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The right system for bright futures

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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 water play.
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.

Should you have any questions or would like more information about early childhood development and health in your area, please feel free to contact Rochelle Lacapa at (928) 532-5041 or via email at rlacapa@azftf.gov.