



Guide to Using the *Partners for a Healthy Baby* Home Visiting Curriculum “Let’s Explore!” Developmental Activities Supplement

The FSU *Partners* “Let’s Explore!” Developmental Activities curriculum supplement was created as a resource to support programs using the core FSU *Partners* curriculum. This resource is designed to help home visitors:

- Plan age-appropriate activities for home visits and family play groups, such as Early Head Start Group Socializations, in keeping with programmatic goals and funding requirements.
- Enhance home visitor professional knowledge of child development and its application to planning infant-toddler play experiences.
- Facilitate and encourage positive, supportive interactions between families and infants/toddlers.
- Manage the varied developmental needs of children through individualization, accommodations for disabilities and delays, and consideration for mixed age groups within a shared activity.
- Introduce simple ways to support learning using materials commonly available to parents in home visiting programs.
- Increase parents’ child development knowledge and observation skills.
- Facilitate the joint home visiting planning process between home visitors and parents.



How Do I Use this Curriculum Supplement to Fidelity?

The “*Let’s Explore!*” curriculum supplement is intended to support programs that are required to share individualized activities for the children and families on their caseload. To be most effective, a program must use its chosen curriculum to fidelity, which means using the curriculum as it was designed. The rich content of the FSU *Partners* core curriculum provides the research-based conceptual knowledge required to support families in the holistic way needed to achieve positive outcomes. The “*Let’s Explore!*” developmental activities complement and expand the application of the core curriculum content.



The process of using the “*Let’s Explore!*” activities to fidelity was designed to be similar to the 3-step process of using the core *Partners* curriculum to fidelity.

1. First, choose the appropriate **Purpose** for your visit, based on the interests of the family and age of the child, from the **At-a-Glance Purpose Chart** or **digital curriculum search page**.
2. Next, review the **Detailed Information Page** and **Individualizing Tips** for the Purpose.
3. Finally, review and share the “*Let’s Explore!*” **Parent Handout** that goes with the selected Purpose and Detailed Information Page/Individualizing Tips.

1. Select a Purpose

Unlike the core *Partners* curriculum, the “*Let’s Explore!*” Purposes are not specifically divided by age. Instead, the Purposes for Visits are grouped into the five categories listed below.



Art and Messy Play: Explore art and sensory experiences and facilitate learning across developmental domains.



Early Discovery: Activities designed with infant development in mind.



Movement and Outdoor Play: Movement and sensory focused activities that may benefit from a little more space or an easy-to-clean setting.

Note: Depending on the space available, some or all of these may be adapted to an indoor environment.



Pretend Play: Imaginative play experiences that support learning goals across multiple domains of development.



Skill Builders: Engaging experiences that often focus on fine motor and cognitive skill development.

Note: Ideal for limited space.

The At-a-Glance table on the next page provides a quick listing of the purposes in each category and their primary target ages:



“Let’s Explore!” Developmental Activities

Purposes and Target Ages

At-A-Glance

Art/Messy Play	Primary Target Age				Purpose
	0-9	8-18	16-24	22-36	
Color Collages			X	X	Encourage parents to think of art as a valuable time for learning.
Fizzy Paint			X	X	Promote early scientific exploration through art.
Painting to Decorate		X	X	X	Talk to parents about the value of displaying children’s artwork.
Play Dough		X	X	X	Discuss the benefits of playdough across developmental domains.
Tear and Cut Bins		X	X	X	Introduce sensory bin play for infants and toddlers.
Early Discovery	Primary Target Age				Purpose
	0-9	8-18	16-24	22-36	
Discovery Bottle	X	X			Encourage cognitive and social-emotional development with a simple sensory toy.
Mirror Play	X	X			Help parents support tummytime and social-emotional development through mirror play.
Sensory Bag	X	X	X	X	Talk about homemade toys that support baby’s exploration and thinking skills.
Treasure Basket	X	X			Remind parents that exploring everyday objects supports baby’s development.
Walker Box	X	X			Encourage parents to support their infant’s growing gross motor skills.
Movement & Outdoor Play	Primary Target Age				Purpose
	0-9	8-18	16-24	22-36	
Dance & Sing	X	X	X	X	Discuss the learning benefits of music and movement activities.
Have a Ball		X	X	X	Remind parents of the benefits of active play.
Popping Bubbles	X	X	X	X	Talk about teaching social-emotional control through play.
Salad Garden			X	X	Suggest growing a garden to promote scientific thinking and healthy habits.
Water Relay Races			X	X	Encourage parents to use a strengths-based approach during play to support their child’s development.
Pretend Play	Primary Target Age				Purpose
	0-9	8-18	16-24	22-36	
Home Cooking		X	X	X	Help parents look for materials within their home to support pretend play and cultural connections.
Masking Tape Roads			X	X	Talk to parents about the cognitive and language benefits of pretend play.
Recycle Town			X	X	Encourage parents to use pretend play as a tool to explore emotions.
Washing Up			X	X	Help parents understand and support their young child’s pretend play skills.
Skill Builders	Primary Target Age				Purpose
	0-9	8-18	16-24	22-36	
Flashlight Fun		X	X	X	Encourage parents to play games that promote language and cognitive development.
Magic Paint		X	X	X	Foster toddler’s emergent writing skills, initiative, and creativity through simple, low-mess art.
Simple Puzzles		X	X	X	Promote early mathematical concepts beyond counting and number names.
Stackers		X	X	X	Encourage parents to engage in “math talk” and play that supports spatial awareness.
Surprise Box	X	X	X	X	Help parents understand the scientific thinking behind their child’s exploration and consider appropriate outlets for experimentation.

