

# Cultivating Creativity and Innovation: Experiences and Activities

Curiosity, exploration, and experimentation help infants and toddlers learn about the world, themselves, and the people around them. This lesson will help you learn more about creating experiences and activities that encourage these skills to support creativity in infants and toddlers.

## Objectives

- Recognize how different experiences and activities foster infants' and toddlers' creativity.
- Identify ways to support creativity during daily routines.
- Distinguish between process-oriented and product-oriented experiences.



Learn



Know

Think of a time when you felt confident to explore something new, what did you discover about yourself? How did you feel during the experience? How did you feel after the experience? Did it spark other curiosities you wish to pursue? Just as experiences and activities inspire your own creativity, experiences and activities support infants' and toddlers' creativity as well. In Lesson One, you learned that creativity is something that can be nurtured and cultivated, and that everyone is born with the capacity to be creative. Caring adults can provide infants and toddlers with consistent and supportive relationships within a safe environment, which will promote opportunities to discover, create, and enjoy interactions, experiences, and activities that help lead them to ongoing learning and growth.

## Experiences and Activities that Foster Curiosity

Infants and toddlers are naturally curious. This curiosity can be supported when caregivers provide opportunities to learn through daily routines and everyday experiences. When this happens, infants and toddlers can begin to develop positive attitudes for learning, such as:

- Taking an interest

- Willingness to explore, experiment, and try new things
- Knowing how and where to seek help from trusting adults
- Being flexible and finding solutions to problems
- Staying engaged in activities and continuing to try even when things get difficult
- Making choices and decisions

It is important for caregivers to determine the best ways to ensure that foundational experiences are being offered and that infants' and toddlers' creativity is being encouraged throughout the day. The table below highlights different approaches and ideas:

## Creative Experiences

### Music and Movement

What We Know About Infants and Toddlers	What You Can Do
Young infants respond to voices, sounds, and music (for example, they will move their heads in the direction of the music).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sing a familiar song.</li> <li>• Display musical toys for a young infant to observe, touch, and grasp.</li> </ul>
Mobile infants respond to music and enjoy rhythm and other sounds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play and sing Pat-a-Cake.</li> <li>• Consider incorporating several types of music that represent the cultures and languages of infants and toddlers in your care.</li> </ul>
Toddlers recall lyrics and can demonstrate enhanced hand and body coordination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clap, dance, and march to music.</li> <li>• Use scarves or streamers for toddlers as they move to music.</li> </ul>

## Dramatic Play

What We Know About Infants and Toddlers	What You Can Do
Young infants use facial expressions and gestures to express feelings and needs, and they imitate facial expressions and gestures of others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make playful faces for the young infant to imitate.</li><li>• Describe facial expressions as the young infant looks at themselves in mirrors.</li></ul>
Mobile infants understand the meaning of objects in play.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk about what you see mobile infants doing</li></ul>
Toddlers engage in play that represents real-life experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage toddlers to ask other children to play.</li></ul>

## Art

What We Know About Infants and Toddlers	What You Can Do
Young infants notice contrasting colors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide pictures that are simple for young infants to look at.</li><li>• Provide photos of the infant's family to enjoy.</li></ul>
Mobile infants use different materials to explore and create art.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide a variety of colored objects for the mobile infant to choose from.</li><li>• Provide safe, non-toxic materials for the mobile infant to explore, such as crayons and finger paints.</li></ul>

## What We Know About Infants and Toddlers

## What You Can Do

Toddlers use materials to explore and create art and to observe and describe art.

- Vary the texture and smell of paints by adding materials such as sand.
- Provide old magazines for children to cut or tear pictures to add to a collage.

Many of these experiences are meant to successfully build upon infants' and toddlers' desires to be part of engaging interactions and their innate joy for play. For example, as a toddler begins to pretend that an object stands for something else (such as a plate being used as a hat), a key skill is developing. The toddler is beginning to understand the idea of symbolism which leads to abstract thinking. This helps lay a foundation for being able to use words and pictures to express ideas.

