

# Facilitator Guide

## Family Play and Toddler Development

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**Note to facilitator:**

The online training module "Family Play and Toddler Development" provides an excellent opportunity for home visitors who appreciate the flexibility of distance learning.

The pairing of the online training with a facilitated discussion (a proven more traditional method of education, whose efficacy is widely recognized) is innovative and provides for added value. The discussion allows for the sharing of personal experiences that help to illuminate the information in the module. It also provides opportunities to use the basic skills that are so essential for communication – “serve and return”, listening, facial expressions, vocal intonation, eye contact - things that are absent from today’s communication using technology. (In these days of emails, text messages, "selfies", and social media, it’s nice to meet face-to-face once in a while!) Also, laughter, stories, music, and role-plays as part of the discussion, injects an emotional component to the learning opportunity. These types of elements are incorporated into this Facilitator Guide.

Home visitors spend time with families that have an array of gifts, skills, cultures and many times challenges. The opportunity to share experiences, strategies, solutions, and successes with other family workers is much more powerful than completing the online education alone.

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This Guide provides some ideas for a trainer or supervisor wishing to facilitate a follow-up discussion with a group of home visitors who have completed the module. It assumes that the facilitator has also completed the module and is familiar with its contents and resources. You don't necessarily have to be a content expert to lead the activities and discussions. Feel free to adjust and add your own creative ideas.

We hope you enjoy the process!



## **Introduction/Icebreaker**

Have participants get into pairs. Ask them:

- *What are the moments where you find the most enjoyment in your role as a home visitor?*

Provide a few minutes for them to discuss with their partners.

Invite a few to share with the larger group.

Ask the whole group:

- *Why is it so important to enjoy what you do?*

Engage the group in a brief discussion based on a few responses.

Then introduce the module:

*This module focused on identifying what families enjoy and encouraging them to build play into their interactions with their toddlers. This approach is good for promoting positive relationships while also supporting their child's healthy development.*

## **Review Learning Objectives**

After having completed this module, home visitors should be able to:

1. Explain to families the ways that family play can enhance the social and emotional development of toddlers.
2. Articulate how family play promotes cognitive development and brain growth.
3. Share with families the ways that play can enhance the language development of toddlers.
4. Describe the importance of integrating movement into family play and how it can enhance all areas of development.

## Whole Group Discussion

In the module, home visitors were asked to consider activities that would be a good play match. This requires having some sense of what parents might enjoy themselves.

Prompt a conversation:

- *How do you learn about what families enjoy doing?*
- *What strategies do you use to help families find joy in parenting their toddler?*

Remind them that the module provides some strategies for assisting families in learning about their child's play preferences.

Hand out copies of the module document: "Guiding Questions to Support Parents' Observations of their Toddler's Play Preferences"

Encourage participants to utilize this resource in their planning.

## Review Vocabulary

In order to review some of the key concepts related to toddler development, use the Crossword Puzzle handout from the end of this guide. Have participants work with partners to complete it. Then ask if there are any terms that they found tricky and discuss those items in more detail to provide any needed clarification.

## Small Groups

Review what home visitors know about brain development in the first three years of life.

In small groups, have them generate a list as they recall what they've learned about brain development. Spend a few minutes reviewing some basic information about early brain development – possibly showing a video on the topic. Then have each group choose one concept from their list.

(Continued on next page.)

Provide poster paper and markers and invite each group to illustrate their chosen concept. Ask them to: *Imagine you are creating a billboard as part of a public awareness campaign about early brain development. Explain your concept in the simplest terms that would have the most impact.* (For example, Like the construction of a house, the building of the brain happens in a sequence, beginning with the foundation...)

Finally, have them identify some ways that family play can support that development.

### **Walk About**

Display the posters around the room and provide an opportunity for everyone to move around the space to view them. Invite them to talk with a partner about how they plan to convey this otherwise complex information to families.

### **Whole Group Discussion**

Even when families are aware of the importance of play, stress often impacts how playful they are. It's hard for families to be playful when they have significant concerns about housing, finances, or violence in their home or community - or when they have experienced trauma.