We recommend starting with Purposes that are of particular interest or concern for the family and/or address program goals. Home visitors should use their knowledge of each child and family to determine whether certain Purposes would not be a good fit for a specific family.

2. Review Detailed Information and Individualizing Tips Pages for each Purpose

Detailed Information Page


Example from a Detailed Information Page

Stackers *Skill Builders*

Encourage parents to engage in “math talk” and play that supports spatial awareness.

This activity is an introduction to early math concepts and the importance of incorporating simple math vocabulary into play experiences for infants and toddlers. Take time to review the ideas for age-appropriate adaptations and tips listed in the Individualization chart.

Research shows that encouraging children’s early math skills makes a big difference in their later school success. What exactly does math look like for infants and toddlers? Most people probably think of counting. But the very first math ideas infants and toddlers explore involves “spatial awareness.”



Just like the core *Partners* curriculum, each “*Let’s Explore!*” activity comes with a Detailed Information Page. This page contains information about how to share the activity with a family. The information is presented in two different colors.

The **words in black print** (prompts) are intended to remind you of the important points to make and help you come up with words and phrases to introduce and discuss them. We want to empower parents to see the educational value of engaging in playful experiences with their infants and toddlers. These prompts give a quick explanation of the “why” behind each activity and are for you to study as you plan your visit. The Detailed Information Page is not meant to be taken with you on a visit because you may be tempted to read from it instead of presenting the activity in your own words.

The **words in blue print** offer additional instructions, call your attention to things to look for, and suggest follow-up actions you may need to take. Here you will see suggestions on ways to modify activities based on the interests of the family and child. These modifications also provide opportunities to revisit activities in new ways, expanding the number of home visits you can plan using the “*Let’s Explore!*” supplemental activities. Infants and toddlers thrive on repetition and are driven to master new skills, often approaching an activity in advanced ways as it becomes more familiar. Parents likewise gain confidence and are more willing to practice new skills when they are comfortable with the play experience.

The **blue text** may also point out health, safety, and logistical concerns that may be associated with this activity so you can provide the appropriate guidance to parents. Although a few possible adaptations for using this activity with children with special needs are suggested at the bottom of every detailed information page, it is always recommended that home visitors seek support from a specialist or early intervention provider when planning activities for children with developmental delays or disabilities.

Review the Detailed Information Page before your visit and make brief notes on your program's planning form regarding the main points you plan to cover or any special considerations that may apply to the family you will be visiting. Talk about the main points and the specific skills you hope to support in your own words during the visit.

Individualizing Tips Page

Example from an Individualizing Tips Page

The image shows a sample page titled "Stackers" under the "Skill Builders" category. The page is divided into two sections based on age groups. The first section is for "Birth - 9 MONTHS" and includes tips such as having a baby hold a stacker while sitting in a lap or on her back, and using spatial awareness vocabulary like "down beside" and "rolled away". The second section is for "8-18 MONTHS" and includes tips like starting with small cardboard boxes or plastic food containers, using a simple song with "up, up, up" and "down, down, down" to introduce spatial awareness, and counting blocks as they are stacked. A "Primary Target Age" badge is shown for the 8-18 months group.

Stackers *Skill Builders*

Tips for Individualizing with Different Age Groups

Birth - 9 MONTHS

Let baby hold a Stacker while she sits in your lap or lays on her back. Watch to see how long she holds the object. Does she look for it when it falls? Use spatial awareness vocabulary when you help her find the Stacker. "Your cup fell **down beside** you and rolled **away**."

Put a few Stackers on the floor in front of baby during tummy time. Encouraging her to reach for them builds strength as she supports her weight on one arm.

8-18 MONTHS

Most older infants start stacking 2-3 large blocks around this age. Starting with small, square cardboard boxes or rectangular plastic baby food containers may be easiest for young toddlers.