Some infants and toddlers may need you to make adaptations or provide support that will enable them to express their creativity and feel successful. Offering well-planned, creative experiences can help encourage infants and toddlers to learn using all their senses, and it creates the opportunity to expand and adapt for a young child with specific learning needs. Let's think for a moment about a 9-month-old who can sit by themselves with support. As they sit on the carpet against a supportive cushion, they begin banging a plastic ball on a mound of stacking blocks (experimenting with a toy to make sounds). The infant then tries banging the ball on the carpet and notices it does not make a noise (experimenting and exploring with persistence). As they start to put the ball in their mouth (further exploration), the ball slips out of their hands and rolls across the floor. The infant starts to cry. The caregiver then reaches out to retrieve the ball and hands it back to the child saying, "Oops, here is the ball. It looks like you are interested in the sounds this ball can make and the way it feels. Did it feel frustrating to you when the ball rolled away?" In this example, the caregiver supports the child in their exploration by making it possible for them to continue and giving meaning to their actions.

## Fostering Culturally Responsive Creative Experiences

Culturally responsive experiences are those that create a feeling of belonging by allowing infants and toddlers see themselves and their families represented in your program. This may mean opportunities for self-expression and discovery. It may also mean broad exposure to people, ideas, and experiences from around the world. In terms of creativity, the "culture" can be quite broad. You should provide experiences that help infants and toddlers begin to define a sense of self and a sense of the world. This may include racial or ethnic identity, but it can also include identities related to family values, beliefs, or experiences. Caregivers should be mindful about representing a variety of these things in their child care setting. For example, infants and toddlers may explore making music with different types of instruments, listen to stories from around the world, or view photos of their families, their peers' families, and family structures that may be different from their own.

As you create and offer experiences, it is also important to remember that each infant and toddler demonstrates their creativity in a unique way. Some infants and toddlers may not be familiar with creative, playful interactions, such as peekaboo, and will need support to engage in a new, unfamiliar experience. Therefore, our relationships and communication with families plays a vital role in supporting a creative environment. Families can provide information regarding their values, beliefs, and meaningful experiences that highlight their family's culture. Asking all family members about their views on creative play is important, as the infant and toddler will bring experiences from home, incorporating them into the ways they explore and experiment in the early care and learning environment.

## Distinguishing between Process- and Product-Oriented Experiences

"The idea that the process is more important than the product shapes your perception of creativity as you observe, support, and respond to young children." (Isbell & Yoshizawa, 2016, p. 21)

In your work with infants and toddlers, you should strive to provide opportunities for children to explore what materials can do. Process-oriented experiences are child-directed and open-ended. The focus is on the experience itself rather than a finished product or outcome. Examples of process-oriented activities may include drawing on a vertical surface with crayons, making prints using various objects, or exploring materials with different textures such as ice or finger paints. Product-oriented experiences are usually adult-directed and have a pre-determined goal or outcome. Examples of product-oriented activities may include children making identical snowmen using the same materials on construction paper, or coloring the same printed picture of a house.

Product-oriented activities may not allow children to learn about the possibilities of the material, however with proper consideration of what is developmentally appropriate, an occasional product-oriented activity is okay. When making decisions about using process-oriented or product-oriented experiences, you should think about your learning goals and objectives. Consider an art activity that incorporates every child's handprint to form a larger design. While the over-arching activity is primarily product based, the experience can still be enriching through the materials offered, vocabulary used, and sensory experiences that are created. While planning, remember that children vary in their abilities based on their developmental continuum and are exploring what materials do. An infant will likely mouth a crayon to learn about it. What purpose does this experience serve? In the child's quest to understand, they discover how to hold the crayon. Through continued exploration supported by adults and often modeled by their peers, they see it will leave a mark on paper. An understanding of cause and effect is forming. Suddenly the young child has begun to experiment in creating their mark on the world. This process of learning is key to the child's successful skill development.

