

Infant and Toddler Experiences

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Guide to Using the Planned Experiences

Chapters 4, 6, and 8 of this book contain planned experiences that support the three Cs of infant/toddler development: curiosity, connection, and coordination. Of course, the three Cs overlap one another, and each experience supports more than one of these attributes.

For each planned experience there is a description, a list of materials, and a procedure that is laid out in a straightforward manner. There are also tips to help caregivers anticipate how infants and toddlers may respond to the materials. In addition, we've included a list of the limits we most commonly set around these experiences and common choices we offer the children in response to those limits.

The experiences are essentially flexible and may be adapted to a range of skills and development. Although we have designated some experiences as most appropriate for infants and some as best for toddlers, they can often be adapted for either age range. Look for adaptations in the "Other Things to Think About" section. Don't forget to consider the time and effort necessary to clean up each experience and transition to the next part of the day. At the end of each experience, we've included a scene to illustrate how caregivers might employ one or more of the strategies discussed in chapter 3 to support the children's play and extend their learning from the experience.





Floor Pictures

Crawling, creeping, or scooting infants love to find new things on the floor. Attach plastic mirrors and pictures or photographs to the floor with clear contact paper to engage the infants' curiosity. Mirrors promote their self-awareness, and pictures or photos offer brain-stimulating information!

What You'll Need

- Plastic or acrylic mirrors 6 by 6 to 12 by 18 inches.
- Pictures or photos of real objects, animals, or people.
- Clear contact adhesive paper.

What to Do

- Choose mirrors and/or pictures to display. You may want to start with just a few and add more over time.
- Cut clear adhesive paper into pieces a few inches larger on all sides than the chosen pictures or mirrors.
- Thoroughly clean and dry the spots on the floor where the pictures will be placed.
- Place the contact paper on a work table or counter with the sticky side up. Put the picture or mirror face down in the middle of the contact paper, so it will be face up on the floor.
- Stick the contact paper with the image or mirror attached down on the floor and smooth out any wrinkles. Press hard with a stiff object like the bowl of a spoon to make sure the contact paper is firmly attached all the way around, right out to the edges.
- Observe the infants as they discover the new pictures, and narrate their discoveries, using phrases like "You're sitting on the elephant" or "I saw you crawl to the picture of the wolf."

Limits

These are infants, remember. Limits provide redirection and intervention for safety.

- Offer alternative mirrors or photos for infants to carry around if they try to pick at the items stuck to the floor: small 4-inch plastic mirrors and laminated pictures to carry around, teething rings to chew on.
- Use phrases like these too:
 - “Let’s leave them on the floor.”
 - “You can use your eyes to look at them.”
 - “Here’s a mirror you can hold and carry around.”

Other Things to Think About

- Test to make sure the pieces of contact paper stick fast during routine mopping of the floor. You may need to hand scrub them or be prepared to replace them frequently. (Our experience is that they last for months.)
- Note the individual preferences of the infants in your program: observe which pictures the babies respond to and provide others that are similar to extend their exploration.
- It might be necessary to tape down the edges as a “frame” to discourage picking at the contact paper.
- If mirrors do not reflect through the clear contact paper, use frames of tape to stick the mirrors to the floor.
- Photos, mirrors, and pictures may be similarly placed within infants’ sight level in other parts of the environment: low down on walls, on the backs of toy shelves, or behind acrylic frames on the wall.

Supporting Play

Use these strategies to support the babies’ experience, as Kim does in the following example:

- Validate the child’s experience; “say what you see”
- Plan to extend the exploration, using the child’s interests as a guide

- Offer information; “say what you know”
- Promote self-awareness

Kim is sitting on the floor with three babies. When an infant stops to trace with a finger or look more closely at a picture, Kim offers information: “Sally, you’re pointing at the dog....The dog says, ‘woof-woof.’ I know you have a doggy at home.” Sally looks intently at Kim, who continues, “Your dog is named Rags!” Sally immediately grins, looking back to the picture of the dog. Sally’s family has included Rags in the family photos from home, so Kim points out that photo too. Kim can also make sure that there are books featuring dogs in the infant room and offer them to Sally later. Now Sally has moved to the mirror and leans over to kiss the image. “That’s Sally in the mirror,” Kim comments. She moves to include herself in the mirror. Sally looks intently from the image to the real person.

Note how the caregiver responds to Sally’s interest in the picture of a dog by offering more information and planning to extend that interest later through books. Sally’s self-awareness is strengthened by having the caregiver name her image in the mirror.