

Stimulation Activities (Ages are functional not chronological)

The ideas below are for communication and other sensorimotor stimulation and are not a substitute for professional intervention. Activities and ages are based on typically developing children and may need some modification for specific children. Also remember that children develop unevenly and may be at one level in motor development and another for communication.

Talking with Children: 1-3 months of age

- Accentuate your facial movement and expressions. Put on a good show. Exaggerating your facial expressions and making changes in your voice will keep a child's interest.
- Treat the child's movements or sounds as meaningful. Remember, at this point in development, children do not have an intention to communicate. That said; their behavior still has meaning. They cry when they're uncomfortable or hungry. It's your job to interpret that behavior for both of you.
- Imitate the child's noises and movements. If the child coos when eating, coo along too. Taking turns is one of the first communication skill infants learn.

Stimulation

One-Month-Old

Communication

- Make gentle noises next to the child's ear. This teaches the child about sound production, and stimulates hearing, the main pathway for language.
- Attract the child's attention with interesting objects, including your face. Young children love movement and contrasting shades of color, so use brightly colored items, noise-making objects, or a combination of the two. Shake it gently in front of the child, and then continue to jiggle it while you slowly draw it to your face. When the child looks at you, respond by saying something.

Cognitive Development

- Attract the child's interest to objects by having them appear, disappear, then suddenly reappear. Remember, however, that although the child enjoys watching objects vanish and pop up out of nowhere, he or she lacks the cognitive skill to search for missing or hidden objects. At this stage, the child will be learning patterns and anticipating behavior.

Hearing Stimulation

- Provide a variety of noises for the child to listen to: Squeaky toys, rattles, music, voices. While this sense was, for the most part, operational in utero, it was somewhat difficult for sounds to get through. It may seem obvious but part of hearing is learning to listen.

Visual Stimulation

- Provide visual stimulation such as interesting objects and faces. First get the child's attention with a squeaky toy, stuffed animal, puppet, or some other interesting object. Do this by jiggling it in front of the child's face and talking about it. Stay within 8-24 inches of the child. Remember that initially the best visual range is only about eight inches.
- When the focuses on an object, shake the object and move it slowly so that the child can follow visually. Don't expect independent eye movemnt. At this age, most infants will move their entire head.

Sensory Stimulation

- Gently brush soft-textured materials or toys over the skin. Some possibilities are smooth fabrics, such as velvet; fuzzy terrycloth and fake fur; and plush stuffed animals.

- Give the child gentle massages with a few drops of baby oil and gentle stroking of the back, legs, feet, arms, and hands.

Motor Development

- Hang commercially available swat and grab toys over the crib or playpen to help the child develop eye-hand coordination. Place the child on his or her back below it but within reach. Although these stimulation toys are ideal for newborns, by three months, they will be pulled into the crib by the more mature child unless firmly anchored.
- Gently move the child's legs while the child lies on his or her back. Move the limbs naturally, such as in a walking pattern. Add some music to make it more enjoyable.
- Strengthen the child's grip by taking advantage of his or her natural reflexes. Place your finger across each infant palm and the child will quickly grasp it. When the child's hand tires, the child will release you. Don't overdo it. A few repetitions is fine.

Two-Month Old

Communication

- Establish greeting routine whenever you enter the child's vision after being apart for a short time, such as in the mornings, after naps, after a solitary play, and the like. It will become a routine and the child will learn that the caregiver is predictable.
- Call the child's name and get his or her attention before interacting even though at two-months isn't yet able to recognize her name. It's still a good place to start.
- Encourage gooing and cooing by making similar pleasure sounds while the adult holds the child against her or his chest or face.
- Respond to the child's vocalizations with attention and gentle talking.
- Alter your voice or pair it with a stuffed animals, dolls, or puppet. The toy can either talk directly to the child in a different voice or the adult can become a third party and vary his or her voice depending on who's speaking.

Cognitive Development

- Hang interesting jiggling toys or objects close enough to the child's feet so that she or he can make them move by kicking them. This gives the child an opportunity to learn that she or he can cause things to happen.

Hearing Stimulation

- Although the child is unable to turn over, give her the experience by placing the child on your bed or on a soft pad on the floor, and gently rolling him or her over a *very soft* squeaky toy. The adult can act surprised when it squeaks and talk about the noise. Encourage the infant to roll by giving a little assist.
- Attach bells to the sleeve or leg of the child's clothing so the child produces sounds when she or he moves.
- Call the child's attention to the noise, point and look in the direction of the source, and talk about it.

Visual Stimulation

- Hang visually interesting pictures, objects, or mobiles over the crib or playpen. Make sure any hanging pictures or objects are well secured. There are many commercial toys and mobiles with brightly colored objects.
- Help the child alternate attention between a toy and the human voice by moving a toy in a very animated manner until it attracts the child's attention, then holding it still and talking to the child or call her name. In a variation, the adult can use two noisemakers, one in each hand, shaking them alternately and looking back and forth between the two with surprise.

- Cover the child's bottle with a clean brightly colored sock, changing it periodically to another color.

Sensory Stimulation

- Stimulate the child's sense of smell with cinnamon, nutmeg, curry, and vanilla, flowers, soaps, mild perfumes, and even a wet dog. The adult should talk about them as they share a sniff.

Motor Development

- Give the child things to hold and shake. Plush toys of contrasting colors added interest and are great for developing an infant's grasp. Rattles or other interactive noisemakers work too. Nothing sharp or pointed though.
- Encourage the child to reach for things at different angles. This will simulate different muscles and brain patterns, as well as eye-hand coordination.

Three-Month-Old

Communication

- Incorporate simple games, such a *peek-a-boo* and *I'm gonna get you* into everyday routines. For example, the adult could begin *I'm gonna get you* after changing a child.
- Accompany the child's movement with talk about different parts involved. Describe what the child is doing as it's done. Although the child won't understand the words, she or he will begin to make associations, especially as if the words are heard day after day. In addition, you're both focusing on the same thing of his or her body just like in a conversation.

Cognitive Development

- Call the child or operate a noisemaking toy off to the side or only slightly behind the child, but not hidden. Finding hidden objects will take a few months. Where before a child coordinated hearing and vision to look around for sounds, now the child can actually search for that sound, not just glance around.

Hearing Stimulation

- Call the child's name or make a noise while jiggling or shaking a favorite toy from across the room. The child now has nearly full focus and can see things at a greater distance.

Visual Stimulation

- Take advantage of the child's ability to focus on objects in close and far away by moving objects in close and back out again. Make a game of it by building anticipation. When will the fuzzy bear soom in again to cuddle with the child?
- Decorate the environment in new places to increase the child's visual interest. Hopefully, there are already interesting things to look at around the crib or playpen. Now it's time to start putting interesting pictures in new but places, if it hasn't been done before. For example, the adult can liven up the seat that the child stares at while in the car in an infant seat.

Sensory Stimulation

- Vary food tastes to stimulate this sense. While I don't recommend jalapenos in the vanilla pudding, the adult can vary pudding flavors or try some recipes from a baby cookbook. Remember, the child will only be able to eat semi-liquids at this point.
- Fill a clean cotton sock with crunchy, crumpled cellophane and very securely tie the open end closed. Then let the child squeeze it and chew it if desired. This stimulates both hand and mouth. Please supervise in case the cellophane comes out of the sock.

Motor Stimulation

- Encourage the child to roll over and creeping by placing interesting objects nearby.
- Fill the broad end of a *L'Eggs* pantyhose container (or any plastic egg) about half full of a

mixture of plaster of Paris and water and let it dry overnight. Then fill the rest with crumpled tissue, and glue the two halves together well. Then let the child bat at it with his or her hand. When it's knocked over, it will pop right back up again. There are commercially available toys that are similar.

