

Month 5: Coordination Skills Toddler Activities

Exploring Lids

Choose a variety of containers with lids that your child can practice taking off and putting back on: plastic food and cosmetic containers, cleaned detergent bottles, cans and pots with knobbed lids. Tuck small surprises into the containers (ball, small car, cracker, piece of cheese or fruit, etc.) to encourage your child to look inside. When demonstrating the task of opening, remember to use two hands, one to stabilize the container and one to lift or twist the lid.

Paint Your World with Water

In order to paint your world you will need paintbrushes of various sizes, a bucket with water and a tree or wall surface. Help the child fill a bucket with a small amount of water, and have him carry it to the surface to be painted by placing both hands around the handle. Demonstrate painting on the tree or wall surface with the paintbrush in one hand while holding onto the bucket with the other hand. To fully cover the bark surface, have the child dab the water between the crevices.

To make this activity harder: Have your child paint lines, shapes, letters and numbers. Give the child two paintbrushes – one for each hand. First, have him use both hands to paint in the same direction, either up or down. Then try more difficult moves such as having one paintbrush go up and one go down, or paint circles in opposite directions.

Getting Down to Nuts & Bolts

Collect a variety of nuts and matching bolts in various sizes. You can use real nuts and bolts or to make it easier at first you can use the plastic nuts and bolts such as those made by Fisher Price, but remember if you start with the plastic ones once the child becomes proficient with the toys, progress to regular nuts and bolts. Demonstrate how to screw the nuts onto the bolts. Then separate the nuts into one pile and the bolts into another. Then have the child match up and screw together the nuts and bolts. To increase the challenge when you separate the nuts and bolts place them into containers with screw tops so the child has to unscrew the container to retrieve the pieces. You can also use nut and bolt boards.

Potato Porcupine

In order to make a potato porcupine you will need a potato and some toothpicks. To start demonstrate to your child how to make the quills of the pretend porcupine by sticking the toothpicks into the potato. Encourage your child to hold the potato still on the table surface with one hand and push a quill into the porcupine with the other hand, using the

pads of the index finger and thumb. Don't forget to get creative by adding eyes, nose and a mouth with other foods or items.

To make this activity easier: Make the potato softer, peel it or put it in the microwave for a few minutes.

To make this activity harder: Use a variety of vegetables or fruit for different amounts of resistance. Squash, cucumber, pear or kiwi will work.

If you don't want to use food, styrofoam balls and different shapes also works well.

Tear-it-up Designs

In order to create a tear-it-up design you will need construction paper and glue.

Demonstrate how to rip paper. Show your child how one hand moves away from you and one hand moves toward you when ripping. Have your child place his hands at the top of a medium sized piece of paper. Place your hands over his hands and demonstrate how to rip paper. Make sure your child is using the pads of the fingers and thumbs rather than a whole hand grasp when ripping. Continue ripping smaller and smaller pieces of paper. Glue the ripped pieces of paper onto a paper to create a design. Or have the child fill in a template to create a flower, pumpkin, letter, shape or number. You can use a variety of types of paper like tissue paper, newspaper or magazines. Thin paper is harder to control, and thick paper provides more resistance to the fingers and thumb. Challenge your child to tear out simple shapes such as circles or squares.

Edible Designs

This activity will help your toddler start the skill of stringing and lacing. Using circular cereal such as Cheerios and Fruit Loops demonstrate how to hold the string and then using the opposite hand to hold the cereal between the pad of their index finger and their thumb to place the cereal on the string. As a toddler string may be too difficult to hold while beading the cereal so try using pipe cleaners or uncooked spaghetti noodles. To encourage the use of the pad of their index finger and the pad of their thumb place the objects to be strung in egg cartons. By doing this it encourages the pincer grasp and doesn't allow the child to use a raking motion to pick up the small pieces from the table. You can also try to bead using different kinds of uncooked pasta noodles. Also remember we want activities to be fun and want success for the child so they don't get discouraged, so start off with easy things and progress to more difficult sizes to manipulate.

Lacing Through Swiss Cheese

What you will need: laundry basket, yarn, tape.

