



Early Intervention Clearinghouse

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You Have Everything You Need: Using Household Items for Early Intervention

Children learn and develop through play, but does that mean you need to spend a lot of money on expensive toys? No. In fact, the best toys are often common household items. Young children learn best when they are in natural settings with the people and materials that are familiar to them. Early intervention providers may use this principle to help you choose materials already in your home, teach you how to use everyday objects to achieve your child's developmental goals, and engage your child in activities using their interests.

Remember a "toy" is just a tool to support your child's developmental goals and "play" is just a method we use to teach. You play an important role in your child's everyday experiences. You help your child grow stronger through play. Next, we share a list of common household items and related activities that you can use to support your child's development.

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ITEMS

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Empty Plastic Bottles

Have you tried bottle bowling? This is a fun activity that can work on your child's gross motor skills. First, fill several plastic bottles with the same amount of water. To make it colorful, add paint or food coloring into the water. Set the bottles up like bowling pins. Grab a ball and ask your child to knock the bottles down! In addition to building gross motor skills, you can also boost cognitive and communication development by asking your child to identify the colors in the bottles.



Muffin Tray

A muffin tray is not only for muffins. You can use the tray as a color matching game. Get a muffin tray, colorful plastic balls (use balls bigger than ping pong size to avoid choking hazards), and colored paper that matches the colors of the balls. Place the colored paper in the muffin tray and have your child match the right ball with the correct colored tray. You can also encourage your child to identify different colors. This activity builds both fine motor and cognitive skills.

Peeling a Clementine or Banana

A very simple and healthy way to work on your child's small muscles (e.g., finger strength, pincer grasp, bilateral coordination) is to have your child help peel their fruit (e.g., clementines, bananas). To make it easier, you can start to peel the fruit and then have your child finish.



Couch Cushions, Pillows, Cardboard Boxes, and Masking Tape

Do you want to work on your child's gross motor skills when it's cold or rainy? Gather couch cushions and pillows and arrange them in an obstacle course. If you have a large cardboard box, ask your child to crawl through it like a tunnel. Also, use masking tape to create lines on the floor and have your child to walk heel-to-toe on the line or jump over the line. The line can be straight or curvy. Then, join your child and have fun!



Grocery Items

Just get home from the grocery store? To build your child's vocabulary and language skills, have your child name the products or encourage your child to describe the color and size of the products as you unpack the bags. Meanwhile, you can also play a guessing game by giving them three to five clues. For example, you may say "This item is a fruit. It looks round and red. It tastes juicy and yummy." Then encourage your child to guess what it is.

With a little creativity, you can use household items to create fun games between you and your child. If you have more questions on how to use household items to address your child's developmental outcomes, talk to your service coordinator or early intervention providers.

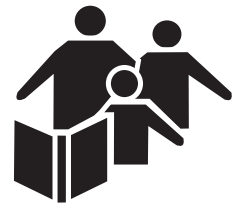
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Everyday Early Intervention: Couch Time

Many families enjoy spending time relaxing on the couch together. The couch can be a great place to sit together to talk, read, and play. Moments on the couch can also be times to work on early intervention outcomes. Here are some ideas to help you fit learning and development goals into everyday routines.



Climb a Couch Cushion Mountain

Stack two or three couch cushions or pillows and encourage your child to use his arms and legs to climb up the mountain. Reaching and climbing strengthens large muscles. As your child grows stronger, add another cushion to the stack for a bigger climb or encourage your toddler to build the stack.

Cruise and Play

Encourage the large muscle development of infants and toddlers that are not quite walking by encouraging them to cruise the lengths of the couch. Take the cushions off your couch and place favorite toys toward the back. This will encourage a child to pull herself up to stand and reach toward the back of the couch to get to the toys.

Build a Blanket Fort

Stretch a blanket or sheet between your couch cushions and chairs to create a blanket fort. Crawl in and out of the fort to work on large muscle development. Talk together about who is inside or outside the fort and how the blanket makes a little house. Using words such as *on*, *in*, *out*, and *under* builds children's spatial vocabulary and conceptual knowledge.

Snuggle and Read

Keep a basket of books near the couch so you always have something for story time. Reading to young children is essential for building their language skills and conceptual knowledge. Read favorite books again and again. Encourage your child to point to the pictures as you read by asking questions such as "Where is the brown doggy?"

 For more information, visit the Illinois Early Intervention Clearinghouse at <http://eiclearinghouse.org>

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois Department of Human Services, Bureau of Early Intervention.