Introduce spatial awareness vocabulary in a simple song—"Build it **up, up, up**. Knock it **down, down, down**." She'll think it's extra silly if you make your voice go up and down on the "ups" and "downs" and you'll be helping her tune in to the rhythms of speech.

Count the blocks as you stack them. Describe turn-taking using math talk and your child's name. "Maddie **adds one** block then it's my turn to add **one** block."

This age group will also enjoy experimenting with the way Stackers fit or nest together. Start with a few plastic cups of the same size, then try introducing 3-4 different sizes.

Suggested ways to individualize the activity based on age-appropriate expectations are provided on the **Individualizing Tips** page. All activities are designed with at least two of the following age ranges in mind: birth to 9 months, 8 to 18 months, 16 to 24 months, and 22 to 36 months. Each Individualizing Tips page contains a separate set of adaptations, considerations, and ideas for using the activity with children in these four age ranges. The primary target ages are indicated by a "Primary Target Age" badge. Home visitors are encouraged to consider the age of the child they are serving but also the child's

developmental level, when determining which set of tips to consider. Parent interests, screening and assessment results, and program goals may also factor into how to individualize an activity.

Ideas to safely and appropriately include older or younger infants or toddlers who are not in the target age ranges are provided for every activity. Home visitors and parents of young children often face the challenge of balancing the varied needs of siblings. Any time there are multiple young children in the home, it is best to have an idea or two on how parents can safely include all children during the activity, as it increases the likelihood that parents will attempt the activity on their own.

Review the Individualizing Tips page before your visit and note ways you expect to individualize the activity. It can be helpful to practice introducing the activity to a co-worker, coach, or supervisor before sharing it with a family to make sure you can confidently explain and model the activity.

3. *Parent Handouts*

Example Parent Handout

Each Parent Handout follows a consistent format to help guide home visitors and families through the “Let’s Explore!” activity. Handouts are designed to be left with the family, either electronically or as a printed copy. Each activity begins with a 3-step set of directions. The first is gathering materials and preparing the environment. In the second step, parents are encouraged to invite their child to explore the materials and lead the play. Finally, the third step includes ways to extend the play or suggests alternative ways to try the activity. You’ll notice that instructions and example photos are intentionally simple. “Let’s Explore!” activities are designed to realistically fit into families’ daily lives. Overly complicated projects detract from the fact that the learning process is more important than a final product.

Stackers *Skill Builders*

Materials

- 5-10 of the same kind of stacking object such as: sponges, plastic baby food containers, wooden blocks, empty toilet paper tubes, small boxes, plastic cups

- 1 First, think of items you have at home that could be used to build with and stack. You'll need at least five to ten items. Make sure your "stackers" are clean and safe for an infant or toddler to play with—no glass, small parts, or sharp edges.
- 2 Then, invite your child to build with you on a table or the floor. Can they make a tower with the stackers? How tall is it?
- 3 Try building simple bridges or pyramids. Line them up like a train. Take turns matching each other's example.

N.I.C.E. Way to Play

Notice & Imitate
Notice how your toddler reacts when the stackers fall. How do they show frustration, surprise, or persistence? Try mirroring their reaction.
Take turns building with the stackers. When it's your turn, imitate the pattern your toddler used to build with the stackers.

Comment & Encourage
Comment on your child's progress and give them words to describe "the fall" as part of the fun and encourage resilience. "You worked hard, and those tricky stackers fell! Let's try again." "Careful, careful... Boom! Crash! That was a big one!"
Encourage your toddler's understanding of numbers and size by counting how many stackers she used and by including words like tall, taller, tallest, short, long, wide, narrow/skinny.

Keep on Growing

I saw my child...

What we enjoyed:

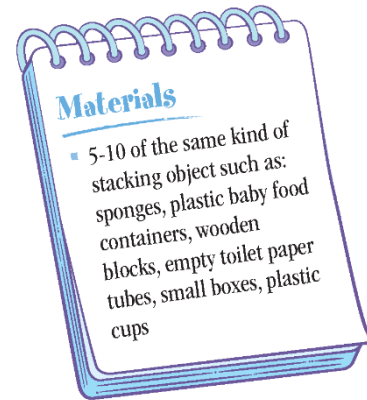
What was challenging:

Next time let's try...

"Let's Explore!" Developmental Activities
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Each Parent Handout contains a list of the **materials** needed to complete the activity. All “Let’s Explore!” activities were intentionally designed to use materials that are either available for free in the form of recycled paper or containers or common objects found in most homes. Programs may choose to provide materials for each family when introducing a new activity or include a planning step for home visitors to make sure families will have the materials for the activity ahead of the visit.