### **Small Groups**

Provide a visual of “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.” Have participants identify families’ experiences that may undermine getting their needs met at the lower levels. Have small groups discuss the following:

- *How might unmet physiological needs impede a family’s play with children?*
- *How about a need for safety?*
- *How can family play satisfy the human need for love and belonging?*

Research indicates that encouraging families who are under stress to play with their children can benefit the entire family - and can be especially helpful for a toddler's social and emotional development. Also, successfully navigating the risk that is attached to play helps to develop resilience. And resilience helps to manage stress.

Invite a few groups to share their insights.

## Whole Group

Prompt the group with a follow-up question:

- *What are some other reasons, families might not be very playful?*

Record their responses, making sure that culture is included in the discussion.

Ask home visitors to share some strategies they use to individualize for each family. There are various ways to incorporate playful interactions throughout a toddler's day. For example, turn-taking games can happen during daily routines as well as during play times.

## View Video

Use the video "Being Adaptable on a Home Visit" from the Module Part 4 Re-watch and use as a springboard for discussion.

## Four Corners

### Supporting Relationships and Social Development

Have participants count off by 4s. Divide them into four groups by walking to the corner of the room where their number is labeled. On each wall, have one of the following questions for them to read and talk about. Provide ample time for robust conversations. Then gather their attention and have each group report out.

- In what ways do you help families learn to set appropriate limits for toddlers? Generate some ideas for how to set age-appropriate limits within a play scenario.
- The toddler years can be challenging for parents as the child begins saying "no" and wanting to do things on his or her own. How do you help parents to understand this as a positive indication of the child's development of healthy autonomy rather than misbehavior?
- Fathers might be more likely to play actively ("roughhouse") with children than mothers do. Some mothers aren't fond of this type of play. How do you help families appreciate the benefits of various types of play?
- In the module, it is recommended that families use play as a vehicle for helping toddlers learn to express and regulate their emotions. How challenging is this for parents who themselves have difficulty with emotional regulation? What strategies have you used to help families learn how to deal with their emotions?

## Small Groups

In the module, “Dynamic Systems” is described as a theory that motor development, cognitive development, and social-emotional development are interconnected and part of a single system in the brain. Although the module focused on each of the developmental domains separately, each child’s development is integrated. Give the participants an opportunity to think about planning a home visit activity that addresses multiple domains.

Back at their tables, provide post-it notes and have each home visitor write down one of their favorite motor activities to do with toddlers. In small groups, have them each share their notes. Have each group choose a few of the activities and identify how many areas of development they address. Then challenge them to adapt one in some way to increase its benefits on development.

## Individual Reflection

### Mindfulness for Self-Care

According to the self-care article, it is useful “...simply making an effort to spend some time every day quieting our minds in order to create inner peace and better health. Mindfulness, as this kind of self-care is known, includes a variety of activities such as “mindful” breathing, stretches, and walks. The goal of mindfulness activities is to focus on one’s immediate experience and surroundings, not dwelling on stressful thoughts that may persist.”

Invite participants to think about how taking the time to regularly quiet their mind might benefit their own mental health and make their jobs less stressful and more enjoyable.

## Action Plan

Have participants develop an Action Plan. Ask them:

- *What 3 things from this session will you try with families in the next week?*
- *Also, Identify one way that you might be able to incorporate mindfulness into your daily routine at work.*

## Closing

Show the video “Introduction to Family Play with Toddlers” from Part 1 of the module. Commend home visitors for their efforts to encourage family play and for supporting children’s healthy development.

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## Additional topics for discussion

### Mathematical Development

Mathematical development is emphasized in the module. Why do they think this is so? Why is this type of learning important for this age, and how do they teach families to support it?

### Gender Differences in Play

Share this quote:

"One of the biggest things that we teach our parents and our dads is to have that connection with your child, even if it's spending ten minutes a day with him or her. Just playing, doing different activities, whether it's kicking a ball, or just play wrestling. That's their bonding time that they're spending together."

