



Birmingham Early Years Network

FORWARD TOGETHER FOR THE CHILDREN OF BIRMINGHAM



Rhymes and finger plays booklet

produced in partnership with



This booklet has been produced as a starting point for professional discussion.

Rhymes and fingerplays are fun and motivating for children and adults.

Prof Kathryn Hirsh-Pasek's research indicates that there are 6 principles of language development and guides practitioners as to how we can support them.

Apply these principles when planning for rhymes and fingerplays with your children.

1

Children learn what they hear most

Ensure that children, individually and in small groups receive rich language input through conversations, stories, and songs.

2

Children learn words for things and events that interest them.

Pay attention to what children are interested in, pick rhymes relevant to their lives and interests.

3

Interactive and responsive environments support language learning.

Talk with children, rather than at them, wait for their reaction and expand on what they say. Give quality time for rhymes and finger plays.

4

Children learn best in meaningful contexts

Make sure you support learning in context, use props, pictures and resources.

5

Children need to learn diverse examples of words and language structures.

Rhymes and finger plays offer children a chance to hear new words and language structures.

6

Vocabulary and grammatical development are reciprocal processes.

Rhymes and finger plays can introduce children to new vocabulary within a motivating context.



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Rhymes and finger plays are an important part of early childhood education. They are **fun** and support children's **learning and development** in many areas including:

Communication and language

You will be supporting them to learn to talk as they become familiar with the words and rhythm, and begin to imitate the sounds you make, or join in with the words. They will learn new words in a meaningful and fun context.

Physical development

You will be supporting them to develop muscle control and coordination as you help them to follow the actions in rhymes.

Literacy

You will be supporting early reading and writing skills as they develop phonological awareness by hearing sounds in the rhymes.

Mathematics

You will be supporting them to learn to count, add and subtract numbers when you sing number rhymes.

Personal, social and emotional development

You will be building strong positive relationships through daily singing games and rhymes with individuals and small groups. They promote connectedness and support the well-being of both children and practitioners.



Research has shown that babies respond to the beat and rhythm of language even before they are born. They are in tune with their mother's heartbeat from an early stage, so a steady beat and the rhythm of songs and rhymes can be very soothing for them.

Songs and rhymes generally have a higher pitch that catches a baby's attention better than regular speech.

We also tend to use a slower pace and lots of repetition which makes it easier for children to hear the individual sounds that make up words. Even while having fun, children's brains are working hard.

When you share a song or rhyme with a child, they are learning lots of the building blocks for communication. You will be making eye contact, creating opportunities for turn-taking, helping them to listen and pay attention, and of course, understand language too.

Rhyming helps children start to work out how sounds are put together to create words, which helps with speech development and with reading as a child gets older.

Rhythm can help children hear the syllable structure of words as well as separating words in sentences.

Lots of the best rhymes have actions too. These are useful for us all when trying to remember the words, but also encourage children's motor skills and coordination.



Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the awareness of the sounds in spoken words and the ability to manipulate these sounds. The ability to hear sounds and to discriminate between them is a key factor in understanding language as being made up of distinct words. It is the foundation for learning to read and is an important and reliable predictor of later reading ability.

Phonological awareness refers to sounds not letters, it is spoken not written.

Reading stories, singing songs and reciting rhymes are a critical part of children's developing phonological awareness.

Note: Phonological awareness and phonics are not the same but many of the skills overlap.

- Phonological awareness includes the awareness of speech sounds, syllables and rhymes.
- Phonics is the mapping of speech sounds (phonemes) to letters or letter patterns (graphemes).



The sounds of language

Children who grow up hearing and speaking different languages and who become multilingual are at a great advantage. They are able to pick up on the phonology (sound patterns) of different languages with more sensitivity than children who are monolingual. All children and adults are naturally drawn to rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration.

The brain is hardwired for the sounds of language, and by exposing children to rhyme from birth, they will develop the range of possibilities for hearing sounds of:

Alliteration – which uses the same or similar sounds at the beginning of words.

Rhyme – which takes the ear to the sounds at the end of words.

Rhythm – which is about syllabification – the part of the word pronounced as one beat.

Steady beat – which is important in developing sensitivity of communication, in hearing sounds, tones, and the rhythms of language needed for literacy.

Phonological awareness – hearing differences and similarities in sounds – alliteration, rhyme and rhythms build up phonological awareness.

