**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

An important component of the PIP model is the inclusion of a developmental moment for the babies and the parents. Even when babies are tiny, parents are keenly interested in brain development and in connecting, bonding, and playing with their babies. Taking a few minutes to focus on the baby, versus parent peer support, is a nice break in the parent-centric meeting focus. We teach the parents a song, or a rhyme or some other activity that they can do with their baby. And what does that little 5 minute activity do? It fosters parent/child attachment, which leads to healthy brain development for babies. So, this section of the meeting time should be brief and interactive, not a lengthy “class” taught by you.

These are some suggested themes for each week of the group. Each includes songs to sing, activities to do, a little tidbit about brain development, and a link to a resource to learn more (for you to check out before the meeting, if desired and/or to share with group members). These themes could be done in any order. They can be used with Newborn Groups, Baby Peppers, and Little Peppers – we’ve noted where activities need to be adapted for different age groups.

**Theme: Lullabies and Soothing**

Songs: Sing lullabies from the Song Guide. After singing these, you could also ask group members if they have a favorite lullaby they sing to their child.

Activities: Newborns: teach how to double-swaddle. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOnsKlluHIg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOnsKlluHIg), and/or teach the 5 S’s from Happiest Baby on the Block. Swaddling is a very effective first step in calming a crying baby or soothing a baby to sleep. The swaddling itself may not calm baby, but once baby is swaddled, then calmed, then he tends to *stay* calm much longer than if not swaddled. Peppers: Read a bedtime story and talk a bit about bedtime routines.

Ideas to share: White noise and quiet repetitive noise helps to calm a newborn; as children grow older, having the same familiar song each night helps to signal bedtime and create clear associations with settling down to sleep. Lullabies are even more powerful when combined with swaddling and rocking, rhythmic motion. Parents also benefit from lullabies… sometimes when we’re really tired, and can’t think what to do next with our baby, just singing a familiar song and rocking them is all that we need to settle us both down. More about the benefits of lullabies: http://www.kistodreams.org/whysinglullabies.asp

**Theme: Songs as part of daily routine**

Songs: Sitting in a High Chair (in the Song Guide), Pat a Cake. Ask parents if they can think of other food-related kids’ songs (*I like to eat, eat, eat apples and bananas*, etc.)

Activities: Scents exploration. Bring several zip lock bags. Each one has something scented in it. For example: a mint, a slice of lemon, lavender, cinnamon stick or cloves, a pickle, sage, cedar shavings. Pass them around or leave them out over break and parents can open them for baby/child to smell, then re-seal. Little Peppers: children need to be told not to take items out of bags. (Don’t use artificial scents, e.g., perfume, as many people have sensitivities to fragrances.)

Ideas to share: Many parents (and teachers!) have learned how helpful songs can be in signaling to a child that a transition is coming, and easing the way into the next activity. Just as lullabies signal bedtime, your family’s clean-up song will tell your child it’s time to put the toys away, your meal-time song can say ‘I know you’re ready to eat… this song tells you I’m getting it ready right now as fast as I can’, and your putting-on-your-shoes song lets the child know you’re getting ready to leave the house. Somehow the rhythm, musicality, and familiar words just seem to work so much more effectively for little ones than just *saying* the words does. Starting the songs when your child is young will only make them more effective later on.

http://www.songsforteaching.com/transitions.htm

**Theme: Carrying and Baby-Wearing**

Songs: Fly Away, Baby in the Air, Brahm’s Lullaby

Activities: Ask your group members to bring any slings, baby carriers, and toddler backpacks they own. Over break, everyone can try out all the options. Little Peppers: if someone has a doll and a doll-sized sling that would be fun for the kids to play with.