New Items in the Clearinghouse

Outdoor Science Lab for Kids: 52 Family-Friendly Experiments for the Yard, Garden, Playground, and Park

Liz Lee Heinecke
Quarry Books, 2016
GE 115 .H45 2016



Breathe, Mama, Breathe: 5-Minute Mindfulness for Busy Moms

Shonda Moralis
The Experiment, 2017
BF 311 .M6297 2017
Also available as an **eBook**

Retro Toddler: More Than 100 Old-School Activities to Boost Development

Anne H. Zachary
American Academy of Pediatrics
HQ 774.5 .Z33 2018

Learning Is in Bloom: Cultivating Outdoor Experiences

Ruth A. Wilson
Gryphon House, 2016
LB1139.5 .S35 W549 2016



The Design of Childhood: How the Material World Shapes Independent Kids

Alexandra Lange
Bloomsbury, 2018
GV 425 .L36 2018
Also available as an **eBook**

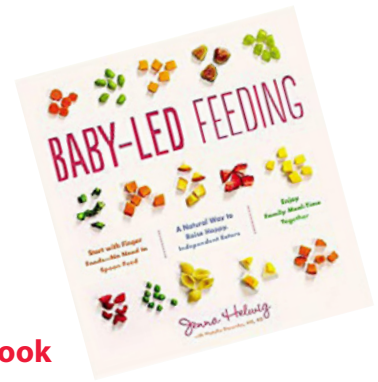
Little Walks, Big Adventures: 50+ Ideas for Exploring With Toddlers

Erin Buhr
Gryphon House, 2018
HQ 782 .B867 2018
Also available as an **eBook**



Baby-Led Feeding: A Natural Way to Raise Happy, Independent Eaters

Jenna Helwig
Houghton Mifflin
Harcourt, 2018
WS 130 .H3699 2018
Also available as an **eBook**



Be the One for Kids: You Have the Power to Change the Life of a Child

Ryan Sheehy
Dave Burgess Consulting, 2018
LB 1033 .S47 2018

The Emotional Life of the Toddler

Alicia F. Lieberman
Simon & Schuster, 2018
HQ 774.5 .L54 2018
Also available as an **eBook**

We're All Wonders

R.J. Palacio
Alfred A. Knopf, 2017
PZ 7 .P17256we 2017



Sensorimotor Interventions: Using Movement to Improve Overall Body Function

Cara Koscinski
Sensory World, 2017
QP 454 .S46 2017

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What Is a Developmental Therapist?

In early intervention, you may have several therapists or specialists working with your child and family. One of those team members may be a developmental therapist. This team member is uniquely qualified to consider the whole child and the impact of a child's development on the family.

A developmental therapist holds a degree in early childhood education or a related field and has also completed educational experiences or training in the following areas: typical and atypical child development, collaboration with families, intervention strategies, and assessment. The developmental therapist will view your child's overall development and enable families to help their children in areas of strengths and concerns. This might be done by

- helping to provide accommodations within different environments,
- recommending ways to use common household items to help achieve outcomes, and
- being a sounding board for a family's concerns.

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The developmental therapist participates in the assessment process, assists in the development of the individualized family service plan (IFSP), and communicates services and strategies to all team members.

The developmental therapist also works with families to support the parent/child relationship, to help families find new ways to support their child's development, and to help the family understand their rights and responsibilities as the child transitions out of early intervention. In addition, the developmental therapist can support the family in learn-

ing to observe and interpret their child's behavior and help to identify resources that might be helpful to families.

The developmental therapist works with a child and family in the home or another place that the child visits often (e.g., child care center). At each visit, the developmental therapist will review the child's progress with the family or provider, discuss any new concerns or updates, and then model play interactions with the child. Upon completion of the visit, the developmental therapist reviews the day's activities and plans for the next session.

A developmental therapist is an important member of the EI team. By looking at a child's overall development, the developmental therapist can enable a family to support their child in all areas of development.

What Is Bagless Early Intervention?

Early intervention providers, including developmental therapists, speech therapists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists, use bagless intervention to help improve a parent's competence and confidence in supporting their children's development in natural environments. Typically, early intervention service providers have brought bags of toys with them into the family home to address a child's skills and goals. However, this approach may not always be appropriate. Instead, when service providers use toys or everyday items already available in a family's home, parents may participate more in early intervention and engage in similar activities with the child even when the service provider is not present.

Bagless intervention encourages providers to focus on routines, activities, and materials that are familiar to the child when addressing IFSP outcomes. This allows the caregiver to observe and participate in an activity that happens naturally within the child's context. For example, a provider might focus on fine motor skills during a mealtime interaction. A toddler can peel a clementine or pick grapes off the vine. The provider can also observe the utensils that the family uses and determine what modifications are necessary, if any. A narrow handle on a spoon can be adapted by securing a sponge hair roller or a small stress ball around the handle.

Bagless intervention is flexible, individualized, and adaptable. The parent-child interaction continues long after the provider has left the home because the toys/supplies used during the visit are still with the child!

Written in collaboration with the family development early intervention team of the Military Families Learning Network (MFLN).

For more information, visit <https://go.illinois.edu/bagless>

Illinois Early Intervention Clearinghouse

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