

A child's interests are

Windows of Opportunity

to fun and enjoyable learning

Play with
hands, feet, and
fingers is a powerful
learning activity
for many young children



Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AT HOME**

All around the house

Long before a baby figures out that her hand is actually a part of her own body and that she can control it, she watches, studies, tastes, and touches it. The same holds true with feet and toes. Take advantage of opportunities for your little one to learn through play with her hands and fingers, feet and toes, with these ideas:

- Make your baby's hands and feet even more interesting by occasionally placing colorful socks and mittens on them. You might find or make socks with funny yarn "hair" and faces to add to the fun, turning your baby's feet into simple puppets.



- Add musical fun to playing with his own feet by sturdily sewing jingle bells to baby's socks, shoe laces, or to a Velcro anklet.
- Rhyming finger games and toe games are fun ways to interact with your baby or toddler. If you don't remember such games from your own early years, ask friends to teach you the ones they enjoy with their children. You might also ask for a book of rhyming games at a public library, or type "finger plays" into an Internet search engine. In these ways it's easy to find dozens of little games that will delight your child with their simple rhymes and fun movements of hands, fingers, feet, and toes!

Here's an example:

The Beehive

Here is the beehive

(left hand cupped palm down).

Where are the bees

(hands open, palms up)?

Hidden away where nobody sees

(hide fingers of right hand under left).

Soon they'll come creeping

(fingers come out one by one)

Out of the hive.

One, two, three, four, five! Buzzzzz

(wave right hand around, wiggling fingers)!

Sharing the hand motions and chanting of a favorite "finger play" brings smiles to mother and child.

Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AWAY FROM HOME**

Waterside

- Help your baby get close to the water safely so she can experience the water using her fingers and toes. Hold her so she can dip in her hands or feet as you talk about the water and how it looks and feels.
- Move your baby's hands and feet through the water in different ways. Show him, by gently moving his hands, that he can make exciting ripples and splashes in the water. Pause, providing time for him to realize that his own actions cause the interesting water effects. If he doesn't try it on his own, help him again to splash in the water, then wait for him to try again on his own.
- Show your young child a variety of things she can do with her hands and feet in the water, like
 - cup hands together and scoop up a handful of water, then let the water spill between her fingers,
 - or
 - push a flat palm through the water to make waves and ripples,
 - or
 - dip fingers in and flick water drops in the air—or on you!
- Help your baby make handprints and footprints in the sand and use his fingers to make funny, wiggly marks in the sand.
- Cover your little one's hands or feet with sand, and let her cover yours! Pack the sand down, then sing a song that ends with suddenly popping your hands or feet out from under the sand. Surprise! Do it again and again.



Wherever you go!

- Find opportunities for your child to touch new things with his fingers and toes. Let him step barefoot on a patch of cool green moss, stroke a friendly puppy's curly fur, brush his fingertips along silky flower petals, feel the roughness of a stone walkway.... Look for such experiences when you're on walks, visiting parks, or running errands with your child.

In a waiting room

- The task of keeping a young child happily occupied during a long wait can be eased by quietly playing a batch of fun "finger plays" together. With your child on your lap facing you, engage her in simple games like "The Eensy-Weensy Spider" and "Where Is Thumbkin?" She'll love the face-to-face time with you, the rhythmic rhymes and songs, and trying to copy motions with her own hands and fingers.



- Invent your own finger plays on topics that especially interest your child. If he's fascinated by cars, for example, make up a silly rhyme with hand movements he can perform as he sits on your lap pretending to drive. Just for starters, you might say:
Jump in your car,
Bounce on seat/lap
Turn the key,
Reach out and twist partner's nose
Grab the steering wheel
Turn pretend steering wheels
Let's go—wheee!
Shake hands above head