Place a laundry basket right-side-up on a table and tie one end of the yarn to a section of the laundry basket. Create a "long needle" by cutting 1 to 1 ½ inches of tape and placing it on the other end of the yarn. Demonstrate lacing the yarn through the different holes of the laundry basket, working from side-to-side and up-and-down. Encourage the child to use both hands, one to hold the basket or "swiss cheese" and the other to push and pull the yarn through the pretend "swiss cheese". Once the yarn is completely laced through the laundry basket, have the child try to figure out how to unlace the yarn without tangling it. You will most likely need to offer clues such as, "which hole should we put the yarn in: this one or that one?"

If the laundry basket is too cumbersome for your child, weave on paper dinner plates. Prepare the plate by punching holes through it. You can also use shorter yarn since it is easier to manage, and slowly increase the length as the child becomes more successful.

Freeze Frame

Have the children sit in a chair with their feet flat on the floor. The adult should be seated in a similar fashion across from the children. Tell the children, “Imitate my movements and when I stop moving, you also stop moving. It’s called ‘freezing.’ Move your body, focusing on exaggerated head and arm movements, in varying directions, and don’t forget to cross midline! Suddenly freeze in an awkward position. The children should also immediately freeze in the same position. You can easily turn this activity into a *Simon Says* game. Have the children assume a position when you say and they may not change to a new position until you say, ‘Simon Says’ to do so. Remember to cross midline as much as possible; for example touch your right hand to your left foot.

Tic-Tac-Toe

In this version of tic-tac-toe the child will be using finger paints and the paper will be placed on the wall. This could get messy (which children love!) so make sure you prep your area first, by placing some garbage bags on the wall before hanging the paper up and have the child wear a smock or old shirt. When placing the paper on the wall make sure it’s at the child’s eye level, so that the child need to reach up. Have the child seat (or keel) on the floor 90 degrees from the wall and sitting with the wall on their hand dominant side (right or left). Place the finger paints on their opposite side. So if there right is closest to the wall the paint would be placed on their left side. This way they have to reach across their body to dip their fingers in the paint. Now you are ready to start playing tic-tac-toe with the child. If they don’t want to play the game have them simply paint a picture with the same set-up.

Shopping for Groceries

Every child likes to pretend play and do grown-ups activities, just like grocery shopping. In advance of playing set out a variety of groceries out (plastic or real) at different heights to look just like a grocery store. Make sure the child has a grocery basket to collect the items. Tell the child to go shopping and fill the basket and make sure to bring it back to you so you can check them out. To make it more challenging give the child a list of groceries using simple words or pictures. Encourage the child to cross his body o reach, using both hands to stoop and recover groceries.

Something in My Pocket

In order to play make sure your child is wearing clothing with back pockets, and have small items that fit in those pockets. Place one item at a time in the child’s back pocket. You may say to the child, “Oops, something just jumped in your pocket! Can you get it out?” Continue until the child has removed then items, then switch to the other pocket. If you wish, you may alternate sides throughout instead. If your child doesn’t have back pockets just place stickers on the child’s clothing approximately where pockets or belt loops would be located. To make it easier make sure the pockets are bigger and to make it harder use smaller pockets.

If you have a group together, gather them in a circle with each child facing outward. Have the children pass an item, such as a ball, behind their backs, from one child to the next. You may choose to play hot potato to increase interest and speed. The children will pass the “potato” as quickly as possible while the music plays. The object is not to be the one holding the potato when the music stops.

Bubble Machine

To make a bubble machine you will need a manual eggbeater, a large bowl, dishwashing soap, and water. To start put about a tablespoon of dishwashing soap into the bowl. Fill the bowl two-thirds full of water. Place the bowl on the table with the eggbeater beside it. To use the eggbeater, ask the child to hold the stationary handle of the eggbeater with one hand and place it into the bowl. She should use the other hand to turn the rotary handle. The rotation of the eggbeater will make bubbles in the bowl. The faster it turns the more bubbles are made.

Modifications: Use a bowl of beans, flour, or rice. As the child turns the handle of the eggbeater, the items in the bowl will spin and jump around. Be careful this can get messy.

