

Themes and Play Experiences for Toddlers

Themes planned for toddlers should be short, fun, and fit their interests. The key point with themes is to give a little focus to days that can easily become nothing but custodial care.

Themes provide a topic around which books can be gathered, songs can be sung, and vocabulary can be developed. Remember, these are not preschoolers. Worksheets and craft art projects are INAPPROPRIATE! Do what you know is developmentally appropriate. They need lots of paint, water, sand, and play, play, play!

Idea- Baby Animals

Shape- Oval

Color- Yellow

Concepts and vocabulary:

baby animals, bunnies, ducklings, kittens, puppies, new life, new vs old, beginning, furry, soft, nests, mommy and daddy animals, nurturing, taking care of babies, gentle, loving, kind,

Possible activities:

- Playing with stuffed baby animals
- Take stuffed baby animals for a walk in the strollers
- Making nests out of pine straw on the playground

- Pretend to be bunnies, ducklings, kittens, puppies inside and outside
- Pretend to be mommy and daddy animals
- Read books about baby animals
- Sing songs about baby animals
- Do activities on textures
- Visit the baby room
- Play with baby zoo animals
- Make baby food and care for babies
- Hide plastic baby animals or eggs in the sandbox for hide and find activities
- Paint with yellow paint on 18" x 24 sheets of manila paper
- Paint with yellow paint with hands on table top or large cookie trays
- Make yellow playdough
- Pretend paint with three inch brushes and water colored with a little yellow food coloring
- Play with empty and fill recycle items in water table with water colored with yellow food coloring

Idea- Bears In Winter / Keeping Warm

Shape- Arch

Color- Brown

Concepts and vocabulary: bears, brown, black, white, fur, warm, caves, sleeping, growl, big, snow, teddy bears, forest, dark

Possible activities:

- Play inside a cave made from a sheet over a table with pillows underneath
- Pretend to be a bear in a cave
- Read books & sing songs about bears
- Paint bear shapes (18" x 24" manila paper)
- Pretend to be a bear in a cave
- Dress-up with hats, scarves, mittens, etc. And pretend to be the three bear's and go for a walk
- Play with teddy bears (must have one for each child)
- Make bear granola
- Have a teddy bear picnic
- Dress up the teddy bear
- Wear furry coats
- Tear shades of brown paper and glue or paste them on a piece of paper
- Rock the teddy bears to sleep
- Put pieces of fur and faux fur cloth in a feely bag or box

- Bear costumes can be made from pieces of faux fur 18" x 24". Make a strap and Velcro it at one end to allow the child to wear it on their back (it will look like a cape). The Velcro will allow the strap to come loose if pulled.

Tell the story of the three bear's....do not make it scary. Make the bears appear friendly, but sad about their house and things.

Cook instant oatmeal (porridge for breakfast)

Idea- Parties

Shape- Square

Color- Orange

Concepts and vocabulary: celebrate, birthday, presents, giving, happy, fun, decorations, cake, invite, singing, friends, games, party, balloons, clowns

Possible activities:

- Wrap presents using old wrapping paper
- Read books & sing songs about birthdays
- Paint cake shapes with orange paint on 18" x 24" manila paper
- Pretend it is our birthday at snack time
- Make cakes in the sandbox (See Pat-A-Cake in the Beyond Cribs & Rattles Symbolic Play Lesson Plan Series)
- Make cards to invite friends to party (scribbles)
- Dress up in playhouse clothes to go to a party
- Make cupcakes
- Decorate the play house for a party
- Dress up as a clown
- Tear tissue paper and paste on a cake shaped paper
- Make a party hat and blow on noise makers
- Make orange playdough (a batch of yellow and a batch of red...let the children mix them to make orange)
- Put red and yellow paint on a table top or large cookie sheets so the children can discover the color orange

Idea- Love, Family, And Mail

Shape- Heart

Color- Pink

Concepts and vocabulary: family, brother, sister, mom, dad, love, sharing, helping, friends, hugs, heart, pink, mail, mail box, letters, grand mother & grandfather.

Possible activities:

- Read books & sing songs about valentines
- Paint heart shapes on pieces of 18" x 24" manila paper
- Pretend to be a mail carrier use envelopes and cloth bags if available
- Play with a mail box (make it out of a box let the children color or paint it with red, pink, and white)
- Mail letters scribbled on scrap paper and stuffed into envelopes
- Scribble with red, blue, and pink crayons to make cards for friends
- Make red and white playdough (let the children mix it to make pink)
- Mix red and white paint on large cookie trays or a table top (finger paint/sensorimotor experience)
- Dress-up as a family member
- Take care of babies take care of babies
- Take care of babies
- Make valentines cookies
- Mail letters scribbled on scrap paper and stuffed into envelopes
- Dress up in pink

- Hug your friends
- Tear pieces of red and pink paper, glue on a larger sheet of white paper (be sure this is a process experience and not a teacher-made craft for mom)
- Make heart cakes in the sandbox
- Decorate for Valentine's Day
- Talk about our family and bring pictures
- Make strawberry flavored milk at mealtime (show the children how it changes from white to pink)
- Make strawberry smoothies
- Make a red/pink fruit salad (using red apples, strawberries, watermelon, plums, cherries, etc.—frozen or fresh or combination)
- Pretend paint with three inch brushes and containers with water colored with a little red food coloring
- Draw with red, pink, and white chalk on the trike trail, fence, etc.
- Fill water table with water, bubbles, and a little red food coloring—add kitchen whisks, colanders, cups, funnels, and other recycled containers.