Phonemic awareness – being able to hear and recognise phonemes which are the smallest unit of meaningful sound in a word, also build up phonological awareness.



Choosing rhymes and finger plays

Rhymes can be said, sung or chanted at anytime throughout the day so are easy to add them into your daily routine.

You can plan specific rhymes that are linked to a particular routine, activity or theme.

There are many rhymes that we might think of as traditional nursery rhymes or you may have others that you use regularly.

Although it can be tempting to stick with rhymes and finger plays that you know, it is important to **think carefully about why you are choosing a particular rhyme.**



Rhymes for babies and very young children

The work of Froebel and Trevarthen clearly demonstrates the importance of singing to babies and involving them in movement play.

Young babies, often only 4 months old, can predict the timing and rhyming features of simple baby songs. The variation in rhythm often generates excitement in the last two lines and there are simple shifts of pitch.

Why not try...

Round and round the garden
This little piggy went to market
Pat a cake, pat a cake

Changing the words to a familiar tune e.g. Here we go round the Mulberry Bush to fit nappy changing.



Finger rhymes

Finger rhymes coordinate hand and eye movements, looking and remembering, rhythm and match sight with sound.

Sometimes children will sit, watch and listen and often it takes a lot of concentration to get hands and fingers in the right place as we sing! Jenny Spratt suggests introducing finger rhymes in three stages:

1 - Introduce rhymes that use the whole hand and all ten fingers e.g. **Open shut them, I have 10 little fingers.**

2 - Introduce rhymes where different fingers are isolated during the finger rhymes e.g. **Tommy Thumb, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 once I caught a fish alive**

3 - Introduce rhymes that use fingers too represent objects from nature, community, food etc e.g. **Two little dicky birds, Here is the beehive, Incy Wincy spider**



Traditional Nursery Rhymes

Traditional nursery rhymes connect children with the traditions of their culture. **Every culture has its own equivalent of nursery rhymes.**

It is important that children are introduced to a wide range of nursery rhymes, tapping into their diversity and richness across the world.

Which traditional nursery rhymes do you know?

Which traditional nursery rhymes do the children and families that you work with know?



Ideas for getting started

1

Introduce **rhyme of the week** and sing it two or three times each day. This is an easy way to build lots of repetition

2

Share the **rhyme of the week** on the door to your room and with families too.

3

Talk with children about the characters and story of the rhyme. Give **child-friendly definitions** of unusual new words.

4

Ask **families** to share rhymes and finger plays from home, including in home languages

5

Build up a **rhyme bag** with props related to your children's favourite rhymes and finger plays



WORLD[®]

Nursery Rhyme Week

2023

Jack and Jill

Hickory Dickory Dock

Heads Shoulders, Knees and Toes

Row, Row, Row Your Boat

The Wheels on the Bus

Sign up to receive resources to use with
your children.

www.worldnurseryrhymeweek.com



“Words *for* Life”

National
Literacy
Trust

Change your story

Discover a fantastic website for rhyme suggestions.

The best part? You can filter by age to find ideas that are perfect for the children you work with.



Get families involved

#6 Rhyme Time

Start with a rhyme you know well. If you are excited your child will be too!

Rhymes include traditional nursery rhymes such as Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, finger rhymes such as Round and Round the Garden and Incy Wincy Spider as well as whole body action rhymes such as Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes.