~Albert Roman, Family Support Provider

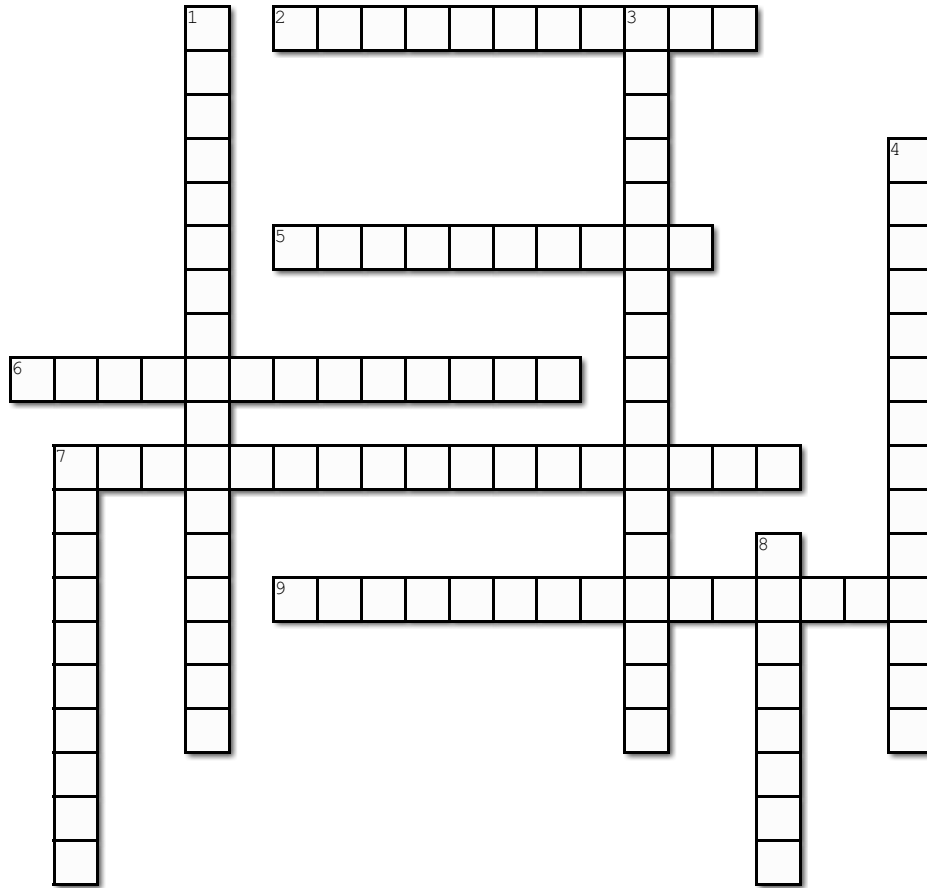
Ask participants what they do to encourage fathers to play with their toddlers.

*This document was created for the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood by the Center for Early Childhood Education at Eastern Connecticut State University with contributions from Doug Edwards. The document is meant to support facilitated discussion groups for home visitors who have completed the online learning module.*





## Toddler Development Crossword Puzzle



egocentric
working memory
social referencing
inhibitory control
symbolic thought
scaffolding