Ideas to share: Carrying a baby in a sling or carrier has several benefits for both the parents and the child. For the parents: If your baby, like many babies, is happiest when being held all the time, a carrier frees up your hands for things like carrying groceries, setting the table, and so on. When you’re on outings, you may find the carrier is easier on your body than carrying the car-seat would be. For the baby: when tucked up close to a parent, it’s easier for a baby to regulate his breathing, temperature, and mood. It’s easier for him to signal to you when he’s hungry or needs something. Also, a child in a carrier is moved in a variety of directions (versus a child in a stroller who remains in the same position), which helps with the development of the vestibular system. (See below) Little Peppers/STA: putting baby in a carrier will free up your hands to do things for/with your older child. Also, when you’re around other preschoolers, having baby in a sling keeps her out of reach of curious kids.

[www.llli.org/nb/nbnovdec04p204.html](http://www.llli.org/nb/nbnovdec04p204.html)

**Theme: Bubbles and Water Play**

Songs: All the Fish, Row your Boat. Ask for other water-themed favorites (like “I had a little turtle, his name was tiny Tim…” and “Baby Beluga.”)

Activities: Bring bubbles and blow them over all the babies / children. Little Peppers kids can chase the bubbles. Peppers: if it’s summer, you could consider some water play outdoors.

Ideas to share: Many babies and children enjoy time in the water. (If your baby hates baths, ask yourself a few questions… are you relaxed when giving a bath or are you anxious? Is the water temperature *and* the room temperature soothingly warm? Is baby comfortable in the tub – many baby bathtubs lean baby on his back, which can be a startle position.) You can spend time playing with them in their bathtub, or you can take them in the bathtub with you or the shower with you, or take them swimming in a warm pool. All of these things build their comfort with the water, plus teach a variety of fun science concepts (what floats? What sinks? What’s the trajectory of water shot from a squirt gun?) Side benefit: Many parents observe that their kids tend to sleep best (longest stretches) when they have had waterplay during the day.

[www.edhelperbaby.com/activity/Blowing\_Bubbles\_with\_Babies.htm](http://www.edhelperbaby.com/activity/Blowing_Bubbles_with_Babies.htm) and

<http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=374>

**Theme: Turning Around**

Songs: Hokey Pokey, Ring Around the Rosie – have parents stand for these.

Activities: Spinning – if there is an office chair available, have parents take turns sitting with child in lap and spinning baby around and around. If not, put on music and have parents dance with baby, taking turns or spinning from time to time. (music: there’s lots of kids’ songs about turning or spinning, or you can use something like “You Spin Me Right Round” by Dead or Alive.)

Ideas to share: Spinning helps to develop a child’s vestibular system, which aids with balance, motor coordination, moving well through space, the ability to localize sound, and the ability of our eyes to scan words when reading.

One study showed that sitting in an office chair with baby in your lap and spinning will help the baby be a more confident and balanced walker and crawler. [http://stellarcaterpillar.com/](http://stellarcaterpillar.com/2011/08/20/vestibular-stimulation-benefits-motor-skill-development-in-babies/)

[2011/08/20/vestibular-stimulation-benefits-motor-skill-development-in-babies/](http://stellarcaterpillar.com/2011/08/20/vestibular-stimulation-benefits-motor-skill-development-in-babies/)

**Theme: Up and Down**

Songs: Elevator, Noble Duke, Hickory Dickory Dock

Activities: Bring a blanket, or oversized beach towel, or a stretchy sheet. Lay it on the floor. Make a “hammock” where one parent holds one end, and another parent holds the other end. They lay a baby or child in there, and then lift the blanket up and down, raising baby up off the floor and lowering back down again. They can also swing baby side to side. Little Peppers: the child must lay on their back to do this safely.

Ideas to share: When you’re playing with your children, once they can hold their heads up well, it’s OK to be bold with how you move them around: lift them high, swing them low, hold them upside down… all these different types of movement help to strengthen their muscles, develop their vestibular system, and build their confidence with moving and being active. Once a child reaches about six months old (can sit independently), you can take them on swings in the playground. This helps with balance, it also helps with development of good vision. (When you’re swinging, things are far away, then closer, then further away, etc. Shifting the field of focus over and over helps to develop depth perception.)