Talking with Children: At 4-6 months

- Spend more time playing and talking.
- Convince the child that the child or the child wants to talk by making conversations fun and pleasurable. Use exaggerated intonation and facial expressions.
- Talk to the child throughout the day.
- Treat the child's movements and sounds as meaningful.

Stimulation

Four-Month-Old

Communication

- Broaden imitation of the child's movement and noises to include echoing his or her speech sounds specifically. After a few imitations, the child may begin to expect your imitation and wait for it, and then laugh and smile, and possibly reply with another sound. Don't expect imitation of your sound. What's important is the vocal turn-taking.
- Also imitate in unison. Then vary your performance, sometimes in unison and at other times alternating.
- Encourage smiling and laughing by making big noises with your mouth on the child's tummy, dancing to music, acting surprised, and making funny squeaky noises. Don't be afraid to ham it up.

Cognitive Development

- Establish little daily routines such as cuddling after lunch, singing a soft song at naptime, and having a snack after a nap. Routines teach the child the predictability of human interactions and aid participation. Use everyday events like diaper changing, feeding, baths, and dressing to teach the child routines. Help the child participate in the routine by naming familiar object, actions, and feelings.
- Play anticipation games a few times a day. Examples include the ever-popular "*I'm gonna get you*", "*Here comes the _____*," and "*Giddy up, horsy.*"
- Use objects to help the child anticipate activities. Simply showing and talking about "signals," such as a hat just before you go outside teaches the child that one thing can represent another. A spoon can represent eating, a washcloth can stand for bath time.

Hearing Stimulation

- Make noises with a squeaky toy, rattle, or some other gentle noisemaker out of the child's line of vision, and encourage him to look in the right direction. If you hide the object leave some of it showing or hide it under a cloth that conforms to its shape. Otherwise, the child will be unable to locate it.

Visual Stimulation

- Continue to place pictures and mobiles where the child can see them. To stimulate interest, change the pictures and objects frequently.
- Encourage eye contact from the child. As you talk, varying your voice, look the child, look away, then look back again. The child may begin to follow suit.

Sensory Stimulation

- Encourage the child to explore your face with her or his hands. Say the word for each part of

your face as the child touches it.

- Explore the child's face using a feather or a clean, soft fuzzy piece of fabric. As you touch each part, give it a name.
- Cuddle with the child and have quiet moments together. Hugging and touching are part of communication, especially for a child.
- Rock the child in your arms as you talk. Talking or making sounds will attract the child's attention to your face, and give multi-sensory input.

Motor Development

- Encourage rolling, the child's primary means of communication, by calling his or her attention to a soft, pliable object like a squeaky toy or small stuffed animal, and then putting it to the side of the child. Ask "*Where ducky?*" or say "*Get ducky.*" Move the object around to make it more enticing. Keep the object in reachable distance and not any higher than the child's shoulder or lower than his waist.
- Fly the child around by placing your hands *firmly* under her or his chest and hips. The child will instinctively raise the head and shoulders, strengthening the neck, back, and abdomen.

Five-Month-Old

Communication

- Point out a doll's facial features, body parts, clothes, and actions as you and the child manipulate the doll. Enhance the experience by moving the doll around in front of a mirror.
- Make a knocking noise, show surprise, and then have a toy, puppet, or doll pop up and have a conversation with you and the child. The child will love the element of surprise and the feeling of anticipation as the knock becomes a signal for the toys appearance.
- Imitate the more varied sounds, squeals, shrieks, and whispers that the child can now make. Don't make any loud or sudden squeals or shrieks. The goal is not to make the child fearful of noise-making games.
- Follow along when the child starts a "conversation" a game. The child will make eye contact, move around, smile, or make noises to attract attention and signal a readiness to communicate. Respond with enthusiasm and interest.

Cognitive Development

- Provide a variety of stimulation activities, especially now when the child can play and explore in a supported upright position.

Hearing Stimulation

- Use the child's name when you begin an interaction or want to get his or her attention. Although you've been doing this before, it's especially important now. If the child doesn't respond, entice him with a toy or other interesting object at the same time you call his or her name.

Visual Stimulation

- Help the child to focus on faces by using a well-mounted, shatterproof, washable, child's mirror with rounded corners. When you see the child looking at herself or himself, name face parts and talk about what the child is doing.

Sensory Stimulation

- Add new tactile sensations of different textures, temperatures, firmness, color, size, and shape. Try things like soft building blocks and balls of differing foam densities, warm and cool wash clothes, ice chest cold (not frozen) gel-packs, or large feathers. Talk about how a particular object feels, or looks.

Motor Development

- Sing simple motion songs with the child.
- Use commercial baby gyms with a variety of things to grab, swat at, pull, and push.
- Encourage the child to splash bath water either with his hands or a floating object.
- Use noisemaking toys in turn-taking games.

Six-Month-Old

Communication

- Talk to the child about what he's doing, what you do together, and what he sees you doing. Keep the talk simple and repetitive and pause after important words.
- Let the child participate and "help" you in your daily activities. Whenever possible, let the child hold and explore objects as you talk.
- Include lots of variations in your own sound-making, such as pitch variations, growls, tongue clicks, whispering, singing, humming, and any other interesting vocal possibilities you can think of. The child will love the variety and just may chime in. If she or he does, imitate the behavior.
- Reply to *unintended* messages, such as reaching for a toy as if the child were *intentionally* trying to communicate the message to you ("*Oh, Kristin want teddy.*"). The child is not yet quite able to plan an action to achieve a desired end; he or she is still *pre-intentional*.
- Sing about what you're doing as you do it and you may end up in a duet. Use simple, repetitive melodies, such as "*Row, row, row your boat,*" that will attract the child's attention. Adapt the song to whatever you're doing at the time.
- Encourage the child to wave bye-bye in appropriate situations.

Cognitive Development

- Talk about the places you go and explore together outside the house.

Hearing Stimulation

- Use sounds whenever you can in your play and keep them varied to hold the child's interest, such as baby CDs, pots and pans, toys that can clank together, plastic blocks, musical instruments, recorded music, whistles, and bells. Talk about the noises too. When possible accompany sound with a real object or picture so that the child gets both vision and sound stimulation.

Visual Stimulation

- Give the child visually interesting toys to examine and play with. Although the child has explored in the past, now he or she can do it from an upright position while holding an object on his own. This changes the entire dynamic.

Sensory Stimulation

- Introduce the child to different substances---sticky, furry, hard, soft, and squishy---that can be fun to explore. These include dough (real or *Play-Doh*), soft sponges, a partially filled beach ball, child putty, Nerf balls, bean bags, sand, rice, ribbons, and mushy bananas.

Motor Stimulation

- Continue to imitate the child's sounds, even burps. This sets the stage for the child's later speech sound imitation. Add actions to the sounds for interest and to help with later gestural development

Talking with Children: At 7-9 months

- Show you understand by responding to behavior, such as pointing, that seems to communicate a message.
- Keep your own speech simple as the infant gets close to saying that first word: Short utterances,

easy words.

- Repeat words in context, varying the order a little or adding new words here and there.
- Treat the child as a real communicator.
- Mimic the child's reduplicated babbling, i.e. *bababa*.
- Use real word models in conversations, remembering the basic building block of CV syllables and CVCV combinations.
- Respond to gestures; they're the first purposeful communication of an infant.
- Use consistent words for things so the child has a reliable model.
- Gesture and/or sign too.

Stimulation

Seven-Month-Old

Communication

- Sing a CVCV combination song by substituting a CV sound like "ba" for the song lyrics--- one sound for each syllable.
- When you or the child points to interesting objects, say the word for the objects and talk about them a little.