## Meeting the Needs of All Learners

Each infant and toddler develops and approaches creative experiences differently. Some children might have difficulties accessing creative experiences. For example, a toddler may be unable to reach or stand for prolonged periods of time. A child with visual or hearing impairments may have trouble viewing a work of art or listening to

a piece of music. An infant who is easily over-stimulated might not enjoy sensory experiences. You must be prepared to meet infants and toddlers where they are and make appropriate creative experiences a priority for all children. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind when it comes to supporting all learners:

- Art and creative experiences should always be a choice, and there should be no wrong answers. Each infant and toddler encounters experiences in his or her own way and at his or her own pace.
- Do not let children with disabilities or differences be a barrier to participation. You should create adaptations that allow each infant and toddler in your care to participate fully and successfully.
- Scaffold creative experiences for infants and toddlers who need support. Although creative experiences are often open-ended, it is OK for adults to provide some help when needed. You could use a picture schedule to help an individual child begin an activity (i.e., put on smock, pick up brush, dip in paint, and create). You may use a variety of supports such as peer support, adult support, or environmental modifications to help children be successful (Sandall & Schwartz, 2008).

## Encouraging Creativity During Daily Routines

During the early years, caregivers should focus on interacting sensitively and skillfully to support and enhance infants' and toddlers' natural curiosity and creativity and there are many ways you, as a caregiver, can encourage these throughout the day. The following table highlights ways you can encourage creativity during daily routines:

Daily Routines	Encouraging Creativity Examples
<b>Hellos and goodbyes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Songs and music: "Shall we sing our hello song together now that all our friends are here?"</li><li>• Prompt creative thinking while reading a book: "I wonder why the baby is crying?"</li></ul>

## Daily Routines

## Encouraging Creativity Examples

### Diapering and toileting

- Generate ideas: "You lifted your legs so that I could get your diaper off. That is a helpful idea!"
- Songs and music: Sing songs for children during diaper changing and toileting.
- Respond to an infants' movement: "You have been looking at that colorful mobile the whole time I have been changing your diaper. Now you are kicking your feet! I think you really enjoy looking at the mobile."

### Feeding and eating

- Exploration of foods: Offer foods that can be eaten using hands and fingers as well as foods that can be eaten using utensils.
- Respond to a toddler's needs to help them try different ways to solve problems: "You moved your cup closer to the pitcher, and it looks like you are wanting to pour the milk. This pitcher can feel heavy. May I help you?"

Curiosity and exploration: "That jello is very slippery!"

### Sleeping and resting

- Songs and music: "You seem quiet and are sucking your thumb. It is earlier than your normal naptime, but I think you are tired. Let's go rock together and I will softly sing your favorite song."
- Rhymes and individual expression: While rocking an infant or toddler, share a rhyme in a soothing voice, or gently touch their fingers while reciting "This Little Piggy."

You can use your knowledge of infants and toddlers to find and plan opportunities throughout the day that will help build a foundation for creativity.



There are many things you can do to interact and create experiences for infants and toddlers that help support their creativity:

- Share stories and read books.
- Take walks with infants and toddlers and talk about what you see.
- Play dress-up with older mobile infants and toddlers using hats, handbags, etc.
- Use a variety of materials for sensory play - sand, water, mud, playdough, paints.
- Use crayons and paper for scribbling on various surfaces.
- Measure using unconventional items such blocks to determine how long the child is.
- Make and use musical instruments - for example, fill an empty plastic water bottle with rice or dried peas for a shaker.
- Provide new toys and objects in their reach - watch as they explore the items.



## Explore

Read and review the activity *Experiences and Activities to Support Creativity*. Then, think about different experiences and ways you can use activities to support infant or toddler curiosity, exploration, and experimentation. Create your own experiences by writing down your ideas, identifying the materials needed, and highlighting the ways creativity is supported. While brainstorming, be mindful of ways you can include culturally responsive experience and activities. Discuss your ideas with your trainer, coach, or administrator.

It is important to offer learning experiences and activities that are appropriate, engaging and supportive of children's learning and development across various developmental domains including cognitive, social-emotional, physical, language and literacy, and creative development. Staff working toward their CDA credential should use the *Creative Arts Activity Plan* handout to develop a creative art learning experience from your curriculum (or a new activity you plan on implementing).

### Experiences and Activities to Support Creativity

Identify experiences and activities that support infant and toddler creativity



*Required: Complete and review this document with your trainer, supervisor, or administrator*

#### CDA Creative Arts Activity Plan

CDA Candidates complete this activity for the CDA Professional Portfolio