<http://solvejswings.com/benefits-of-swinging>

**Theme: Counting and Rhythm**

Songs: Elevator, Tick Tock, Five Little Monkeys

Activities: Bring a variety of home-made drums and shakers (e.g., pot and spoon, plastic bowl and spoon, plastic containers filled with beans, jingle bells, etc.). Play with rhythm. Rhythm reinforces math. Something about the way our brains learn to process rhythm helps it process numbers and math as well. Note: Some of these toys may not be safe for a young child to play with alone (e.g., a shaker filled with choke-able sized items). Point these issues out to parents.

Ideas to share: Numbers are great early words / concepts to teach. Start counting when your baby is young: count stairs as you climb them, forks as you put them away, slices of fruit you set on a plate. Sing songs with numbers and counting. Let your child see you using math: “I have 3 cups, I need 4 cups, so let me get one more.” This begins to lay the foundation for math skills.

[www.ehow.com/list\_6867394\_toddler-infant-pre\_math-activities.html](http://www.ehow.com/list_6867394_toddler-infant-pre_math-activities.html)

**Theme: Nursery Rhymes**

Songs: do all the rhymes from the PIP Song Guide, then ask them what nursery rhymes they remember and recite some together from memory.

Activities: Texture exploration. Bring objects with a wide variety of textures. Sandpaper, velvet, silk, cotton balls, feather, corduroy, ribbed sweater, etc. Newborn group: pass things around, parents can touch them to baby’s hands or faces. Peppers: let children explore the items.

Ideas to share: Nursery rhymes are soothing for babies to listen to due to the soft words and sing-songy rhythm, fun for young children to memorize, and fun for older children to play with and parody. They teach a wide range of vocabulary, teach rhythm and vocal inflections (rising and falling of sound), and rhyming. Memorizing nursery rhymes is great practice for all the learning and memorization your child will have to do throughout her school years. Also, nursery rhymes are part of a cultural heritage and will help connect your child to others when he discovers that they know the same rhymes he does.<http://engagingtoddleractivities.wordpress.com/2011/02/21/great-benefits-to-nursery-rhymes/>

**Theme: Bouncing Baby Boys and Girls**

Songs: Rig a Jig, Bouncin’ Up and Down, This is the Way Baby Rides

Activities: Bring a big exercise ball (if you don’t have one, ask your members if they have one they could bring) or a big beach ball. Parents can sit on the ball with babies in their arms and bounce them up and down, or can sit baby / child on the ball and bounce them, or can lie baby/child down on their belly on the ball and roll it back and forth.

Ideas to share: Bouncing babies or doing other movements in time with music, helps them to learn rhythm better.<http://lubbockonline.com/stories/060305/nat_060305038.shtml> Bouncing a baby is a great way to calm crying; bouncing an older child is a great way to induce the giggles.

**Theme: Variety of Movement**

Songs: Wheels on the Bus, This is the way we… If you’re Happy

Activities: Bump Heads – demonstrate this game, which is one of the first ones babies can master. The parent leans their head down, says ‘bump heads’ and lightly bumps their forehead against baby’s head. Over time, as the parent does this, the baby will learn the cue – when the parent leans their head down, baby will know to bump it. (Note: don’t do this one with toddlers. They can bump really hard!) Beep Nose – this is another fairly early game for babies. Parents touch fingers to baby’s nose, and say “beep” and help baby touch fingers to parent’s nose and say “beep”. After many repetitions over time, baby will get it, and will reach out to beep parent’s nose. Little Peppers: toddler can beep baby’s nose…. Gently!

Ideas to share: Babies and children benefit from a wide variety of movement to help them build strength and flexibility, and also for brain development. Songs like Wheels on the Bus let them move in lots of different ways. One move you may add in is “Kids on the bus all tap their toes” and help your child touch his right foot with his left hand, and then his left foot with his right hand. These movements that cross the midline help with creating connections between the two hemispheres of the brain, similar to how crawling benefits brain development.