Wall Turns

You will need: two pieces of poster board or paper (2 X 3 feet), finger paints, paintbrush and be set up in the corner of the room. Place one piece of paper on each side of the wall in a corner. The middle of the paper should be at the child’s eye level. Use a paintbrush to paint the child’s palms with finger paint. Have the child stand with her back in the corner. Hold onto the child’s feet so that she does not move them. Tell the child to turn side to side and say, “Touch both hands on the paper when you turn. Keep going until the paint on your hands is gone. Great, now let’s add another colour!” Paint the child’s hands with another colour and continue the activity. When you are finished, the child will have two pictures filled with handprints.

Making Rainbows

To make a rainbow you will need a large sheet of paper and a variety of crayons. Have the child sit cross-legged on the paper near the bottom edge. Make an X on each side of the child near the edge of the paper; thus the children will be sitting on the paper with the Xs slightly behind them.

Let the children use crayons and/or markers to make rainbows by starting at one X, drawing half circles around the front of their bodies, and stopping at the other X. Allow the children to continue drawing the rainbow, making as many lines as they would like. While the children are making their arches, encourage them to keep one hand in their laps while drawing with the other. By doing this children will not lean on their unused hands.

Play Dough Fun

Whether you purchase play dough or make it yourself, kids love to play with it and it helps to promote coordination skills and hand strength.

Activities:

1. Use both hands to roll dough into a ball.
2. Use both hands to roll ball on table into a long thin “snake.”

3. Other things children can do: squishing, flattening with a rolling pin, using cookie cutters to make different shapes.
4. Roll into long, thin strips and cut with safety knife or scissors.
5. Roll these smaller pieces to create numbers or letters. Make your own name or initials.
6. Practice “cutting” using long strips of play dough.
7. Cut the dough using a knife and fork.

Playdough & Straws

It’s time to build, and to do so you will need playdough and straws cut to approximately 2” – 3” long. Have the child soften the playdough in two ways:

1. Roll clay between hands with palms flat and wrists in neutral.
2. Roll clay between thumb and 1st and 2nd fingers, keeping last two fingers curled into palm.

Join the straws using the balls of playdough. Form letters, numbers and shapes and let the child create! The playdough balls will form the corner joints of the structures.

Going on a Bear Hunt

Remember this old standby? It still does the job admirably to pass the time and to help children develop good bilateral coordination.

How to play Going on a Bear Hunt:

What you say	What you and your child do
“Let’s go on a bear hunt. Come with me.”	Sit in a circle – on the floor, etc.
“Let’s walk. Walk, walk, walk, walk, walk, walk.”	Drum your hands on your thighs, or “walk” your feet: left-right, left-right.
“Here we are in the tall grass. We’d better push the grass aside so we can pass through. Swish, swish, swish.”	Bring the backs of your hands together. Press them to the sides, as if pushing apart tall grasses.
“Uh-oh, here’s a river. Guess we have to swim. Swim, swim, swim.”	Make swimming motions: breaststroke, crawl, backstroke, butterfly, side stroke, doggy paddle.
“Let’s dry off. Shake, shake, shake.”	Shake your head, arms and legs to flick off water drops.
“Let’s look around. Do you see a bear anywhere? I don’t see one, do you?”	Bring your hands to your brow, like a sun visor, and look left and right.
“Oh, look, a big tree. Maybe we can see a bear from the treetop. Climb, climb, climb, climb.”	Make climbing-up-the-tree motions, left-right, left-right. Stretch your arms higher each time. At the top, stretch your neck and look around.
“See anything? No? Me, neither. Let’s go down again. Down, down, down.”	Begin with arms high. Lower them as you climb down.
“My goodness, another stream! Here is a rowboat. Oars, too. Come on, let’s get in and row. Row, row, row.”	Row your boat with two oars.
“We must drag this boat onto shore. Here’s towline for you. Pull, pull.”	Hand each child a pretend rope. Pull on your ropes to haul in the boat.