secure base
deferred imitation
joint attention
autonomy

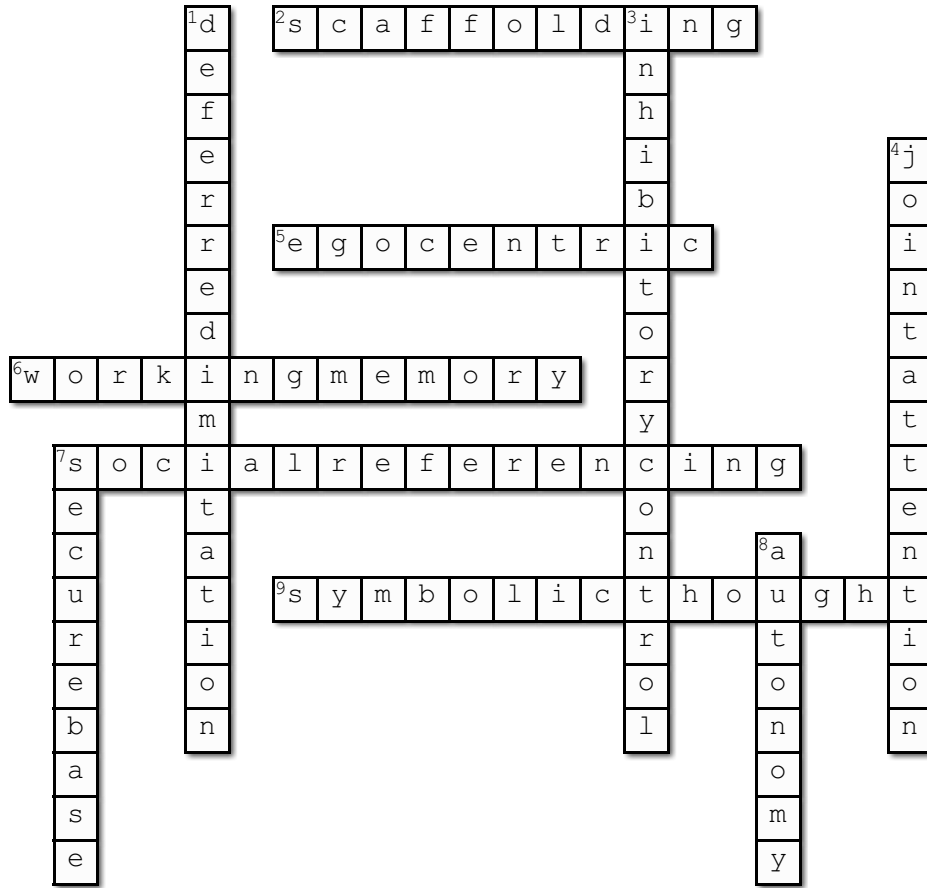
### **Across**

2. An interaction in which an adult or older child provides a young child with just the right amount of support needed.
5. A state in which children are unable to understand that there are other viewpoints besides their own.
6. The ability to maintain several ideas or pieces of information in one's head at the same time, so that they can be retrieved (*2 words*).
7. The ability to read the emotions of and cues from others to determine what feelings and behaviors are appropriate in a given (*2 words*).
9. The ability to use symbols (including objects) to stand for things that are not actually present (*2 words*).

### **Down**

1. When a child observes someone doing something and then performs the same action at a later time (*2 words*).
3. A brain-related ability to control one's impulses, pay attention, and avoid distractions (*2 words*).
4. The ability to pay attention to the same object or action that others are paying attention to (*2 words*).
7. A trusted adult whom toddlers can return to now and then for reassurance as they begin to explore their environment (*2 words*).
8. An emotional state in which toddlers desire to become independent from their caregivers.

## Answer Key - Toddler Development Crossword Puzzle



egocentric   working memory   social referencing   inhibitory control   symbolic thought   scaffolding  
 secure base   deferred imitation   joint attention   autonomy

### Across

2. An interaction in which an adult or older child provides a young child with just the right amount of support needed. **(scaffolding)**
5. A state in which children are unable to understand that there are other viewpoints besides their own. **(egocentric)**
6. The ability to maintain several ideas or pieces of information in one's head at the same time, so that they can be retrieved. **(working memory)**
7. The ability to read the emotions of and cues from others to determine what feelings and behaviors are appropriate. **(social referencing.)**
9. The ability to use symbols (including objects) to stand for things that are not actually present. **(symbolic thought)**

### Down

1. When a child observes someone doing something and then performs the same action at a later time. **(deferred imitation)**
3. A brain-related ability to control one's impulses, pay attention, and avoid distractions. **(inhibitory control)**
4. The ability to pay attention to the same object or action that others are paying attention to. **(joint attention)**
7. A trusted adult whom toddlers can return to now and then for reassurance as they begin to explore their environment. **(secure base)**
8. An emotional state in which toddlers desire to become independent from their caregivers. **(autonomy)**