Cognitive Development

- Use familiar objects for their intended function or purpose and talk about it as you do. Even though a children explore things on their own, they will pick up the most information about things from the way they're used by other people. You can make this activity a natural part of any task during the day.
- Lend a hand in the child's exploration by holding objects or turning them when needed, using them functionally, and talking about them.

Hearing Stimulation

- Holding the child in your arms and dance around gently to the radio or favorite CD. Help the infant make noise with a wooden spoon and sitting next to the child and drumming too. Try adding some recorded music and play together. Buy or borrow some percussion toys, drums, xylophones, tambourines, marimbas and the like.

Visual Stimulation

- Get the child to look at you, make a funny face, look away, then look back again with another silly face. This game includes taking turns, an essential element of communication; and imitation, an essential factor of cognitive growth.

Sensory Stimulation

- Play with all sorts of different textures, from soft and squishy to plush and furry. I suggested this for six months, but it's just as viable now, and in fact will be for several months to come, so keep it up. Add some new textures. Spaghetti?
- Lie or sit facing the child and let him or her touch all the different parts of your face as you touch his or hers. Talk about each facial part as it's touched. Add some sound making to the exercise.

Motor Development

- Babies love to roll things at this age so turn this fascination into a fun interaction by rolling objects back and forth to each other on the floor. To give the child extra communication stimulation add a sound that you've heard her or him make before.
- Provide the opportunity to handle and manipulate safe, small – not too small objects, like magnets on the fridge or on a cookie sheet, socks in a drawer, or small items, such as juice or pudding boxes, on shelves.

- Sing a song or nursery rhyme (or play a CD) while bouncing knee the child in time with the song. Although this activity may seem like one we've used before, there is a subtle difference in that we are combining song with overall movement, rather than just hand movement.
- Encourage the child to reach up at different angles by holding up a favorite toy or some other highly desirable object. This is terrific for eye-hand coordination and will strengthen and stretch the child's back.

Eight-Month-Old

Communication

- Engage the child in some fun activity like playing patty-cake or bouncing, then stop, and wait for the child to vocalize before you continue. If the child's a little slow on the uptake, make a sound first, or just wait until the child makes one by chance., and then continue with your activity. If the child doesn't seem to understand the connection try to get him or her to imitate you physically.
- Pick a simple, repetitive song, such as "*Old MacDonald*", and move (bounce, pick up, raise arms) the child to the music at the same place in each repetition, such as the *e-i-e-i-o* part.
- Pretend play is always fun. For example, pretend to be some sort of animal and make noises. Describe your actions with simple commentary.

Cognitive Development

- Present two child-friendly things to the child and offer a choice. Hold them far apart so the child has to choose and be to talk about the choice made.
- Use two objects instead of one every once in a while in play, such as a doll and doll clothes, or a dog and a brush. The child's just beginning to be able to focus on two objects at the same time, which is an important step in cognitive growth, and will be important for problem solving, word definitions, and word combinations a little later on.

Hearing Stimulation

- Record the child's vocalizations when he or she's in a chatty mood, then play the tape back. Children are more likely to parrot their own sounds than the recorded sounds of others.
- Show the child how to make noise with an old coffee can by dropping blocks and other items into them. It's always a good idea to cover the top rim of the can with a nice heavy gauge tape to guard against sharp edges.

Visual Stimulation

- Introduce some visually interesting puppets and have them appear and disappear suddenly. You can also make your own with old colorful socks and pieces of brightly colored fabric. Puppet play is a perfect opportunity to use language.

Sensory Stimulation

- Introduce a variety of finger foods and textures for taste and feeling stimulation and different types of chewing. Avoid foods like whole hotdogs that break off in big chunks. (Hotdogs are fine, but cut them into very small pieces first.) Best foods are bananas cut in small pieces; berries; very tiny apple, peach, watermelon, or pear slices; crackers; teething biscuits; soft cheeses pieces; small pieces of toast; even short pieces of cooked spaghetti with a little sauce. This is a full supervision activity, especially if there are some feeding problems.
- A variation on the previous activity offers touch by spreading O-shaped oat cereal on the highchair tray with pudding, yogurt, whipped cream, applesauce, or other blended fruit. The child will experience the crunch of the cereal along with the smoothness of the yogurt or pudding and the chunkiness of the fruit, in addition to the motor and sensory experience of moving hands through the muck. Keep the garden hose handy for clean-up.

Motor Development

- Encourage the child to throw or push soft objects like toy animals or balls, then retrieve them and give them back for another go.
- Hand an object and encourage the child to give it back, until you're passing things smoothly back and forth between the two of you. Handing objects is second only to rolling them for good turn-taking practice. Use toys or other things that differ in size and texture for added stimulation and motor development.
- Stack items with the child and then knock them down. As you're stacking say "Uppppp," and as they're falling say "Fall" or "Down." The language will be very meaningful because it occurs within an activity that the words describe.
- Encourage crawling, reaching, and sitting by using a rolling noisemaker that the child can push ahead as she or he crawls or propels on her or his tummy.

Nine-Month-Old

Communication

- Have the child imitate sounds he or she can already make, CV syllables or CV and CVCV words. You can try this with real words, but they should be CV or CVCV in nature. Keep this activity light, easy, and fun. Imitating the child is a way to get exercise started.
- Showing the child photos of favorite people, animals, or things. Use a photo album or make a small child size one with lamination.
- Let the child pretend to use the telephone or better yet use it for real and make sounds. This can be fun be be aware that some kids don't react at all to a disembodied voice.
- Now when the child points, give the child a chance to "name" the item of interest or to babble a comment. Ask "what see?" or "what's that?" Respond positively to any vocal or gesture response, then supply the name yourself as is "Yes, doggie" even if the child said "Ba."

Cognitive Development

- "Hide" some favorite food under a napkin or hanky when you know the child is watching. Then watch to see if the child lifts the cloth to find it. If you see that the child's having trouble finding the stash, leave some of it exposed as a clue. If it's too easy, make it a little more challenging by hiding the food under a solid object like a plastic cup or upside-down bowl.
- Introduce toys with pull cords, switches, and levers to teach cause and effect.
- Attach a favorite toy to a string and tie it to the high chair, then show the child how to pull on the string to retrieve the toy whenever wanted. On the same theme, attach a ribbon to a toy that's just out of reach on the floor, and show the child how to pull the ribbon to get the toy.

Hearing Stimulation

- Use an easy-to-operate baby CD or tape player, or radio. Children of this age love to poke with their index finger, and being able to produce your own music is a powerful cause and effect lesson.

Visual Stimulation

- Use sturdy cardboard picture books with simple images of big bright colorful things, one or two items per page. Let the child take the lead, this is an introduction. Keep sessions short.

Sensory Stimulation

- Make a pots and pans band with kitchen utensils. Demonstrate, then encourage with "Keenu make music." If the child doesn't seem interested, wait until she or he does and then give another demonstration.

Motor Stimulation

- Try to get the child to imitate some of the simple actions in everyday activities that he or she has observed many times in the past. Give the child a little dust cloth, some safe food prep utensils, or even a little toy vacuum cleaner, and ask him or her to “*Help mommy (or daddy).*” If the child catches on quickly, you might be able to hire him or her out to do chores in other households.
- When you see the child starting to crawl around, get down on the floor and play “*I’m gonna catch you.*” Be silly, crawl after the child and keep “threatening” to catch her or him. When you do, hug or tickle her gently.
- Help the child pull to a stand using firm sofa cushions in a pile, firmly wedged against the wall. This is easier than a hard table leg. To add a little incentive, set a favorite toy or something else irresistible on top of a stack of pillows. Stay close by in case there’s a tumble.

