

## 10 for 10: Ten Activities to Occupy Toddlers

By Shauna Smith Duty

Toddlers are busy little people, working hard to explore their new world and learn everything they can. They move from one challenge to another in a matter of minutes and require a great deal of chasing, engaging, cleaning up after, and redirection.

These ten creative activities will keep toddlers occupied for at least ten minutes at a time, and they are great for encouraging both an increase in their attention span and developing motor skills.

1. **Sorting Machine.** Most toddlers love to sort things. For a toddler who enjoys organizing, provide a few handfuls of multi-colored, O-shaped cereal and a muffin pan. With a little direction, she'll sort the cereal by color into the muffin pan cups and enjoy a healthy snack. For a non-edible activity, use blocks or colored manipulatives.
2. **Future Picasso.** A bowl of soft, chopped fruit with a little cream cheese and graham crackers is great for an entertaining, edible art project. First, spread the cream cheese on the graham cracker. Then have the toddler press fruit chunks into the cream cheese to create a nutritious work of art. You may just inspire the world's next Picasso.
3. **Toy Rotation.** A bin filled with toys can be stashed away for months in a closet or cupboard. When the forgotten toys are reintroduced, toddlers feel they have rediscovered them.
4. **Shake It Up.** Place toys or treats inside clear containers with the lids attached. Children love to shake and rattle things, and when a toddler realizes a treat is inside, the activity will be even more appealing.
5. **Water Colors.** Add a drop of blue food coloring to a shallow wading pool or sand and water table. Toss in some sea creature toys. For a change of theme, use green food coloring and jungle creature toys. It makes a great outdoor activity on warm days. Remember to closely supervise any waterplay.
6. **Paper Play.** Consider allowing toddlers to wrap themselves in toilet paper and pretend they are snowmen, or to decorate the room with toilet paper streamers. You may want to use the game as a potty training introduction or celebration of a potty success.
7. **Lid-Le Ideas.** Try presenting toddlers with a tub of plastic containers and their detached lids. Children can find and affix the matching lids to each container. Cleaned and dried plastic bottles like those used for condiments (ketchup and mustard), and grated cheese have distinctive lids that are easily identified and attached.
8. **Roughin' It.** Turn over a table or gather chairs into a circle in the center of the room, then drape blankets over them to construct tents. Flashlights and a non-sticky snack can create a fun environment while you read a story or sing songs.
9. **Obstacle Course.** Use nap mats on their sides, propped against chairs or tables, to form walls for a maze. Pillows can be hopped over, crawled on, or used as steppingstones in an obstacle course. Play Follow the Leader in the obstacle course, changing the leader each time you reach the beginning. Encourage the children to vocalize - can they travel as kittens, as cows, as racecars?
10. **Footsteps.** Place a small amount of washable paint on a pie tin or sturdy paper plate. Encourage the toddler to step into the paint with her bare foot, or feet, and walk across banner paper. She can even have a different color for each foot. This activity can be confined to a wading pool or tarp to ensure easier clean-up.

### Conclusion

With all their energy, providing constant stimulation for toddlers can be difficult. These inexpensive and easy ideas will afford early childhood educators a few minutes of downtime while encouraging children to use their minds and their bodies to explore, play, and learn in their new world.

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## Fostering Attachment in the Child Care Setting for Infants and Toddlers

By Kristen Johnson, senior writer for Parents as Teachers National Center

For young children attachment is more than just a feeling; it's a critical part of healthy development. "Attachment is a reciprocal relationship formed between a child and a care giver, most often a parent," explains, Jane Kostelc early childhood specialist at Parents as Teachers National Center. "Although the expression of love is an important part, the most secure attachments form when the parent can accurately read the baby's cues and meet the child's needs. The child then responds with trust and interest." Caring adults are essential to a baby's or young child's development, especially social-emotional development. Since many children spend much of their day in child care settings, it's important for attachment relationships to include adults other than just parents. Children can love and become attached to more than one adult. Children thrive in environments that foster attachment through consistent and loving care. This is why child care providers, in addition to parents, are also encouraged to form attachments with the children in their care.

