



Rhythm and Rhyme



Songs, poems, and stories are a fun way to cuddle, snuggle, and play with your child while promoting early literacy and social/emotional connection. “Young children with visual impairment may not make eye contact or be able to observe a face, so social contact must be physical and auditory,” reports Virginia Bishop, Ph.D. in her handbook “Infants and Toddlers with Visual Impairment.” Rhythm and rhyme activities are also a way to introduce imitation and independent play.

Duration

The length of this activity depends on your baby’s interest and your family’s needs. Even a few minutes of singing and story time is beneficial to your child.

Materials

- Pick your child’s favorite song or your favorite song. Work with your Early Intervention Teacher of the Visually Impaired (EI-TVI) to get ideas if needed. Some examples are “Rock-A-Bye Baby,” “Baa, Baa Black Sheep,” or “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.” Even popular songs can work like “One Love,” “Dream a Little Dream,” and “You Are My Sunshine.”
- A favorite board book with rhythmic language, a poem, or a song. Some examples of our favorite books are Moo, Baa, La La La! by Sandra Boynton, Where Is Baby’s Belly

Button? by Karen Katz, Little Blue Truck by Alice Schertle, and Sheep in a Jeep by Nancy E. Shaw. It's important to select books that your child likes and is interested in. For example, if you have a dog at home, your child might like a book about dogs or other animals.

Activity Steps

1. Find a favorite place to cuddle with your child. If your little one likes to move, you may want to dance and move about instead of sitting down.
2. S-l-o-w-l-y sing or say the first line of the song, poem, or rhyme. If you have a board book with tactile components, allow the child to explore the book using her hands, mouth, or feet or by placing it on her chest. If your baby has a favorite way to explore, use it. Exploration time depends on your child.
3. Continue cuddling or moving with your child as you repeat the first line again. If your child is enjoying this, you might want to add actions that go with the song or book. For example, if you are singing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," move your body in a swaying motion. If reading a book like Where Is Baby's Belly Button?, you can touch the baby's body parts. Make sounds related to the book while holding your child and having face to face contact or body to body contact. Note what touch, actions, or movement your child prefers.
4. Move on to reading or singing the next lines of the song or book while cuddling, dancing, or completing your child's preferred actions. Continue the activity as long as your child is content and comfortable.
5. Ask your EI-TVI to expand on this activity if you would like further ideas.

Tips

- Pause during the activity occasionally to give the child time to participate or tell you they want more through vocalization, expression, or movement.
- Use this activity to teach your child how to take turns. After your child vocalizes or makes a movement, imitate the child, and pause for the child to do it again.
- Children learn best when engaged in favorite activities so always keep your child's preferences in mind.
- Give your child wait time to process and enjoy the activity.

- Some children might need to engage in each sense separately. For example, they may need to listen first, then touch, then move, then look. Your EI-TVI will have strategies on how to introduce senses separately.
- Clapping or adding a hand action at the middle of the baby's body will help her learn to reach or maybe visually follow if she has some vision.
- Children learn from opportunities to try again and again. Practice and repetition aid learning.
- Initially, exploring the book is just as important as reading the book. The child doesn't have to be on the page you are reading or even turn the pages if they aren't interested. It's okay to mouth the book while exploring.
- Don't feel the need to add your own narration or talking. This allows your child to hear the sounds of the rhyme without too much "extra sound" to listen to and process/understand.

Extension Activities

- Play and sing "Pat-A-Cake" with everyday kitchen objects such as bowls, spoons, measuring cups, and a whisk. Pretend to eat and bake the cake. You could even make a "pretend" cake with play dough or clay.
- This idea can be applied to other songs/rhymes. For the rhyme "Humpty Dumpty," use plastic Easter eggs and drop them into a bowl. For "Pudding on a Plate" place the objects listed in the song on a plate or your child's tray. "Jack and Jill" can be acted out with a pail. "Jack Be Nimble" can jump over objects. Involve your child's favorite stuffed animal, a truck, or other favorite toy in acting out the rhyme.
- Make a book of pictures or tactile objects representing the songs, allowing choices for songs and extension activities. The opportunities are as broad as your imagination.