Talking with Children: At 10-12 months

- Be a good role model. Use short words and phrases plus gestures.
- Don’t interrupt when the child’s practicing sounds.
- Expand the child’s world with quality experiences that you mediate with simple language.
- Don’t expect the child to get it right each time the child or the child names something. Always respond positively and gently redirect with the right word.
- Try not to be critical of the child’s speech.
- Use appropriately simple and useful words that reflect the child’s interest at the moment.
- Imitate word-like vocalizations.
- Use the child’s name when referring to him or her as you/me can be confusing.
- Encourage the child to initiate communication by manipulating the environment, such as sealing tasty treats or fun toys in clear plastic containers, or putting tempting objects just out of his reach while the child’s watching.
- Respond appropriately and immediately by imitating, expanding or extending.
- Take advantage of pointing and vocalizing by supplying an appropriate word.
- Sing simple songs at bedtime or other quiet times.

Stimulation

Ten-Month-Old

Communication

- Now that the child’s on the verge of talking, instead of just presenting visual choices, add names to the objects presented—a big developmental difference.
- The child’s already doing things like clapping and waving when you do; now it’s time to encourage him or her to add vocal imitations to the physical ones. Even the most reticent tot can be enticed to mimic sounds when you add action to the mix.
- When the child is playing with something or examine an object as he starts to explore his environment, name the object. After you’ve told the child the name and thoroughly explored it with him or her, hold up two objects and say “*Show me cup*” or “*Touch cup.*” This is a good check.
- At about this time, infants will pretend to cough, hiccup, or sneeze. Play along, or even mimic.
- If you or the child spills something by accident simply comment, “*Uh-oh!*” It’s an easy utterance for a child to imitate and the situation in which it’s used is very specific making it a perfect learning opportunity.
- Respond to the baby’s gestures only when they’re accompanied by a sound, or a word or

word-like noise. If the child makes a gesture out of your direct line of sight, just ignore it for a few seconds to give a chance to attract your attention with a sound. If after ten seconds or so, the child doesn't come up with some sort of vocalization, reply to the gesture by reproducing it and talking about it. Try to prompt it again.

Cognitive Development

- Babies nearing their first birthday love to pile up things and topple them over. Use a variety of different shapes, colors and sizes. In addition to stimulating motor maturity, stacking is an important cognitive skill that includes making a plan and executing the plan.
- Commercial toys with switches and levers that cause bells to sound or animal figures to appear add a novelty to cause and effect learning and make it much more interesting .

Hearing Stimulation

- Encourage the baby to listen by providing interesting sound experiences. Words aren't the only noises, so bring the child's to barks, beeps, roars, tweets, purrs, music...you name it.
- Recorded music is extremely popular with this age group. Choose albums with easy songs in which the words are simple, well articulated, easy to understand, and the lyric lines are repeated often. The first time you play the music, say the words along with the singer to make the words easier for the child to understand. Later, as you listen together, add some little action like clapping, or sing a word or phrase at specific points in the song.
- Call the child's attention to noises around the house. When you hear a sound, tell the child what it is, and talk about it.

Visual Stimulation

- For some reason babies are fascinated with mirrors. You can use this. Because the child can by now wave, clap, and copycat some of your other movements, let's see if he can do it while looking in the mirror. This requires a little more cognitive skill than simple physical imitation, so it's a bit more challenging.

Sensory Stimulation

- Continue to play with toys of all different textures, shapes, sizes, and colors. This kind of sensory input is just as important now as in the past months; perhaps even more so now. Try playing with things like textured blocks of varying colors; plush teddys, dogs, and dolls in bright outfits; spongy balls of differing size and color; multi-colored cellophane; shiny or vivid pieces of fabric; colorful stacking rings. Talk about your play as you go.

Motor Development

- Now that the child can sit unsupported for long periods and has full free use of his or her hands, ball rolling is a natural. So let's make it a little more of a challenge. Roll a beach ball or any other kind of large, soft ball to the infant like you normally would, but for this exercise, roll it a little off to the side so it just misses him or her, or very lightly so it doesn't quite reach. Encourage the child to give chase. Needless to say, talk as you roll. Suitable words for this game are *push, ball, me, uh-oh!, go*, and the like.
- The range of imitated behaviors you and the child can share expands. They go from whole body movements---rolling across the floor together (you go first)---to facial exaggerations and sticking out your tongue. See if you can get the child to imitate mouth movements like licking, making raspberries, kissing, and blowing horns or whistles. And of course, don't forget to keep up classic imitation games like clapping, *Peek-a-boo, This little piggy, Pat-a-cake, So big*, and *Ahhh-Boo*.
- It's a great idea to let the child take more responsibility for dressing, undressing, and feeding if she or he shows an inclination. Typically, a ten-month-old can take off a hat, mittens, shoes, and socks; pull on a loose shirt or sweater after being helped with arm and head insertion; smooth the diaper tab; and eat with fingers and an infant spoon. Remember to stay

nearby and monitor. A good rule of thumb is to work together; letting the child do as much as he or she can.

- Obstacle courses can be fun, challenging, and great for muscles. Use big pillows and chair cushions. Put the child on one side of a big pillow as you sit on the other, and encourage her or him to come to you. He might go over or around. Try a simple maze on the floor.

Eleven-Month-Old

Communication

- Although you've searched for objects with the child before, you're now going to *ask* him to find them. The teaching emphasis shifts from finding objects to *responding to your question*.
- As you play with the child, chat about how the toys and objects are *used*. His early definitions will be based in part on the function of things. As the child begins to talk, he or she may name a particular food ("Nana") or actually tell you how it's used ("Eat").
- Up to this point, you've encouraged the child to replicate your actions and sounds. Now we make a qualitative leap. Try to get the child to imitate *very simple words*. Remember the building blocks: CV or VC syllable words, such as *hi, go, out, eat, up, toy, see, ma, da [dad], hi, me, tea, shoe, bye, ear*, etc, are the easiest for 11-month-olds. Also at this age words only make sense in the appropriate context. Asking the child to say "Toy" when there's not one around will only confuse him or her.

Cognitive Development

- Let the child expand exploration to include safe new items, and the house and yard. Exploring is the way in which we find out about our world. Baby-proof the environment first, and then let the child look under tables and into boxes, open baby-friendly drawers or cupboards, taste new varieties of fruits and vegetables, and touch different texture surfaces. If you provide a simple running commentary it's even better.

Hearing Stimulation

- Infants love music for its rhythmic, repetitive beat and the shared interactions associated with it. So continue to play music but ask for a little more sound and action participation from the child. There are lots of repetitive actions he or she can do at this age that will help keep the "dancing" interesting.

Visual Stimulation

- It's never too early to begin sharing books. Now you can move from single object pictures to bright interactive picture books that contain pictures of *more than one object*, and that may even have textures like fake fur or spongy material added to enhance your little reader's sensory experience. Books about animals and transportation are big winners. You don't have to actually read yet. It's really more about the concept of reading and using the book as an interactive tool. The pictures serve as a vehicle for introducing language into conversation. Have a little chat about what you see on the page, and, of course, make it fun.

Sensory Stimulation

- Bubbles fascinate young children, are terrific fun, and can be used for sensory, motor and cognitive stimulation. Most children this age don't have the breath control to blow bubbles, so hold the child's hand while you wand bubbles together. As always, accompany this with words, such as *wet, up, go, big, all gone*. You can find "bubble stuff" at most toy stores, or you can make your own solution simply by mixing...

1 cup water

¼ cup dishwashing liquid

1 teaspoon of sugar for longer lasting bubbles.