<http://icpa4kids.org/Wellness-Articles/baby-crawling-how-important-it-really-is/All-Pages.html>

**Theme: Body Learning**

Songs: all the songs on the PIP Song Guide

Activities: Massage. Demonstrate a few basic strokes, and have parents practice them, if their babies are in the mood (calm and relaxed). If babies are fussy, hungry, sleeping, etc. then encourage them to just watch for now, and try the techniques some other time. (To learn strokes that you can demonstrate, go to YouTube, and search for Infant Massage.)

Ideas to share: Touch is a great way to bond with your child. Massage is relaxing and can be either a gentle way to start your morning together, or a way to soothe a child toward sleep. Specific massage strokes can be used to stretch out muscles and aid digestion. Be respectful of your child, and only massage him when he seems open to the idea and stop if it troubles him. If you choose to use a massage oil, be sure it’s something edible, so if your child sucks on his hands or feet after the massage, it’s harmless. Olive oil and coconut oil are common choices.

[www.infantmassageusa.org/learn-to-massage-your-baby/benefits-of-infant-massage/](http://www.infantmassageusa.org/learn-to-massage-your-baby/benefits-of-infant-massage/)

**Theme: Hiding and Peek a Boo**

Songs: Peek a Boo; Where oh Where; Where is Thumbkin

Activities: Scarf play – bring scarves or cloths. Parents can use them to cover up baby’s face, or cover their own face during peek a boo, can also play with them by waving them in the air, etc. Making faces – parents can also make silly faces at baby.

Ideas to share: Peek a boo teaches object permanence – the idea that something still exists even when you can’t see it. Babies like other hiding games too – try hiding a squeaky toy under a cloth – reach under to squeak it, then let them try to find it. Peek a boo may also help with separation anxiety, as a gentle way for baby to discover that people can “disappear” and then come back again.<http://momtomadre.org/2011/01/22/peek-a-boo/>

**Theme: Sign Language**

Songs: Twinkle Twinkle; The More we get together. To learn the signs, go to YouTube, and search for “sign language twinkle”, for example, and you’ll find lots of teaching videos.

Activities: Teach basic signs: More; Milk; Food; Mommy; Daddy; Dog; Cat; Ball.

[www.babysignlanguage.com/basics/getting-started/](http://www.babysignlanguage.com/basics/getting-started/)

Ideas to share: Babies start understanding language long before they are able to coordinate their lips, tongue, and voice to make a clearly understandable sound. Simple hand signs are often easier for them to coordinate the motions for, and thus sign language lets your baby start communicating long before she can use verbal language. This can reduce frustration and temper tantrums, as well as being a delightful way to get insight into what your child is thinking. You can start using signs together with your spoken words around 6 months of age, and baby will begin using signs around one year. For Little Peppers age: older children enjoy adding sign language to their repertoire of ways to communicate.

[www.examiner.com/baby-sign-language-in-national/benefits-of-baby-sign-language](http://www.examiner.com/baby-sign-language-in-national/benefits-of-baby-sign-language)

**Theme: Dance Party**

Songs: Hokey Pokey, Rock a Bye Baby, Skinnamarink. Have parents stand and dance around with baby during each of these.

Activities: Ask everyone to show off their “magic baby dance” – what’s the movement that works best to calm their baby? Then put on some fun dance music and let everyone dance their babies around for a few minutes.

Ideas to share: You can dance with your baby to soothe him, or you can dance for fun and enjoyment. Your child learns rhythm from you, learns to enjoy the music you enjoy, sees you enjoying exercising, and builds attachment to you. You get to get exercise and have fun, and the endorphins you generate can reduce stress.<http://ezinearticles.com/?Shared-Dancing-has-Benefits-for-Babies-and-New-Moms-Alike&id=10177>