.

Activities That Build Thinking Skills

Box It Up!

Give your child a big cardboard box and show her how a paper plate can become a steering wheel for a race car. Add aluminium foil along the sides of the box to make a rocket ship. Crumpled up newspaper on the bottom of the box can become water, a wrapping paper tube is a fishing pole, and the box is a boat. Games like this help your child become a creative thinker and problem solver as she creates her own stories.

Loud/Quiet Fill-n-Dump

Take two plastic buckets. Encourage your child to fill one of the buckets with plastic balls or bells (or other noisy objects) and the other with washcloths, scarves, or foam balls. As you fill up the bucket, talk about whether each one is loud or quiet. Now dump them! Which one is loud? Which one is quiet? This activity teaches your child to sort objects. (You can play a variation of this game with big and little objects.)

Open a Play-dough Pizzeria

Use play-dough or homemade salt-dough to make a play-dough pizza, tacos, cookies, or cupcakes with your child. See if your child would like to pretend to serve you in a “restaurant” by putting the “pizza” on a paper plate and bringing it to you. Games like this build pretend play skills and help your child develop muscles in his hands and fingers—which he’ll use for writing later on.

Try the Two-Step

Play a game where you give your child two-step directions to follow, such as: “Get the ball and throw it to me” or “Run to the steps and then jump as high as you can.” As your child approaches 3 years, try offering directions with three steps, “Get the ball, throw it to me, and then clap your hands.” This game builds your child’s listening skills and is also a fun way to keep her active.

Activities That Build the Senses

Indoor Leaf box

Gather a plastic bin full of fall leaves. Talk about their shapes, colours, and sizes and about how they are the same or different. Then give your child a bucket or plastic basin and let him fill and dump leaves, crumple them, and toss them. (Keep a small broom handy so he can help with clean-up.) This type of activity helps your child begin to compare similar objects.

Push a Pompom

Wash out a margarine container and cut several circles out of the lid. Using pompoms or similar, show your child how she can push the pompoms through the holes. For children approaching 3 years, you can offer two different containers and pompoms in two different colours. Your child can then try to sort them into the containers by colour.

That's a Wrap!

Let your wiggly toddler hop on bubble wrap to make “popping” noises. Unroll a length of bubble wrap or cut circles of bubble wrap and place in a line down the hall or across the room. Show your grandchild how he can hop on it to make it POP. Supervise closely to be sure your child does not put the plastic in his mouth.

Digging for Treasure

Fill a box with shredded paper and hide a small toy for your child to find—such as a small plastic dinosaur. Once your child has found the item, let her hide it for you.

Activities That Build Language Skills

A Few of My Favourite Things

Ask your child to show you his favourite toy, food, book, stuffed animal, etc. Snap a picture of him with each object, then glue each photo to an index card. Write on each card, “This is [child’s name]’s favourite book, toy, etc.” Tie the cards together to make a book. As you read the book together, point to your child’s name on each page. This helps him make the link between the look of his name in print and the sound of his name when spoken.

Picture It!

Before you read a new book, take a “picture walk” with your child and look at the illustrations first. See if your child might want to tell you the story just using the pictures as a guide. This type of activity helps your child develop her vocabulary, build creativity, and put actions in their logical order.

Learning Body Parts

Cut a photo from a magazine or catalogue that shows a close-up of a child’s face and another that is a head-to-toe photo of a child or adult. Glue each to sturdy card and cover with clear contact paper. When your child has to wait (like at a restaurant or doctor’s office), take out the photos and ask him to “point to the baby’s nose” or “point to the lady’s leg.” By age 3, your child may be able to name up to ten body parts.

Sing-along

Singing is one of the easiest ways to learn new words; and parents often know lots of songs from their childhood that are perfect for sharing with toddlers. Singing together is a fun way to build new memories with your child.

Play Activities for 12 to 24 Months

Whether you're looking for games to build your toddler's language skills, or games to keep the young ones busy, here are some great play ideas for your infant or toddler.



Action-Oriented Activities

Squishy Sponges

Give your child some soaking wet sponges to play with outside. Let him wash his bike, the play equipment, or even stamp wet sponge-shapes onto the path. Show him how he can squeeze the sponge to make the water come out—this builds physical skills in his hands and fingers. “Important” jobs like washing a tricycle or baby doll help toddlers feel like confident and helpful members of the family. As with all water activities, it is critical to supervise children carefully as they play.

