

So Close

Cost: None

Mess factor: None

Suggested location: Anywhere

Experiences your children will have

- Turning toward or away from objects or people
- Being persistent in moving toward things

Materials

- Interesting toys (with bright colors, stimulating patterns, interesting textures, and soothing sounds)
- Desirable objects (sippy cup, a favorite blankie, a pacifier)

Beginning

Observe which toys, objects, and sounds catch your child's attention (e.g., young infants might turn their head toward a bottle; older infants might reach for a brightly colored stuffed animal that jingles when shaken). Likewise, pay attention to objects, sounds, and other sensory input that your child might try to avoid (e.g., infants might turn their head away from a bright light).

Middle

If your infant is not yet mobile, try holding a colorful toy that makes a pleasing noise about 10–12 inches above your child's face (you'll know if your child can see and hear the toy because they may smile, coo, or kick their legs in excitement). Slowly move the toy from one side to the other (occasionally shaking it), and stop periodically to make sure your child is still tracking it.

If your infant is mobile, position an interesting toy near your child, making sure they know it's there. As your infant attempts to reach the toy, encourage your child by saying things like "Stretch just a little bit more!" or "You're going to get it!"

As infants grow, they are able to creep along the floor, sit independently, and move into a crawling position. At this stage, try positioning an interesting toy just beyond your child's reach. Over time, your child will begin to show more persistence in moving toward the object. Once your child reaches an object several times, you might want to position it a bit farther away. Be aware of children's reactions to this challenge, however, because they may become frustrated or may lose interest if the object seems too far away. To keep children interested in the challenge, be sure they experience frequent successes and encouragement.

Before you know it, your child will begin crawling, pulling to a standing position, cruising along furniture, and taking first steps. Infants' natural tendency to move toward interesting objects can become dangerous if the items of interest aren't child friendly or if dangerous obstacles are in the way; be sure to babyproof where necessary. You can also place interesting and infant-friendly toys and objects around your child's play space, which will encourage crawling and cruising.

End

Once infants reach the desired object, they may put it in their mouths; look at it; and feel, pat, or shake it. Your child may choose to continue playing with it or decide that the joy is in the "hunt" and look for another object to pursue!

Cleanup

Older infants can help put away toys by dropping items into a basket or box.

Older children

Older children will likely begin indicating their intentions by using language. They will begin with one or two words, such as "Up" and "Go night-night," and eventually use simple sentences, such as "I want to swing" or "Let's look for bugs."

Hints

- Eliminate distractions to infants' natural curiosity by turning off the television. The colors, movement, and noise created by the television may interrupt children's attempts to make contact with what they are trying to move toward.

More!

For older infants (eight to nine months), try hiding (or partially hiding) a favorite object underneath a blanket. Infants at this age are beginning to develop *object permanence*, which is an understanding that an object still exists even if it can't be seen. Infants who have not yet reached this developmental milestone may cry when a favorite object is covered (thinking that it is no longer there) or may find a different toy to pursue, which simply means that they aren't quite ready for this game. For infants who understand that the object or toy is still there even though they can't see it, hiding objects under a blanket becomes an amusing game.

Special needs accommodations

Infants with developmental delays may not gain mobility as quickly as their peers. In this case, encourage your child to move toward objects but understand that you may need to bring the objects to your child. Choose toys with interesting textures and bright colors that will be stimulating for your child.