Every activity is designed to promote positive parent-child interactions. The “**N.I.C.E. Way to Play!**” provides prompts for building responsive interactions within the context of the activity. Parents are coached to first **Notice & Imitate** their child’s signs of interest, attempts to communicate, and play behaviors. Next, they support and scaffold development as they **Comment & Encourage**. Home visitors can also use the Notice, Imitate, Comment, and Encourage strategies when they see parents engaging with their child as part of the parallel process of modeling these strategies for parents.

The **Keep on Growing** questions build reflection and joint planning into the activity portion of your visit. Much like the interactive Parent Handouts in the core *Partners* curriculum, this section can be used in various ways to fit the needs of the program and family. Responses can be filled in on the handout together or the prompts can be used to guide a conversation. Some parents may want to repeat the activity on their own, reflect, and discuss it with you on your next visit. As with the *Partners* core curriculum, home visitors have the flexibility to use this tool in a way that best meets each parent’s learning style and needs. One strategy is to leave time at the end of the activity portion of the visit to discuss one or more of the reflection prompts with the family. This exercise is intended to support the parent’s observation skills, as well as foster communication between home visitors and families.

Keep on Growing

I saw my child...

.....

What we enjoyed:

.....

What was challenging:

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Next time let's try...

.....

How Do I Include “Let’s Explore!” Activities on my Home Visits?

“Let’s Explore!” activities are meant to flexibly meet the needs of the families on your caseload.



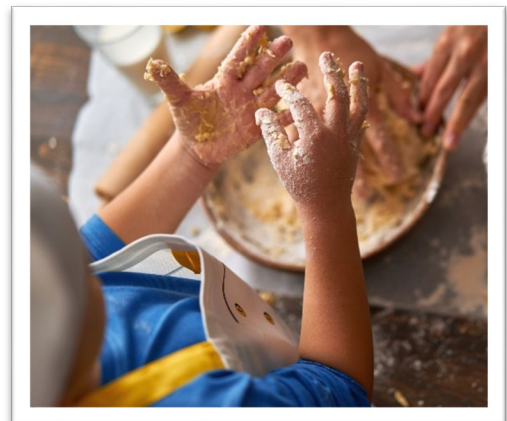
When choosing an activity from this resource consider the family’s culture, parents’ interests, the child’s developmental strengths and needs, and recently discussed parent education topics. For example, if after reviewing the 13-14 months *Watch Me Grow* handout from the core *Partners* curriculum the family expresses concern that their 14-month-old is not walking yet, you might suggest trying the Walker Box activity from the Early Discovery category.

It’s best to plan to conduct the activity during a home visit rather than leaving the handout as “homework” for the parent. Even an activity that is designed to be simple and quick to implement can feel too big or involved the first time you try it. Having a mentor or a partner nearby makes it easier to try something new. The “Keep on Growing” reflection questions may be discussed with the family after the activity or left for the family to think about and report back on the next visit. This feedback can be helpful for home visit planning. The family may want to try a variation of the current activity on their own, during your next visit, or move on to a new activity altogether. The Detailed Information Page and Individualizing Tips include age-based modifications so that the same learning experience can remain developmentally relevant when repeated over time with minor changes.

How do I use “Let’s Explore!” activities to plan play groups such as Group Socializations?

Using the “Let’s Explore!” activities in group settings has significant benefits to parents and children. Parents learn from each other and may be more willing to try messy or challenging activities with the encouragement of their peers. Infants and toddlers negotiate new social skills as they play with children their own age.

To incorporate “Let’s Explore!” activities into play groups or group socializations, you will need to reflect on your space and staffing options. Consider choosing between two and four activities for parents to try. It is a good idea to have a staff member or volunteer parent mentor at each “station” to help explain and facilitate the activity. Provide enough copies of the Parent Handouts so that everyone has all the information needed to try the activity again at home.





Plan to let families transition between “*Let’s Explore!*” activity stations based on their child’s interest in the activity, not a timed rotation schedule. Assure the parents of children who want to keep playing at one station that it is fine if they don’t complete all the activities during the group time. If your play groups include a parent education component, be creative in how you choose “*Let’s Explore!*” activities to complement the topic. For example, when discussing social emotional well-being and stress management with parents, the Discovery Bottles and Playdough activities provide them with positive ways to redirect and release tension in children. The Salad Garden activity could be paired with parent education topics on nutrition.

Can the “*Let’s Explore!*” developmental activities be used in early childhood settings other than home visiting?

While the “*Let’s Explore!*” developmental activities supplement was originally created for home visiting programs, it can also be a helpful tool for engaging parents in center-based programs or parent support programs during individual or group parent engagement activities such as monthly parent meetings, parent education events, or parent/teacher conferences. Pairing “*Let’s Explore!*” developmental activities with related content from the core *Partners* curriculum ensures parents are provided with actionable activities and research-based health, safety,-and developmental information.