Leaf Collector

Give your child a small basket and take her on a walk around your street or a local park. See if she wants to pick up leaves and other “treasures” and put them in her basket. You might be surprised by how long your toddler will be happy to walk, snapping up leaf after leaf for her collection. This activity builds gross motor (large muscle) and fine motor (small muscle) skills as children walk, squat, and pick up their discoveries.

Freeze! Toddlers love freeze dancing

Play music and encourage your child to dance or move in whatever way he likes. Then instruct him to stop when the music ends. This kind of activity encourages listening skills and self-regulation as he practices stopping and starting. (This is a very useful skill for when he goes to school and has to follow a lot of directions!)

Pop Some Popcorn

Take a receiving blanket and have your child hold one side while you hold the other. Place some foam balls (“popcorn”) on the blanket and then shake the blanket so the balls bounce (or pop!) off. Your little one might like singing “POPCORN! POPCORN! POP, POP, POP!” while you shake. Once all the balls have “popped,” have your child race to grab them and put them on the blanket to do it again.

Quiet Play Activities

Shadow Play

In a darkened room, shine a flashlight at your hand so that the shadow is reflected on the wall. Wave to your child and make silly shadow shapes with your hand. Does your child want to try to wave with his shadow hand too? He may also enjoy shining the flashlight on the wall all by himself.

Fill and Dump

Make 5-10 homemade balls (wad up newspaper and cover with masking tape). Put the balls in a shoebox or basket. Give your child another box and show her how she can move each ball from one box to the other. If your child is walking, place the baskets a few steps apart so that your child can toddle from one to the other. Games like this encourage toddlers to move their hands across their bodies as they transfer the balls, which helps them later on with many skills from athletics to handwriting.

Make a Homemade “Wagon”

Attach a 12–18 inch length of string or ribbon to a shoebox using sturdy tape. Show your child how she can pull the string to make the box move. If she is walking, give her a job to do using her “wagon,” such as pulling some clean dishtowels into the kitchen or delivering mail to grandpa in another room. This kind of activity builds physical and problem-solving skills as your grandchild learns how to use an object as a “tool” (pulling the string to move the box.) Be sure to supervise closely and put this toy away when you are done playing.

Activities That Build Thinking Skills

How Does Your Garden Grow?

Plant some seeds that grow in summer, such as grass or flower seeds, in a patch of dirt outside or in a pot to keep inside. This is a fun project for toddlers who love to shovel, pour water, and get messy! At the same time they're building fine motor skills (as they use their fingers and hands) and learning important science concepts as they watch their plants grow.

Try the Classic Shell Game

You'll need a plastic cup and a small toy. Show your child the toy, then set it down and cover it slowly with the cup. See if he picks up the cup to find the toy. Once your child has mastered this game with one cup, try it with two cups and later, with three cups. This is a very challenging concept for toddlers to master so it's important to be patient. Soon enough, your child will have no trouble at all locating the toy. This kind of activity builds thinking skills and hand-eye coordination.

Take Out Some Tubes

Put those empty wrapping paper tubes to work. String a scarf through the tube and let your toddler pull it out. Or, show your toddler how to drop a ball or foam block down the tube and watch it fall on the floor. Roll the tube and race across the room to get it. Make music by banging the tube on the floor. Games like this build your child's thinking and imaginative play skills.

Practice Pouring

Wash out an empty plastic spice container and show your child how you can drop a few pieces of cereal inside. Offer it to your child and watch as she tries to figure out how to get the cereal out. She may shake it or drop it, but eventually, she will pour them out onto the high chair tray, a plate, or her hand. This type of activity builds problem-solving skills.

Activities That Build the Senses

Take a Peek!

Remove the label from several small water bottles. Fill each bottle with interesting objects—one might contain small shells, another can be filled with sparkly glitter, water, and mineral oil, and another with a few pennies. Securely glue the lid on each bottle. Give them to your child to look at, shake, and explore.

Water, Water Everywhere

Fill a dishpan with water and place it on a towel on the floor (or better, outside). Give your child plastic cups, spoons, bowls, and a funnel. Watch her pour, splash, and more.

Add some food coloring to the water for a new twist on water play. As with any water activity, supervise carefully and pour all water out when you are done.

Band Together

Gather several objects that make different noises—rattles, bells, tambourines, etc. Start singing a song and pick up an instrument—offer one to your child too—and make some music together. Games like this nurture your child’s language, physical, and thinking skills.

