

20 Activities to Support Development

Ages 1-2 Years

Science & Discovery

At this age, toddlers love figuring out how things work. These simple, hands-on activities spark curiosity, build early thinking skills, and make exploring their world feel fun and magical.

01

Fireworks in a Jar

Materials Needed:

Clear jar, warm water, small cup, oil, food coloring

What to Do:

Add a few drops of food coloring to a cup of oil and gently mix. Pour the mixture into the warm water and watch as the colors slowly drift, burst, and fall like underwater fireworks.

Educational Benefits:

Introduces toddlers to the concept of density and how oil and water don't mix.

02

Balloon Beard

Materials Needed:

Balloon, marker, pepper or salt

What to Do:

Blow up a balloon and draw a fun face on it. Rub it on your hair or fabric for static, then hold it over pepper so the grains jump up to "grow" a beard.

Educational Benefits:

Learning that rubbing objects can create static and make things move in surprising ways.

03

DIY Lava Lamp

Materials Needed:

Clear bottle, vegetable oil, water, food coloring, Alka-Seltzer

What to Do:

Fill a bottle two-thirds with oil and the rest with water. Add a few drops of food coloring, then drop in broken pieces of Alka-Seltzer, and watch the colorful bubbles float and fall.

Educational Benefits:

Encourages curiosity and helps toddlers explore colors, movement, and simple cause-and-effect.

04

Magical Milk Color Explosion

Materials Needed:

Milk, dish, food coloring, dish soap, cotton swab

What to Do:

Pour milk into a shallow dish and drip food coloring onto the surface. Dip a cotton swab in dish soap and touch it to the milk to make the colors burst and swirl.

Educational Benefits:

Helps toddlers notice cause-and-effect as colors burst and swirl when the soap touches the milk.

05

Rainbow Bridge

Materials Needed:

Paper towel, markers, 2 cups of water

What to Do:

Color both ends of a paper towel with bright markers and place each end into cups of water. Watch the colors slowly travel up the paper towel and meet in the middle.

Educational Benefits:

Introduces toddlers to color blending and water absorption, while sparking curiosity, and practicing patience.

Creative Arts & Crafts

Your little one is bursting with imagination. These creative activities give them exciting ways to express themselves while building fine-motor skills and confidence through making, creating, and experimenting.

Finger Painting

06

Materials Needed:

Paper, washable finger paint

What to Do:

Tape paper to a wall or easel and let your toddler explore finger painting. Watch them smear, dab, and mix the colors freely.

Educational Benefits:

Encourages creativity, hand-eye coordination, and helps strengthen shoulder and wrist muscles toddlers use for early fine-motor skills.

07

Puffy Paint

Materials Needed:

Shaving cream, white glue, food coloring, thick paper

What to Do:

Mix 1 cup shaving cream and 1/4 cup white glue with a bit of food coloring, then let your toddler paint with the fluffy mixture to create raised, textured art.

Educational Benefits:

Helps develop fine motor skills, encourages creativity, and introduces early sensory exploration.

Animal Masks

08

Materials Needed:

Paper plate, scissors, markers, tape, popsicle stick

What to Do:

Cut eye holes into a paper plate and let your toddler decorate it as an animal. Tape a popsicle stick to the bottom to use as a handle.

Educational Benefits:

Encourages imagination, pretend play, fine motor skills, and helps toddlers practice using both hands together, an important skill for dressing, feeding themselves, and eventually writing.

09

Flashlight Discoveries

Materials Needed:

Tissue or shoe box, scissors, small toys, flashlight

What to Do:

Cut the top and one side off a tissue or shoe box to make a little “stage.” Then cut a small hole in the opposite side. Place animal toys or other shapes inside the box and turn off the lights. Shine a flashlight through the hole and watch the shadows appear and dance on the wall.

Educational Benefits:

Helps toddlers explore how shadows appear and change when light moves, building curiosity, cause-and-effect, and visual tracking skills.

10

Cotton Ball Art

Materials Needed:

Cotton balls, glue, paper, paint, small cup of water, medicine dropper

What to Do:

Glue cotton balls onto a piece of paper to make shapes, pictures, or a simple design. Then thin out some paint with a little water and give your toddler a medicine dropper to drip the colorful paint onto the cotton balls. Watch together as the colors soak in and spread.

Educational Benefits:

Strengthens the pincer grasp and hand control, encourages creativity, and helps toddlers practice coordination as they squeeze and release the dropper.

Sensory Activities

Toddlers learn best by touching, squeezing, scooping, and exploring. These sensory experiences support language, problem-solving, and regulation as your child discovers new textures and sensations.

11

Shake Shake Shake

Materials Needed:

Clear bottles or jars with secure lids, rice, beads, bells, glitter, small toys, water, food coloring

What to Do:

Fill clear bottles with materials like rice, beads, glitter, colorful water, or tiny toys to create a variety of sensory shakers. Seal the lids tightly. Let your toddler shake, roll, tap, or tip the bottles and notice how each one looks and sounds different.

