

Exploring Objects

Cost: Less than \$10 (depending on the materials used)

Mess factor: None

Suggested location: Anywhere

Experiences your children will have

- Looking at or handling one object and then another
- Gathering three or more objects

Materials

- Infant toys (choose toys that are easy to grasp, with bright colors, stimulating patterns, interesting textures, and soothing sounds)
- Safe and interesting objects found around your house that your infant can explore, such as basting brushes, whisks, or measuring spoons

Beginning

Depending on your child's age, position your infant on a blanket lying down, sitting in your lap, sitting on the floor with your support, or sitting independently. Surround your child with several interesting toys or objects, positioned nearby. (For younger infants, offer two or three objects; for older infants, increase to five or six objects.)

Middle

If your infant can't yet grasp objects, simply hold an interesting toy over their face to watch. An infant who can sit supported but can't grasp objects can watch toys that you hold in each of your hands. Give your child plenty of time to look at a toy and then shake the toy in your other hand.

If your infant can grasp objects and sit, either with your support or independently, give them a toy to hold and explore a toy. Younger infants may simply hold on to the toy with one hand, while older infants may transfer the toy from one hand to another. Present a new toy and observe what your child does (e.g., they might glance at the new toy but choose to continue exploring the first one or drop the first toy and grab the new one). Older infants will enjoy sitting on the floor with toys spread around them and may reach for and pick up two toys, one in each hand; exploring toys by looking first at one toy and then at the other; or placing one of the toys in their mouth, followed by the other one.

Older infants may start collecting toys and placing several in a pile. When children gather toys or objects in this way, you will know that they can attend to more than one object at a time, which is a milestone in their development.

End

Younger infants will show they are losing interest in this activity by crying, squirming, or arching their back. Try showing your child a new toy or changing their position before transitioning to a different activity. Older infants may show that they are finished by simply crawling away and finding something else to do. If your child is engaged in the activity but it's time to transition to another activity, try singing a cleanup song to let them know that it's time to put toys away and to indicate what's going to happen next.

Cleanup

An older infant may enjoy helping you clean up by transferring their collection into a box or basket. If your infant isn't enthusiastic about putting away the toys, consider letting him or her continue holding or exploring one toy or object as you move on to your next activity.

Older children

Older children will extend this activity by lining up the objects and noticing the properties of the objects in more detail (e.g., color, shape, size), which sets the stage for recognizing, copying, or extending simple patterns.

Hints

- As your child becomes more mobile, place toys, board books, and other easy-to-grasp objects around the room within your infant's reach. Have containers available, and demonstrate how to fill a container with toys. Your child may start using a container to hold objects he or she collects.

More!

Older children begin recognizing, copying, and extending simple patterns (e.g., blue-yellow-blue-yellow). While infants are still several developmental stages away from this milestone, introduce them to patterns through play and your daily routine. For example, lift your infant into the air while saying "Up" and then lower them while saying "Down." Repeat this several times while saying "Up...down...up...down" and continue until either your infant (or your arms!) get tired of this game.

Special needs accommodations

Infants with special needs can easily become overstimulated, especially when exploring something new or trying out a new skill. Minimize other distractions (e.g., lighting, background noise, and general visual clutter) before presenting your child with a new material or an idea. Speak in a calm tone, and offer gentle reassuring touches as your child explores a new toy or tries a new skill.