“Any bears in sight?”	Look around
“I don’t see any, either. We are in a muddy swamp. We’ll have to slog through it somehow. Squish, squish, squish.”	Lift your feet heavily, left-right, left-right, left-right, left-right and make a slurpy sound.
“Here’s a big mountain...and here’s a cave. Should we go in? Yes? Okay, but I’m a little scared. Are you?”	Shiver with pretend fear.
“Wow, it’s too dark in this cave to see. We’ll have to feel our way.	Grope in front with both hands, as if you’re feeling around in the dark.
“Hmm, what’s this? It’s big, and warm and furry...Yikes it’s bear! Come on, let’s run! Run, run, run.”	Drum your hands rapidly on your knees, or make running motions with your feet: left-right, left-right.
“Hurry! It’s after us! Let’s get through the swamp! Squish, squish. Here’s the boat. Let pull it to the river. Pull, pull. Let’s row. Row, row. Here’s the tree. Let’s climb up to see where the bear is after us. Climb, climb. Oh I see it! Let’s get down!”	Continue retracing your steps and repeating the appropriate motions.
“We’re home! Open the door! Slam the door! Run upstairs! Hide under the bed! Whew, we’re safe!...and I wasn’t scared at all, were you?”	Sigh with relief.

Clapping Bubbles

For a quick and easy bilateral coordination game, Clapping Bubbles is as good as it gets. You will need bubbles which you can buy or make by mixing 4 cups of water, ¼ cup light corn syrup, and 1 to 1 ½ cups of dishwashing liquid (let the mixture settle for several hours). Blow the bubbles in the child’s direction aiming high, low and side to side. Show the child how to bring hands together “clapping” to pop the bubbles.

Tearing Activities

Tearing is a bi-manual task that initially requires both hands to work simultaneously to achieve the desired outcome (tearing the shape out). The preferred hand completes the tearing action while the non-preferred hand provides stability or guidance to the paper. The following are examples of tearing activities, use these and then develop your own to work into your themes or curriculums.

1. Tear around the dotted perimeter and then around the shape.
2. Paper Jigsaw: Partners, or individually, each with a magazine page, tear her or his page into about 6-8 strips. Then each partner mixes up the strips and passes them to the other partner.
3. Bookmark: Each child has a piece of cardboard (25cm X 5cm), 2-3 colourful magazine pages, glue and a black marking pen. Children tear magazine pages into small shapes and glue onto their piece of cardboard. When the glue has dried, use the black marker to write their names, etc.

Sticking Ball

You will need masking tape to wad up and make a small ball out of. The ball should be at least 2 inches in diameter. On the outer most layer, wrap the tape so that the sticky side is facing out. Demonstrate placing the tape ball on your own hand and then pulling it off using your other hand. Then place the tape ball on your child's arm or hand and because the tape ball will stick to the child's arm or hand, he will reach across his body to remove it with his other hand.

To make this activity harder...

- Have your child follow simple directions such as, "Put the ball on your leg. Now put it on your arm."
- Put two sticky balls on the child. For, example, put one on each leg. Ask the child to take the balls off using both hands at the same time.
- Place a sticky ball on a body part of your child that is out of his sight, such as on the back of his arm or on his lower back. This encourages your child to feel with his body and not rely solely on what he can see.

Sticker Stick-Ons

This game is similar to sticking ball as it helps to develop the skill of crossing midline. In order to play this activity you will need a variety of small stickers, such as soft ones, puffy ones, and smelly ones. Place 5-10 stickers on a sheet of waxed paper. Let each child pick his own sheet of stickers and then randomly place the individual stickers up, down, and all around one of his arms. Have each child close his eyes and then feel, find, and remove the stickers one at a time, putting each one on his piece of waxed paper.

Sticker Pictures

To make a sticker picture each child will need a sheet of stickers and a sheet of paper. Now let the child be creative and create a picture using stickers. You may need to first demonstrate to the child how to peel the sticker using one hand to hold the sheet and using the index finger and thumb to take the stickers of the sticker sheet. Let the child do this on their own and provide only guidance, this is a fun way to have the children start using both hands together.