Educational Benefits:

Helps toddlers explore sound, movement, and color while strengthening visual tracking as they follow the items inside. This activity also supports early language development by introducing new descriptive words.

12

Homemade Snow

Materials Needed:

Baking soda, white conditioner, bin, scoops, cups, small toys

What to Do:

Create your own fluffy snow by mixing 2 cups of baking soda with 1/2 cup of white hair conditioner (adjust as needed until it feels soft and moldable). Place it in a bin and let your little one explore. They can scoop, squish, and mold the snow with their hands or use small toys for imaginative play.

Educational Benefits:

Supports tactile exploration, strengthens fine-motor skills, and encourages imaginative play.

13

Water Sensory Bin

Materials Needed:

Bin, water, cups, scoops, sponges, small floating toys

What to Do:

Fill a bin with water and add items like cups, sponges, funnels, or small toys.

Encourage your little one to splash, pour, and explore the water with their hands and tools. Talk about the textures, temperatures, and movements they experience.

Educational Benefits:

Teaches early science concepts like sinking and floating while strengthening coordination, problem-solving, and sensory exploration.

14

Squish & Squeeze Bags

Materials Needed:

Ziploc bag, hair gel or paint, glitter or buttons (optional), tape

What to Do:

Fill a Ziploc bag with various materials like hair gel, shaving cream, or colored paint.

You can also add small items like buttons, glitter, or beads for extra texture. Tape it securely to a wall or table and encourage your toddler to poke, squeeze, press, or swirl the colors inside while the mess stays safely contained.

Educational Benefits:

Builds finger strength and fine-motor skills, introduces cause and effect as they see how the materials move inside the bag, and offers calming sensory input.

15

Homemade Sand

Materials Needed:

Flour, baby oil, bin, scoops, cups, toy animals or cars

What to Do:

Mix 4 cups of flour with 1/2 cup of baby oil and mix them together to create homemade sand. Pour the sand into a clear bin and let your toddler explore the soft, grainy texture by running their fingers through it. Add scoops, cups, or toys for digging, pouring, and pretend play.

Educational Benefits:

Supports sensory processing, strengthens hand muscles through digging and scooping, and encourages open-ended imaginative play.

Active Play

Movement is your toddler's favorite way to learn. These playful activities build balance, coordination, and strength while giving them the freedom to move, climb, and explore with confidence.

Tunnel Crawl

16

Materials Needed:

Blankets, chairs, couch cushions, toys (optional)

What to Do:

Create a simple tunnel using blankets draped over chairs. Encourage your toddler to crawl, walk, or wiggle through the path, adjusting the setup to match their comfort and curiosity. You can make it more fun by adding toys or objects inside the tunnel for your child to discover along the way.

Educational Benefits:

Strengthens core muscles, balance, and coordination while helping toddlers understand how their bodies move through space.

17

Tower Topplers

Materials Needed:

Blocks, stacking cups, magnetic tiles

What to Do:

Build towers (tall ones, wide ones, silly ones) and let your toddler knock them down with cars, balls, or their hands. Try stacking with different materials and talk about height, size, or sound as each tower falls.

Educational Benefits:

Builds hand-eye coordination, encourages early problem-solving, and teaches cause and effect in a playful, hands-on way.

Toddler's First Hike

18

Materials Needed:

Pillows, couch cushions, soft boxes, step stool (optional)

What to Do:

Create a cushioned “hiking trail” by arranging pillows, cushions, and soft objects at different heights and distances. Encourage your toddler to crawl, step up, climb over, walk across, or carefully step down each obstacle at their own pace. Stay close by as they explore new ways to move their body from one surface to the next.

Educational Benefits:

Strengthens balance, coordination, and motor planning as toddlers climb and step across soft, uneven surfaces. The different textures offer calming sensory input and help little ones understand how their bodies move in space, building confidence with each new step.

19

Bubble Pop

Materials Needed:

Bubbles

What to Do:

Blow bubbles at different heights and distances and encourage your toddler to reach, stretch, and move toward them. Let them pop bubbles with their fingers, clap them between their hands, or chase the ones that float farther away. Bubbles naturally encourage little ones to take steps, change direction, and keep moving.

Educational Benefits:

Supports early walking, balance, coordination, visual tracking and hand-eye coordination.

20

Freeze Dance

Materials Needed:

Music

What to Do:

Play your toddler’s favorite music and dance together. Pause the music every so often and shout “freeze”. For new walkers, see if they can balance on their own for a few seconds before turning the music back on.

Educational Benefits:

Supports listening skills, rhythm, body awareness, and early self-regulation as toddlers practice stopping and starting their movements.