Motor Development

- Encourage the child to throw soft objects like stuffed animals to you, then retrieve them and give them back to him, while talking about what you're doing. Say, "*Throw Mommy teddy.*" Then "*Good throw, Sammy. (pause) Sammy strong!*"
- Dumping and filling and dumping again fascinates most 11-month-olds. Noise can enhance this activity, as in dropping clothespins or wooden blocks into a coffee can or cardboard oatmeal carton, then dumping them out, and refilling. This also presents an excellent opportunity for you to use words like *in, out, over, can, and on*, as well the names of the items dropped and dumped.
- This is the perfect time to incorporate the classic "*Do As I'm Doing*," song into your baby activity repertoire. In this simple version, say with pleasing lilt in your voice, "*Do as I do, follow, follow me, do as I do, follow, follow me (pause), ----X.*" Insert some physical action in the place of the X.
- *Peek-a-boo* and *So Big* are favorite games at this age, but a more mature child can fully participate.

Twelve-Month-Old Communication

- Twelve-month olds love playing *dress-up* with different hats. Put on different ones, then wave and say, "*Hello*" to each other. Play by a mirror so the child has added stimulation.
- Create very simple stories the child as the main character, incorporating familiar environments and routines, and recent experiences. The story is interactive and should allow the child to participate. You can use a book with relevant pictures.
- Ask the child to say particular words using "*Say X.*" Don't overdo it. A few other reminders:
 - Ask for words only in contexts where the words are appropriate, so they makes sense to the child.
 - Only request words that refer to things that are visually or audibly present. Pick words that the child has already said or that contain sounds the child can say.
 - Respond in a conversational way.
 - Vary the way you make your request ("*Say X,*" "*Tell me X*" or say the word then "*What's this?,*" as in "*Teddy. What's this?*")
 - Only ask for words one at a time.
- Explore your bodies, supplying words for all the easy-to-say, obvious body parts, and encourage the child to repeat the words after you. Because the child can't see his or her own face, use a mirror or use your face when you point out and name the parts.

Cognitive Development

- Using one item to represent another is called *symbolic play*. Encourage symbolic play with a feast with pretend food. Use dishes with your imaginary menu. And talk as if it's a real meal!
- At this stage in children's cognitive development, they should already be able to find objects that they've watched you hide, and recognize them when found. Hide a tasty treat under a paper or plastic cup---use clear plastic until the child gets the idea---and ask him or her to find it. Now also ask him or her to find things that he or she didn't see you hide.
- Take the child to a petting zoo or airport to experience different people and places.

Hearing Stimulation

- Try playing music. Sing your own renditions of popular baby songs and personalize them for the child. Repeat the words over and over again so the child can learn them with the music. *Marry had a Little Lamb* could become *Little Tony, Sing and dance.*

Visual Stimulation

- At this point in development, the child will become increasingly interested in children's books. Add more to this experience with interaction and lots of give-and-take conversations. Use books as a vehicle to share topics suggested in the pictures.

Sensory Stimulation

- Baths are a great place for babies to explore and learn. Play and talk with the child about things that float and don't, and discuss the things the child feels and sees.

Motor Stimulation

- As the child matures, fine motor development becomes increasingly important. Introduce toys with small switches, dials, and slides that the child can move and manipulate, such as bead frame toys.

Talking with Children: 13-15 months

- Continue to encourage talking and comprehension. Discuss things in your immediate environment that the child can see, feel, smell, and hear. Remember to speak slowly, clearly, and simply.
- Treat the child as a participant and conversational partner, not just an observer. Take turns and always give the child a chance to talk after you say something.
- Teach the child new words by saying them and asking her to say them after you but don't overdo it. Try to pick words that incorporate sounds the child already makes.
- Expand the child's action verb vocabulary by having her or him act out the actions named.
- Pull toys out, name them, then play as you talk about them.
- Participate in shared reading and talk about the pictures in a way that helps the child connect the images to the things in the environment they represent.

Stimulation

Thirteen-Month-Old

Communication

- Although, the child to talk to someone she or he can't see, lured her or him into phone-chat by making the other person visible using a cell phone or an extension of your landline while the child uses another phone in the same room. If the child makes sounds, have the phone partner slip out of sight to see if the child continues.
- Continue to play dress up with hats and add other accessories like gloves and scarves. Imitating each other in front of a mirror adds another dimension along with saying words.
- Use the photos in creative ways to elicit language. Play peek-a-boo with photos glued to paper plates or thick cardboard. After showing the child a quick flash of the photo, flip it around to the blank side ask who's on the other side. Get excited when you see who it is.
- Use directions to help the child complete routine tasks like dressing and eating. Don't be too bossy' keep it fun.
- Turn whatever you're doing into a song. It's an excellent way for babies to hear a word over and over in the appropriate situation. We've done similar activities before, but now *context and real words are key*. It's important for the child to hear repetitions of words in relevant situations. Try adapting some classic child tunes, such as *Are you sleeping? (Frere Jacques)*, *Here we go 'round the mulberry bush*, *London Bridge*, or *Twinkle, twinkle, little star*. This is a great way to introduce new words and phrases in context, and to let the child hear them over and over again without being bored or overwhelmed. Repetition is critical for learning.

Cognitive Development

- Continue exploring new and different situations that challenge understanding and problem solving ability, such as opening containers, finding surprises under furniture, and looking into storage closets. As the child explores, supply appropriate words for new things. Be consistent in your names and descriptions.

Hearing Stimulation

- As you venture out together, name noises that the child hears. When you have the chance turn noises on or off, such as the vacuum cleaner or hairdryer. Be sure to warn the child what she or he is about to hear before you turn it on. That gives the child a chance to anticipate the sound.

Visual Stimulation

- Pop-ups and other kinds of toys that surprise are fun and great for visual memory and helping the child learn to anticipate, plan, and problem solve. Ask the child, “*Where’s X?*” and when the child guesses have X pop up and play.

Sensory Stimulation

- Finger paint with different flavors of yogurt on a high chair or wheelchair tray. Different flavors vary enough in color to make for interesting art, finger licking, and conversation. Use new descriptive words, such as *yummy, slippery, gooey, smooth, sticky, icky, and tasty*.

Motor Development

- Introduce toys that require different muscle movements, such as pushing, pulling, sorting and nesting, building and destructing, and rolling that are ideal for gross and fine motor development. The variety gives you plenty to talk about. Reintroduce banging on pots and pans for the child’s improved motor skills.
- If the child is walking, aid this development by helping her or him practice turning and stepping over *small* obstacles like a wooden spoon or hose. Keep the obstacles close to the ground and hold the child’s hand. Make it a game and have fun.

Fourteen-Month-Old

Communication

- Have the child perform pretend actions with a favorite teddy bear or doll as the two of you sing about. Use a familiar melody.
- Using the song, “*Have you ever seen a lassie,*” (*Have you ever seen a lassie, a lassie, a lassie; Have you ever seen a lassie go this way and that?*) add variations as in *Did you ever see a kitty sleeping in a hat?* Or *Did you ever kiss a fishy while in the bathtub?* Sing the last line as a question, and talk about how silly the words are.
- You will probably be getting a lot of *no*’s from the child. The trick is not to take them personally, but respond to them as serious communication attempts. If you continue to get constant negative responses, offer choices. If the child refuses both, then simply move on to the next activity. I believe in real consequences. A consequence of saying “*No*” to *everything* is that you don’t get *anything*. It’s also good to have someone else model saying “*Yes*” and receiving a treat.
- Whenever you and the child are reading or playing with toy animals, be sure to include the appropriate proper animal noises. Ask the child, “*What does a cow say?*” or “*A doggy says...?*” Because the child can’t ask these questions of you, consider pointing to the pictures or toys as a cue for you to make sounds.
- Ask *what* and *where* type questions. The child should understand both at this point, and you’re teaching names of things and locations, two categories of words that will be useful later when the child is able to speak in longer phrases. Since she’s going to try to repeat the name of whatever object you ask for, make sure you request things with names that the child

can pronounce. Also encourage the child to ask *what* and *where* questions by showing various objects or by hiding things or pretending not to know where an object is so the child has to ask the location. If the child doesn't ask, have someone else model a question or answer with the wrong location and hopefully the child will ask again.