Make a Bubble “Mound”

Fill a small bowl with some bubble liquid and then use a straw to blow a mound of bubbles. Let your child explore the bubbles with his hands—but watch to make sure he doesn’t eat any. He may also enjoy watching you blow bubbles for him to catch.

Activities That Build Language Skills

Name It!

During nappy changes, take a moment to play “what’s this?” Lift up her foot and say, “What’s this? It’s a foot. And what are these? They are toes.” You can name belly, belly button, knee, leg, parts of the face, and more. Through repetition, young toddlers learn new words.

Picture This

Snap photos of your child during an activity with you, such as making cookies. Take a picture of the beginning of the activity (getting the ingredients), the middle (adding ingredients, stirring), and the end (eating cookies). Glue each photo to an index card. Show the photos to your child and talk about the steps you took for each activity. Activities like this help develop your child’s thinking and language skills.

Point It Out

As you read books with your child, ask him to “point to the cat” or “show me the moon” in his favourite stories. He may not be able to follow through yet (so you should go ahead and do the pointing), but as your child approaches 2 years, you may be surprised by how many words he seems to know. Reading activities like this help children understand the connection between words and pictures and build their vocabulary.

Hello, Good-Bye

Make a tunnel from a large cardboard box by opening both ends. Your child can be at one end of the tunnel. You sit at the opposite end. Peek your face in the tunnel and say, “Hi!” Then lean away from the tunnel (so your grandchild can’t see you) and say, “Bye!” Does your child try to communicate with you by crawling to find you, or by making

sounds to copy your “hi” and “bye?” This activity encourages language, problem-solving, and physical skills as your grandchild figures out how to locate you.

Play Activities for Birth to 12 Months

Whether you're looking for games to build your baby's language skills, or games to keep the young ones busy, here are some great play ideas for your infant.



Action-Oriented Activities

So Big!

Hold your child on your lap. Ask: *How big is (child's name)?* Then lift his arms up into the air and say: *Sooooo big!* Babies love this game and will eventually learn to lift their arms in response to your question.

Wind at Your Back

Place your baby on her tummy on a soft blanket. Billow a light scarf in the air above her and say, *Feel the wind!* Let the scarf gently fall on her back and then slowly pull it off her. Wave it in front of her and see if she follows it with her eyes. This activity gives your child some fun “tummy time” with you. Spending time on her belly is important for building upper body strength.

Roll and Go

For children who are crawling, show them a soft ball or interesting toy. Roll it or place it a few feet away and encourage your baby to get it. If your child is cruising along the couch, you can place the toy farther and farther along the couch to motivate him to keep moving.

On Your Feet

Gather several pieces of material with different textures—such as a tea towel, fake fur, felt, a silky scarf. Holding your baby upright (with hands under baby’s arms), let her feet touch one of the fabrics. (Or allow crawling babies to crawl on and over the fabric.) Try a few different fabrics to see which textures your child seems to prefer. Games like this enhance a baby’s sensory and body awareness.

Quiet Play Activities

Shadow Sharing

Babies have limited vision in their first few months but they are tuned in to contrasts between light and dark. At bedtime or naptime, slowly move a flashlight beam across the wall or ceiling of your baby’s room. See if she can follow it with her eyes. As she grows, she will get better and better at following the moving beam—this skill is called “visual tracking.”

Make your own “aquarium”

Cut some fish shapes out of clean kitchen sponges and slip them into a gallon-sized resealable plastic bag filled with about a cup of water. For extra fun, squeeze a few drops of blue food colouring into the water and add some glitter or shells. Seal the bag and cover the edge with duct tape to be sure it stays closed. Let your baby squeeze the fish and pat the bag while he is seated in his high chair or on the floor with you.

Create a Leaf “Canopy”

Make a leafy mobile for your baby by placing a few colourful leaves between clear contact paper. Cut out the leaf shapes, punch a hole in each, and hang with string from a clothes hanger. While your baby is on her back, swing the “mobile” gently to make the leaves flutter. You can even move the mobile gently left, right, and in a slow circle. (Put the mobile out of baby’s reach when you are done.) Activities like this enrich your baby’s ability to track objects.

How Touching!

Make a texture book for your baby by cutting squares of different kinds of fabric with pinking shears and gluing each one to an index card. Punch a hole in the corner of each card and tie together with yarn. Gently bring your baby’s hand to each texture and see how he responds. As you read the book together, you can name the colour and texture of the fabric.