Idea- Bugs

Shape- Rectangle

Color- Red

Concepts and vocabulary: insects, flying, buzz, wings, tiny, busy, flowers, biting, ladybug, ant, beetle, butterfly, bee, bug, red, bug spray

Possible activities:

- Play with toy bugs
- Read books & sing songs about bugs
- Paint bug shapes using 18" x 24" manila paper
- Pretend to be bugs
- Wear bee & lady bug costumes
- Put on bug spray
- Make fruit smoothies
- Wear butterfly wings made of poster board with elastic straps for their arms
- Crawl around like bugs
- Go exploring for bugs
- Talk about bugs that bite & bugs that don't
- Make an ant hill in the sand
- Smell the flowers
- Make food with honey (if children are over 2 years of age)

Idea- Nursery Rhymes

Shape - Circle

Color- Green

Concepts and vocabulary: books, stories, rhyming, listen, dress up, songs, characters, pretend, pie

Sing songs and recite nursery rhymes such as:

Hey Diddle Diddle The Cat And The Fiddle

There Was An Old Woman

The Three Little Kittens

Rub-A-Dub Dub, Three Men In A Tub

Mary, Mary Quite Contrary

Jack Be Nimble, Jack Be Quick

Baa, Baa Black Sheep

Little Boy Blue

Ring-A-Round The Rosie

Possible activities:

- Read books with nursery rhymes
- Sing songs of nursery rhymes
- Bake pretend pies in the sandbox
- Play with toy people in a shoe
- Tubs of water with three men toys
- Put mittens on kittens
- Wear mittens
- Wash mittens and hang them on the fence of a low line.

- Make a pie
- Water fake flowers in pretend garden
- Go up and down stairs
- Jump over a candle stick
- Go to bed with one shoe on
- Sleep in the hay and play with horns
- Count piggies on our toes
- Play Ring-a-Round the Rosie on the playground
- Paint using manila paper cut in circle shapes with green paint
- Make green playdough

Idea- Summer Time Fun

Shape - Rectangle

Colors - Red, White And Blue

Concepts and vocabulary: playing in parks, vacations, visiting family, family reunions, travel, water play, barbeques, picnics, swimming pools, ice cream, watermelon, camping, hotdogs, hamburgers

Possible activities:

- Make paintings on ice cream cone shaped paper 18" x 24"
- Go on a picnic for lunch
- Tear red and blue paper to paste on a sheet of white paper
- Play in tents made with sheets over tables inside or outside
- Wear swimming goggles
- Pretend the sandbox is a beach...put in shells and have buckets and shovels. Lounge chairs with books and sunglasses add to this
- Wear bathing suits and water shoes
- Play in a sprinkler that does not spray into their faces
- Make homemade ice cream in a churn
- Make fruit salad
- Pack suitcases in the dramatic play area
- Pretend to grill hot dogs and hamburgers for a picnic
- Make shakers using paper plates or paper towel inserts and popcorn...let the children color the plates or paper towel rolls, hot glue a disc of paper larger than the hole on one end, if using paper towel inserts, and fold the plate in half and staple shut leaving a small opening for the corn. Let the children put

corn kernels in their shaker and seal it shut either with a stapler for the plate or another hot glued circle for the paper towel roll. Now sing songs about the sun, travel etc...

- Read books about the summer time
- Eat watermelon
- Go on a hike
- Pretend to be grandma and grandpa
- Make red and blue playdough (do not let them mix these unless you want purple)
- Play with airplanes and cars
- Put red paint for smearing on a table top or large cookie sheets
- Put blue paint for smearing on a table top or large cookie sheets
- Paint flags with face paint on their arms or faces (if they want it)
- Make yankee doodle hats by folding paper...let the children color on the paper before folding with red and blue crayons
- Have a parade outside...dress up and wear the hats...play marching music

Theme: Things That Go

Shape: Circle

Color: Red

Concepts and vocabulary:

Red, circle, wheels, drive, trucks, buses, cars, horn, wipers, noisy, sounds, shiny, big, fast slow, careful, fast, slow

Possible activities:

- Play with trucks and cars
- Play with wheels attached to the fence or other surface for pretend driving
- Pretend to drive trucks and buses while sitting in cardboard boxes
- Pretend to be truck drivers making engine sounds while running around the playground or riding on push toys on the trike path
- Read books about trucks and cars
- Sing songs about trucks and cars
- Look at cars and trucks passing on the road
- Make engine sounds
- Put together puzzles about cars and trucks
- Make easel paintings on large manila paper cut into circle, car, or truck shapes

- Make truck sandwiches (see recipe for Truck Sandwiches)
- Bury small trucks and cars in the sandbox provide shovels for hide and find activities
- Make red playdough
- Play with red finger paint on red trays
- Talk a discovery walk looking for circle shapes (See the Nature Walk in the Beyond Cribs & Rattles Symbolic Play Lesson Plan Series)

Theme: Babies

Shape: Triangle

Color: Blue

Concepts and vocabulary:

babies, big brother or sister, blankets, bottles, diapers, mommies, daddies, baby food, little, nurturing, taking care of, gentle, loving, kind, soft, crying, sleeping

Possible activities:

- Play with baby dolls
- Change diapers on baby dolls (See Me & My Baby in the Beyond Cribs & Rattles Symbolic Play Lesson Plan Series)
- Pretend to be babies
- Pretend to be mommy and daddy
- Read books about babies
- Sing songs about babies
- Visit the baby room if one is available or have a infant visit
- Sit in a high chair
- Make baby food by mashing food with a spoon or a blender
- Pretend to feed babies
- Be a doctor for babies
- Bathe and dress babies (See Baby Bathing in the Beyond Cribs & Rattles Symbolic Play Lesson Plan Series)
- Make baby sounds
- Paint on manila paper cut in triangle shapes using blue paint
- Make blue playdough