Cognitive Development

- Let the child help with routine chores, such as cooking (more mixing than actual cooking), cleaning, washing dishes and laundry and gardening. Participation now boosts the ability to interpret and tell stories by building event sequences in the child's mind.

Hearing Stimulation

- Here are some listening activities that will boost vocabulary and language growth:
 - During meals, dressing, play, or bathing, give simple directions that the child can easily.
 - Allow the child to eavesdrop on the phone and encourage her or him to say "Hi" and "Bye."
 - Play "Hide and seek" and encourage the child to follow your voice to find you.
 - Hide a squeaky toy within easy reach, squeeze it, act surprised at the noise, and ask the child "Where's X?" Talk about both the toy *and the hunt* as you and the child search.
 - Sing simple action songs as the child participates.
 - Every once in awhile name something totally absurd so the child can correct you with "No!" and you both laugh.

Visual Stimulation

- Encourage the child can look at brightly colored picture books with limited text by himself or herself for short periods of time. Comment when the child looks up to share. At only fourteen-months, little readers do best with books that have tear-resistant pages.

Sensory Stimulation

- We've done sensory stimulation activities before, but now we will add language and more variety. Describe the tastes and name the foods as you and the child sample such things as raisins, and other soft dried; juices; pieces of crackers, pretzels, or cookies; small cut-up pieces baloney, hotdogs or chicken nuggets; canned fruit or small peeled pieces of apples, pears, peaches or plums; dry cereal; small chunks of cheese; fruit bars and the like.

Motor Development

- Toddlers love walking, running, climbing, and crawling. While keeping an eye on the child, try the playground, especially if it has a toddler section with tunnels and bridges for walking and climbing.
- Buy a large, plastic, children's crawl space plus slide or make your own tunnels from old boxes taped together.
- Remember to add language such as *in, on, out, up, down, go, run, crawl, slide, box*.
- Try two-part verbal requests such as "*touch ear, then touch nose*." Do the actions first and then ask the child to follow. Within a month or two, the child will be able to follow two-step commands without your actions to imitate.

Fifteen-Month-Old

Communication

- At this age, children understand limited emotions such as sad, hungry, and tired. As you play with dolls, action figures, and puppets together, talk about how they act, look, and *feel*. Join in with your own facial expressions. *Everybody has Feelings*, by Charles Avery includes photographs of different emotions on people's faces too.

- Finger plays are fun for kids, great for language learning opportunities and fine motor skills, and extremely portable. The important thing is participating not getting it all correct.
- We've used songs before to introduce the child to new words. Now, at fifteen-months, it's the child's turn to join in to a small degree. Use repetitive children's songs and adapt them to things the child knows.

Cognitive Development

- The child has the ability to anticipate familiar games and routines, so deliberately make a mistake, then overreact as if totally surprised. The child should find this hilarious. Afterwards, talk about your "mistake."

Hearing Stimulation

- You've talked about natural sounds with the child before, so now you can begin to ask the child to identify them for *you*. You can even use record environmental sounds.

Visual Stimulation

- The child is gaining the ability to solve problems involving shapes, so buy some shape-fitting toys. The child will need some physical assistance at first until he or she gets the idea.

Sensory Stimulation

- At this age, spreading liquids around is great fun. Fill a bucket with warm water, give the child a nice soft sponge, and ask her "*what should we clean?*" Then let the child use the sponge to wash different objects. The warm water, non-toxic suds, and soft-textured sponge provide a nice sensory experience.
- Fruits offer a huge variety of tastes and textures and they're healthy. Use your blender or juicer and make some mixed fruit drinks with the child. Talk while you concoct.
- Playing with dough is excellent sensory stimulation, ideal for strengthening hand and arm muscles, and also great fun. Dr. Bob's Edible Dough Recipe is 1 cup smooth peanut butter, soy butter or another nut butter (if you're concerned about peanut allergies); 1 cup honey; and 1 ½ cup powdered milk. Mix it up, dump it out, and let the play begin...and don't forget to take a nibble.

Motor Stimulation

- Forget the way you learned *Simon Says* and for now just say *Simon Says* or *Mommy* or *Anybody Else Says* every time. Here are a few possibilities: *Brush teeth, clap hands, close X, color X, comb/brush hair, come here, dance, drink X, drop X, eat X, give X, go to X, hold hands, hold X, hug X, jump, kick ball, kiss X, lie down, look at X, look in X, open X, pick up X, point to X, pour X, push/pull X, put X in, put on X, read book, roll ball, run, sit down, stand up, stop/go, take X, throw ball, tickle X, touch X, turn around, and turn on X* (child toy). With specific toys, you could say *listen radio, mow/cut grass, sweep floor, vacuum rug, and wash dishes*.
- Scribbling with a big fat crayon or washable, non-toxic marker is wonderful for fine motor and small muscle development. Be sure to supervise this one. Hold marker caps to prevent possible ingesting.

Talking with Children: 16-18 months

- Model two-word phrases in context as you describe events and talk about emotions and actions. Repeat yourself so that the child has a couple of chances to hear the word combination, and vary your language slightly.
- Continue to provide names for all the things that are of interest to the child, especially when the child asks "*Wassat?*" Explore objects with the child and talk about them.
- Sing "favorite" songs and adapt them to allow the child to fill in a missing word or two.

- On a walk, collect “treasures,” such as stones, leaves, twigs, flowers, or other nature items—most children are fascinated by small things in nature. Talk about each one as you add it to your collection. Later, use the items to remind the child and share a conversation about it.
- As the child talks more, there is less need for gesture unless they expand the utterance. For example, pointing to boy and saying run is a precursor to “Boy run” later on.
- When serving a snack, only give the child a small amount and see if he or she will request more. If the child does, give it along with lots of praise for asking. If the child seems to want more but doesn’t ask you, ask what he or she wants. If the child still doesn’t respond, ask him to “Say ‘More’.” Again, don’t overdo it.

Stimulation

Sixteen-Month-Old

Communication

- Incorporate environmental noises into play and encourage the child to imitate animal noises, car horns, sneezing, coughing, airplanes, trains, and the like. Mimicry requires hearing discrimination.
- Introduce educational toys that are touch and talk. At this point in development, the best ones for language growth are a voice describing a picture, because it provides a context for the words the child hears. Avoid talking toys that just chatter away.
- Ask the child to show you how to do something as in “Show me how you X,” but expand on the action verbs the child already knows by including longer, more specific directions as in “Show me how you brush your teeth” or “Show me how you eat ice cream cone.” If the child is already using a few action words, let him or her be the one to give you a command.
- Have the child name body parts as you point to them. With increasing memory for words, the child will be able to make the shift from imitating to naming things. If the child doesn’t seem to know what to do, demonstrate first.

Cognitive Development

- Have the child hide, then you say “*Where are you?*” The child probably won’t grasp the rules, so you might have him hide with an adult or older child (in a very safe place). Make this a real game.
- Wind-up toys run down and electronic toys can be stopped. When that happens, encourage initiating verbal communication to restart it. In a slight variation, you could put a non-operational toy in front of the child and wait.

Hearing Stimulation

- The child can now search for you and for objects without seeing them hidden. Hide and make animal noises as the child searches for you. When the child finds you, pretend to be the animal and ask him or her to join you in sound making.