Activities That Build Thinking Skills

Wrap It Up

Wrap a ball of waxed paper in a scarf and tie it up. Hold it out for your baby and see if she wants to reach for it, grasp it, squeeze it, or crinkle it. Watch her face to see if she is interested or surprised by the sounds the package makes. You can put into words what you see on her face, “Wow! It crinkles and crackles. What’s inside?” Games like this encourage sensory awareness, reaching, grasping, and language development.

Baby in the Mirror

Hold your baby in your arms in front of the mirror. Talk about and point to his body parts—eyes, nose, mouth, arms, etc. Then step away from the mirror and ask, “Where did baby go?” Move back in front of the mirror and say, “There’s the baby!” Hide-and-seek games enhance babies’ growing sense of body awareness—the knowledge that they are separate from you.

Find It

As your child approaches her first birthday, she might enjoy playing a “find it” game with you. While she is in her high chair or sitting on the floor, show her one of her favourite rattles or another small toy. Then cover it with a washcloth. Wait a moment to see if she reaches to uncover the toy. If she doesn’t, show her where to find it. Games like this build babies’ thinking and problem-solving skills.

Putting It Together

Between 6 and 12 months, babies begin to understand how different objects work together—what they can do in relationship to the other. To practice this skill, offer your child some small, easy-to-grasp blocks and show him how he can drop them into a bucket, plastic cup, or bowl. Combining the block and the cup shows an early understanding about how things go together.

Activities That Build the Senses

Listen Up!

Show baby a bell and then gently ring it so he can hear. Wait until he focuses on the bell and then slowly bring it behind your back or place a washcloth over it. Then ask, *Where did it go?* Take it out and ring it from a different location. Wait until your baby has found the bell again with his eyes. This activity enriches your baby’s auditory awareness.

Take a Whiff

Give your baby (6 months old and up) an opportunity to use her sense of smell. When you cut an orange, hold it gently under her nose so she can have a sniff. When you take out the cinnamon or cloves for a recipe, do the same thing. You might say, *Smell this. We*

smell with our nose. Then you can point to your nose. Keep in mind, all children process sensory information differently. Some may love it and others may not enjoy it at all. Activities like this help your child connect sensory information to her everyday experiences.

Sound It Out

Gather several different objects that make distinct noises. Jingle, tap, or shake each one for the baby. If he reaches out to grasp one of the instruments, let him hold it and explore it with his hands. Games like this enhance babies' thinking skills and fine (small) muscle development.

Try a Massage

When you get your baby out of the bath, take a moment to gently massage her arms and legs with baby lotion. As you massage, gently bring her legs in and out from her body and gently bring her arms toward her chest and out again. Many babies are soothed and comforted through massage—an activity that helps them learn that touch is soothing and that their bodies are special and belong to them. But of course, follow your baby's cues and stop if it doesn't seem to feel good to her.

Activities That Build Language Skills

Get Out Your Umbrella!

Sing "It's Raining, It's Pouring" to your baby. At the end of the song, drop a handful or two of soft, colourful pompoms over her belly and chest. How does she like this sensation? If she looks interested—widening her eyes, smiling, kicking arms and legs, do it again. If your baby cries, try it again another time. Babies' preferences can change quickly. Singing to your baby is a great way to build language skills. This game also encourages babies' awareness of themselves as an individual, separate from you.

Picture Perfect

Snap photos of friends and family members in your baby's life. Glue each one to an index card and cover with clear contact paper. Show the photos to your little one and name each person. Over time, your baby will begin to point, smile, and maybe reach for the people in the pictures. Activities like this help grow your baby's memory and develop her language skills.

Finger Plays

Sing songs with your child that have hand motions that go along with the lyrics. For example, songs and rhymes like "Patty Cake," "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," "Wheels on the Bus," and "Where Is Thumbkin" all have hand and finger motions to do as you sing. When your child is able to use his hands and fingers, he will start to copy your gestures and—before you know it—he will be singing along!

Hi! Bye!

As your child approaches 6 to 9 months, you can start to play peek-a-boo. Most babies really enjoy this game! When you pop out from behind a towel or your hand, say, "HI!" When you are about to disappear, wave and say, "BYE!" By putting words to your actions, over time your baby will begin to understand their meaning. She might even start saying them herself!