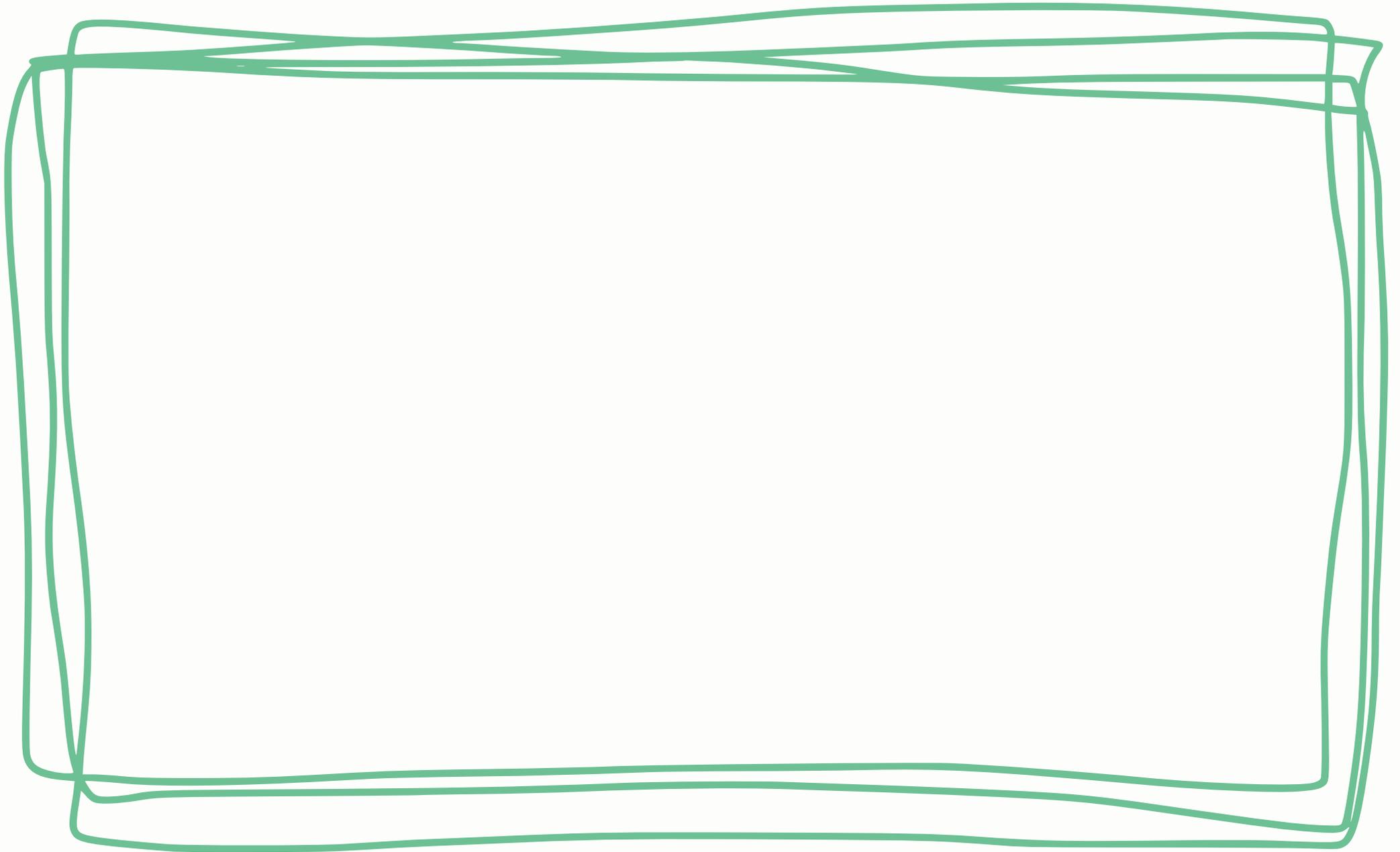
Scan the QR code
and scroll to
activity #6 for more
information



A photograph of a classroom scene. In the foreground, the back of a teacher with curly hair, wearing a light green shirt, is visible as they sit on the floor. In the background, several young children are sitting on the floor, looking towards the teacher. The children are diverse in appearance. The classroom walls are decorated with colorful posters and a green banner with white text. The floor is covered with small, colorful confetti.

**What are
your
favourite
rhymes and
finger plays?**

My favourite rhymes and finger plays





Prompts for reflection with your team

- When do you say and sing rhymes with the children you work with?
- How do you introduce new rhymes to children?
- Do you give time to practice finger and hand movements?
- How do you work with parents and family members to share a baby/child's rhymes/songs from home? Do your songs and rhymes reflect the children's cultures?
- How does rhyme feature in all areas of your setting/home including the outdoors?
- How many rhymes do you know?



References and further reading

[BLOG: The importance of nursery rhymes in early childhood \(Claire Bennett Pacey October 2019\)](#)

[Froebel Trust Pamphlets - Songs, rhymes and finger plays](#)

Bruce, T and Spratt J (2011) Essentials of Literacy from 0-7 Sage Publications

Bruce, T (ed) (2012) Early Childhood Practice: Froebel Today London Sage Publications



Booklets of rhymes to download

West Heath Nursery School shares a booklet of rhymes with families each term.

Featherstone and Osborne Nursery Schools created a booklet of number songs and rhymes

Brearley Nursery School share a rhyme booklet with families

**Have you got a booklet you could share?
Let us know.**