Snowball Fight

Everyone loves a snowball fight and as a bonus this one can help target bimanual coordination. You will need newspaper, cut into half sheets. Have the child take a half sheet of newspaper and crush it into a tight ball. Encourage him to squeeze and shape it with both hands, making sure to emphasize that he "make a tight ball so that the snowball doesn't fall apart." Have him make several snowballs. Position targets around the room and work on tossing the snowballs at them. Clean up the snowballs by having the child crawl on his hands and knees to scoop up the balls and place them in the recycling bin.

To make this activity easier...

- Use a less resistance paper such as tissue.
- Give the child smaller pieces of paper that require less squeezing.

To make this activity harder...

- Use a more resistant paper such as magazine paper.
- Give the child a whole sheet of newspaper for more resistance.
- Set up a moving target, such as a large rolling ball.

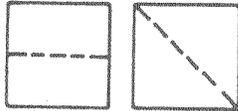
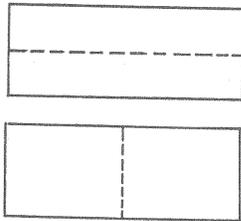
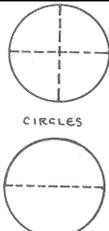
- Encourage the child to throw the snowball up in the air and catch it with one or both hands.

Folding

Folding is a bi-manual task that initially requires both hands to work simultaneously to achieve the spatial aspects (the fold). The preferred hand completes the creasing action while the non-preferred hand provides stability or guidance to the paper.

The following are progressive samples of folding activities.

Fold the following shapes:

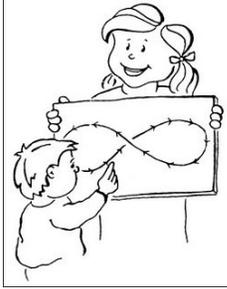
<p>Square: in half, diagonally</p>	 <p>SQUARES</p>
<p>Rectangle: length in half; width in half</p>	 <p>RECTANGLES</p>
<p>Circle: in half; in pie shapes</p>	 <p>CIRCLES</p>

Crossing Midline Exercises *(these activities were adapted from Brain Gym exercises developed by Paul E Dennison and Gail E Dennison)*

These activities can be done as a group or individually. Remember to also do these activity with the children so they have a model to follow.

Drawing 8's

With the children standing with one arm extended at shoulder level, have them “draw” a sideways 8, so it looks like an infinity sign. If this is too difficult for the child draw an infinity sign on a poster board and tape to the wall at shoulder level. Have the child stand far enough away that just their finger tip is on the wall and their arm is straight and held at shoulder level. Now the child can trace the 8. Make sure when you do this exercise you go both clockwise and counter clockwise and use both the right and left arm.



Cross in Front #1

With the children standing facing you with hands up and arms extended. Touch left knee while lifting it up with right hand meeting to touch at midline. Return to start and then touch right knee with right hand. Repeat 10 times. If you are noticing some children having difficulty patterning the activity it may help if you put stickers on one hand and the opposite knee so they can match the stickers.



Cross in Front #2

Have the children standing, facing you and arms up in the air. With this exercise they are going to bring their right hand to the inside of their left foot, return to start then touch their left hand to the inside of their right foot.. Lifting their foot up and bring their hand down to meet at midline. Repeat 10 times. If you are noticing some children having difficulty patterning the activity it may help if you put stickers on one hand and the opposite foot so they can match the stickers.

Cross in Front #3

This exercise starts as all the cross in front exercises. The goal of this exercise is to have the child touch their right elbow to their left knee, return to standing then have them touch their left elbow to their right knee. Repeat 10 times. If you are noticing some children having difficulty patterning the activity it may help if you put stickers on one elbow and the opposite knee so they can match the stickers.



Buttons in the Bank

You will need buttons and a shoebox to create the bank. Remember to choose larger buttons and to supervise your child with this activity since they will still want to put things in their mouths at this age. In the shoebox lid cut vertical and horizontal slits slightly large than the buttons. Have the child push the button through the slits as if putting money in a bank. Demonstrate and encourage the child to hold the box with the opposite hand that she's using to put the buttons in.

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