Visual Stimulation

- Make a scrapbook especially for the child and fill it with favorite objects, pictures, and photographs. Books are always good for visual stimulation and a wonderful source of conversations.

Sensory Stimulation

- At this age, bubble blowing, although we did it before, is an endless source of wonder. It’s good for breath control and provides visual and tactile stimulation. If the child lacks the control needed to blow, demonstrate by blowing on her or his arm or get next to the child and assist in blowing.

Motor Stimulation

- Stacking blocks, boxes, and rings is still enjoyable for most toddlers, and an excellent way to strengthen fine motor muscles in the hands and fingers. Of course, knocking over the stack is the most fun.
- Pouring things from one container to another is a fascinating thing, so let the child play with containers and water in the tub or at the sink. Hearing phrases such as *wash cup, pour water, or find bowl* is perfect.
- Push and pull toys are excellent for strengthening the child's muscles for walking. Mental development occurs as the child navigates around the household or outdoor obstacles.

Seventeen-Month-Old

Communication

- Cut bread into shapes using a cookie cutter, and then you and the child can spread peanut butter, marshmallow fluff, or jam, on each shape, make faces with raisins, craisins (dried cranberries), chocolate chips, or peanuts. Try for facial expressions of different emotions. Talk about the process and the emotions.
- Give the child a chance to create funny sounding voices. Show him or her how to talk through a paper towel tube or a hose, and then take turns doing it with him. Try recording your "tube-talk" and playing it back.
- Pile up some things that clearly belong to certain people and then hold up one at a time, and say "Whose is this?" or "Whose hat?" This is a more advanced version of the "*what's this*" name game.
- Try variations on *Mary had a Little Lamb* that express possession. Substitute other people and objects as in *Mommy has a little cat*. Try to get the child to join in in some way.
- Encourage the child to ask for assistance (*Help, Do, Open*) by presenting challenges that will require help. Try things like difficult buttons and jars that won't open and contain toddler-desirable and visible objects or treats.

Cognitive Development

- Have the child follow directions during your play together, such as "Brush the baby's hair" or *in* and *out* variations as in "Put teddy in the box."

Hearing Stimulation

- Turn on a playback device with one of the child's favorite very simple songs, and hide the machine. Now ask the child to find the song. As you search, sing the song together. Expect only occasional words.

Visual Stimulation

- Kids alike love to "draw" on sidewalks with big chunky soft chalk. If it's too cold, just wait a few months. This one will keep.

Sensory Stimulation

- Some children will hate this messy body painting activity, so steer clear. All you need is specially designed washable body paint available in most toy stores, a soft brush or two for painting, and an ordinary dish sponge for printing. Cut the sponge into small interesting shapes, dip into the paint, and press against the body.

Motor Stimulation

- At the playground or outside, let the child go, but follow close behind and name large motor actions, such as *run, throw, chase, bend, pick up, climb*, and the like. Also take advantage of the child's anticipation, as you get ready, and talk about what *will happen* in the park. Talking about things before, during, and after they happen is great. Remember to keep your utterances simple. Songs that allow pretend play are terrific fun. Examples include

pretending to be an animal in “Old MacDonald” or teapot in “I’m a Little Teapot” or doing an action in “This is the Way We....”

- Let the child feed himself or herself. It’s excellent motor skill practice and sure to be a little messy. By this age, the child should be able to use a spoon and a child’s cup, but eating with fingers works too.
- Hold the child’s hand as the child walks up the stairs, which is much easier than going down. When the child’s ready for the descent, make sure she or he kneels and goes backwards. Stay close by. Don’t let the child do it on her or his own!

Eighteen-Month-Old

Communication

- Draw a happy face on the child’s thumb with washable marker. Ask “Thumbkin” simple questions that can be answered with *yes* or *no* or a single word. The child can either verbally reply for his or her thumb or just have Thumbkin move his “head” to signal yes/no.
- Encourage the child to describe the world and to use location *names*. When looking out the window, say, “Mommy looking out window. What mommy see? I see” At the end, pause and let the child fill in the blank.
- While outside, “introduce” the child to inanimate objects. “Hello tree. I’m mommy. This is Clarita. Clarita, say ‘Hello tree’.” When Clarita “talks” to the tree (or other objects), reply with a funny tree-like voice.

Cognitive Development

- Imitation play with two actions in a sequence is a wonderful way to increase the child’s short-term memory. As you say certain action words and do the appropriate actions, try to get the child to imitate, as in *clap hands, then touch head*. As the child becomes better at remembering sequences, drop your actions and just use words.

Hearing Stimulation

- This is a way to introduce new words and to check on the child’s understanding. Ask the child to suggest an action with the question “What do?” or suggest an action that may be a new word, “We can jump. What do you want to do?” As you and the child perform the action, say the word over and over. Then suddenly shout “Stop!” All movement ceases and you begin again with another action.

Visual Stimulation

- Try to get the child to describe pictures in his favorite book. Although the child will most likely label rather than describe, you can help by linking words. For example, if the child says the words *Pooh* and *run*, you might respond, “Yes, Pooh runs” or “Pooh is running.”

Sensory Stimulation

- We first talked about dough play when the child was six-months-old, and the goal was to squish and feel the dough. Now we’re going to use it to tune-up fine-motor skills as the child spreads and rolls the dough. Try this new recipe. It’s safe if eaten and is good for about a week if kept in the fridge. If it’s a too stiff, add a bit more water or a few drops of food coloring. Dr. Bob’s Dough Play Recipe: 1 cup flour, 1 Tbsp oil, 1 cup water, ¼ cup salt, and 1 Tbsp cream of tartar. Mix all ingredients in a bowl and stir until blended smoothly.

Motor Stimulation

- Most children can run and kick now. Use a large, colorful, lightweight beach ball and run around with the child as you take turns kicking the ball.
- Eighteen-month-olds have a ball filling, pouring, dumping, and mixing with uncooked rice or dried beans. The child can use plastic spoons and small containers or a plastic plate or two

and a spoon for a pretend meal. Supervision is needed because of the danger of choking if ingested.

Talking with Children: Months 19 through 24

- Keep setting good language examples. Respond to the child's talking by expanding what the child says into longer more mature sentences. Don't correct her or him and keep it positive. The trick is to stay a step or two ahead developmentally.
- Take advantage of ALL language opportunities.
- Have real conversations. Talk about what you both are doing, comment on sounds you hear, ask questions and answer questions with enthusiasm. Reply to attempts to communicate and comment on what the child says.
- Sing simple repetitive social songs in which the child can participate or make up your own about everyday activities.
- Be silly. Call things by the wrong name. At first the child will probably be reticent, so ask, "*Is that right?*" Or "*Is that your nose?*", when it's really her ear.
- Provide opportunities for language growth. Encourage the child to stretch the uses of language by giving chances to make requests, ask questions, and describe things.

Stimulation

Nineteen and Twenty-Month-Olds

Communication

- Take photos during the day and put them together in a book. Talk about the photos as you look through the book together.
- Children at this age love to open things. Give the child a practice by directing her or him to put teddy *in* or *on* various things. Pick locations that are very obvious at first, where there can be no confusion whether *in* or *on* is the correct word. As the child understands the commands better, you can add more items and make the choices less obvious.
- Mount pictures on a "Lazy Susan," help the child spin it, then name and talk about the picture that lands the closest. Encourage naming objects and people in the picture and describing what's going on.
- Sing a variations on the song, *Oh where, oh where has my little dog gone* as you and the child search for previously hidden objects, i.e. *Oh where, oh, where has the duck gone?* Items don't even have to be hidden. Try it while sorting laundry.
- Imaginary play is always fun, so have make-believe dinners, tea parties, picnics, and shopping expeditions. Take a drive in an imaginary car and have a conversation about the imaginary things you see. No limit on possibilities. Imagining and pretending stretches his or her language.