### Attachment Is Critical In The Early Years

Feelings of attachment influence later social development and relationships. This primary relationship is the basis for all other relationships. It also lays the foundation for the development of self-concept and self-regulation. Babies have a natural ability to engage adults to fall in love with them. This is important because babies are born totally dependent on adult care. The way an adult responds to a child allows the child to develop feelings of trust and compassion. "When an adult responds to a baby's coos, the child learns that he is important and lovable," said Kostelc. "When he reaches for the buttons on the TV and an adult gently and consistently redirects him, he learns rules and expectations. Eventually this will lead to self-regulation of behavior." Many problems or successes throughout childhood, adolescence and into adult life can be traced back to whether or not a child developed a secure attachment as a baby. A child who does not develop a secure attachment might show anger or aggression to adults and peers. He may be fearful and unable to venture away from adults. He may find it difficult to be comforted or to feel safe and not respond to warmth from adults.

### Factors That Promote Secure Attachment

Since forming a strong attachment is so crucial, parents and care providers should be deliberate about ensuring a child has access to the types of care that encourage attachment. Here are some risk factors that threaten the development of a secure attachment:

- Family circumstances – Lack of attachment is especially high in families where there is stress and instability such as job loss, failing marriage, financial difficulties and other stressors. All these circumstances can interfere with the sensitivity of parental care and response to the infant's cues.
- Unresponsive child care arrangements – An infant who spends a majority of the day with a care provider who gives physical care but doesn't show warmth or quality in her responses might be at a disadvantage when it comes to successfully forming a secure attachment. Care providers must give more than just routine physical care. A care provider who is responsive and playful, cuddles and is affectionate demonstrates love that a child learns to reciprocate. Parents who work and are away from their children need to do research and evaluate where and with whom they place their children for a good portion of the day. They need to choose places where high-quality, responsive care is provided.
- Multiple transitions – Young children can't form healthy attachments if the adults in their lives move in and out too often. It takes time for care providers to learn the cues of the babies in their care; likewise, babies need to get to know and understand their care providers. This cannot happen if the baby has too many adults in his day or if he moves to a new classroom every few months. Early childhood researchers suggest that infants and toddlers spend their first three years in consistent care for secure attachment to develop.

### Child Care Can Support Healthy Attachment

One way to curb these risk factors is for care providers to see the value in forming attachments with the children in their care. Care providers are encouraged to hold and cuddle babies tenderly. "If a certain baby tends to avoid hugs, the care provider can find other ways to provide healthy touches," explains Jill Bailey, early childhood specialist at Parents as Teachers National Center. "She might kiss the baby's fingers, toes and tummy when diapering for example or use massage to soothe and calm a child. Care providers also need to create everyday routines to promote secure attachments. When possible, the same care provider should do routine things like change a child's diaper." Care providers are also encouraged to eat with the children, be emotionally available and do activities with the children in their care.

### Children Can Love More Than One Adult

Parents may need to be reassured that the love and attachment a child develops with a care provider will not replace his love for his parent. Having numerous opportunities to form a secure attachment will only benefit the child's development. To help ease apprehension, parents and care providers can work together by sharing information and openly communicating. Parents should tell the care provider how the night went and care providers should share how the time spent apart from mom or dad went. Daily notes or other types of communication should go home with each infant and toddler everyday. Daily, short conversations, notes, a notebook for journaling back and forth, or phone calls are all ways care providers and parents can support each other and communicate with respect. Care providers can also support healthy attachment between parent and child by having a place for moms to breast feed and having a place for parents to sit and play with the child when dropping off or picking up after work.

The above tips and a conscientious effort on the part of all care givers is a great start for increasing the likelihood for secure attachments to develop in infants and toddlers. Parents and care providers should, however, be aware that sometimes there are other underlying factors that might prevent a child from forming a secure attachment with adults. These reasons can be the result of medical or developmental conditions. If parents or care providers are concerned that something might be wrong they are encouraged

to talk with a healthcare provider or seek out advice from parenting programs like Parents as Teachers.

For more information on Parents as Teachers, early childhood development or to find a Parents as Teachers program in your area, visit [www.ParentsAsTeachers.org](http://www.ParentsAsTeachers.org).



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