Cognitive Development

- The child is beginning to notice similarities between objects. While doing laundry, ask the child to help you match colored socks and sort clothes. See if the child can pick her or his clothes out of the basket. There are some terrific sorting games available, such as matching animals, but the possibilities with objects in the child's everyday world are infinite.
- When the mail arrives, call out "*mail is here*", and allow the child to open junk mail while you open the other mail. You can also compose a letter to someone and have the child add a "drawing" or stickers. This activity helps the child gain even more understanding about the role of print.

Hearing Stimulation

- Toddlers love to dance with scarves, so give the child a few old ones and let her or him go. Join in to model moving.

Visual Stimulation

- Sit in the middle of a semi-darkened room with the child and shine a flashlight on various objects and talk about them. For example, you can sit in front of a mirror and highlight parts of the body with the flashlight and name each one together.

Sensory Stimulation

- Take turns initiating an action like a hug and passing it around a family circle. Other possibilities include a snuggle, touch, pat, kiss, butterfly kiss (brush the other person's cheek with a blinking eyelash), rub, tickle, gentle word, and so on.
- Take turns feeding each other, but the person being fed has his or her eyes closed or covered and has to guess what the food is. When you're the blindfolded one make absurd guesses that the child will find hilarious. Suggested taste-treats include raisins, yogurt, various fruits, oatmeal, peanut butter (assuming no allergy), lemonade, chocolate, cheese, Jell-O, pudding, marshmallow fluff, jellies, and the like.
- Create cards together for special occasions or for special people. You can paint, trace shapes, scribble, or glue on pictures, decorate with washable magic markers, or use stickers. Talk about the recipient and things the child likes, as well as what you're doing.
- Making bakeless cookies can provide lots of sensory stimulation.

Motor Development

- An indoor slide (with soft landing) or a slide-climber combo is perfect for this age.
- Take turns pretending to be various animals, by moving like they do. Possibilities include getting down on all fours like a dog, duck waddling, frog jumping, kangaroo hopping, chicken scratching, crab walking, stiff-legged elephant walking, ostrich strutting, and the seal flapping.
- At this age, the child will be into "nesting" and may have a favorite blanket or thing to drag around. Combine that with his or her continuing interest in building with blocks, and homemade 'caves' and simple mazes are a natural. Get some large foam or inflatable blocks in a toy store and let him or her build herself a little hideaway.

Twenty-One and Twenty-Two-Month-Olds

Communication

- By now you'll be bored with Old MacDonald and May and her lamb so jazz them up with new variations. Personalize them. Maybe Josie has a teddy bear instead.
- Have the child move brightly colored objects *in* and *out* of containers, grocery bags, toy chests, and the like. This is the next stage of the *in* and *on* exercises. We're adding another word, *out*.
- Strengthen the child's oral abilities with blowing activities, including blowing bubbles through a straw in clean bathtub water or in a cup of liquid; inflating a collapsed paper bag; and blowing feathers, leaves, dandelion or milkweed fluff, and other lightweight things.

Cognitive Development

- Use bath time to show the child – in the form of play – that some objects disappear *below* the water and others stay *on top*. Talk about *heavy* and *light*, *float*, *sink*, *go down*, *stay up*, *on top*, and *in water*.
- Cut a variety of different kinds of pictures from a magazine and help the child match them up. Start with different versions of the same thing, such as two different cars, hats, or dolls.

In a few months, you can match things that go together naturally, such as gloves and hands, hats and heads, shoes and feet, and glasses and eyes. Keep it very simple.

Hearing Stimulation

- The child can now follow an extremely simple, *very simple*, plot in a book. Books should still have lots of pictures, because they will still be the most interesting part.

Visual Stimulation

- The child will love simple, easy-to-handle wood-block, puzzles. Puzzles are wonderful for development of fine-motor coordination and cognitive skills too.

Sensory Stimulation

- Let the child tear very old, very thin cloth. Long, thin pieces can be used as scarves for dancing or to make magic wands when taped to a tight roll of newspaper.
- Another fun ripping treat is unwrapping gifts which can be more fun than the actual gift. Wrap up some stuff from the house like a snack or soap for a bath.
- Washable, non-toxic finger paints are fun and very sensual. Try bathtub finger paints on the tile and tub.
- Here's another messy one. In front of a mirror, decorate each other with edible materials, such as whipped cream, raisins, pudding, yogurt, and peanut butter. Then get a bath.

Motor Development

- Jumping will be very interesting and fun. Be very firm about where and when jumping is allowed. A bed, old mattress, or kiddie gym mat is ideal. Naturally, talking about the activity is essential.
- Community parks often have playgrounds that can offer hours of running, climbing, sliding, crawling, and digging. Many parks also have imaginative structures to use as a fortress or a house with bridges and towers, and some even have water play. Use your imagination and play.
- The child has the fine-motor skills to handle some small objects, so refrigerator magnets offer plenty of opportunity. Use five or six colorful magnets shaped like fruit, animals, people, or other familiar things, on the bottom of the fridge or on a cookie sheet and let the child go.
- At this age, many children love to spin. Limited spinning can strengthen coordination and balance. Add some music.

Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four-Month-Olds

Communication

- When you're talking on the phone with someone the child knows well, have the child talk into the receiver to pass along a very short message, or at least have him say "*Hi*" or "*Bye*." A quick little chat can strengthen communication and cognitive skills and stimulate long-term memory.
- Body tracing combines visual two-dimensional memory with listening memory, and is a terrific way to remember the names of different body parts.
- We've played *knock, knock* before, but now the child can be a much more active participant. Pretend to be someone else, which adds to the fun by adding silly hats or clothes. First, one of you knocks, and when the door is answered, the conversation begins.
- In a very limited fashion, the child can now begin to tell stories. Don't expect plots, character development, or even imaginative or pretend stories yet. The child's stories will be more about the things that make an impression, often outside the realm of everyday routines.

Cognitive Development

- Talk to the child about things the child has recently experienced, even if the events are relatively mundane. By “telling” these stories together you’re helping the child relate events thematically, which is a precursor to later storytelling and understanding.

Hearing Stimulation

- Sing songs and leave out words or actions and encourage the child to fill in the missing piece.

Visual Stimulation

- Sing a variation of *The bear* (substitute the child’s name) *went over the mountain* (or for a car ride, etc.) and have the child tell you what she or he sees.

Sensory Stimulation

- Continue with finger plays. As the child’s fine motor skills continue to develop, he or she will be able to do a lot more hand movement.
- As you help the child experience different sounds, tastes, and textures, ask her or him to tell you about the smells, tastes, or feels. Have the child close her or his eyes and smell or taste things that she or he knows the name of.
- Make an ever-popular pinecone bird feeder with a pinecone, peanut butter, birdseed, yarn. If the child gets messy, it’s fine. You can’t ruin this project. There are lots of opportunities for language while making the feeder and even more while you enjoy watching the birds feed.

Motor Stimulation

- Manipulating small, but safe, objects like those in toy pegboards, gear games, and toddler Legos, can enhance the child’s fine motor abilities and creativity while strengthening her hands for holding and squeezing.
- Batting colorful balloons back and forth with the child is great for hand-eye coordination as well as large-motor development and visual stimulation.
- When you’re at the beach or playing in puddles, show the child how to walk in your footprints. It’s terrific for large muscle development and co-ordination.

Taken from Owens, R.E. (2004). *Help The child Talk*. New York: Perigee.