

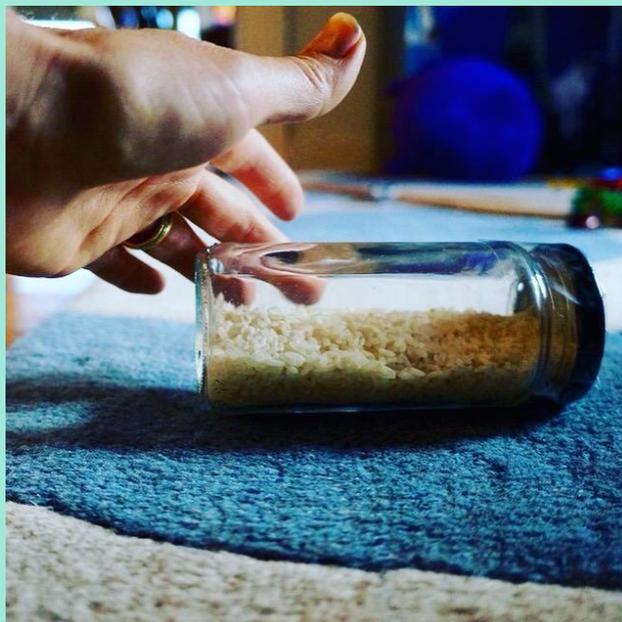


# SIMPLE DIY INFANT ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT

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# INTRODUCTION

As parents and caregivers of infants, we want to provide the best experiences and materials to our little ones... without spending money and time we don't have! There are plenty of "best toys" for infants, but it becomes easy to feel frustrated and financially strapped when these end up collecting dust in a corner.

You crave educational resources that inspire you to become a more knowledgeable, connected parent. My mission with this e-book of **Simple DIY Infant Activities To Promote Development** (as with all resources from [Strength In Words](#)) is to provide you with:

- A set of great ideas to inspire you to interact with your baby at various ages and developmental stages
- The understanding of WHY these activities support development
- The knowledge that you don't have to spend a lot of money on play materials, or even on craft supplies

You don't have to be "crafty" to create great play materials that support interaction & development!

**If you're looking for a week-by-week developmental guide for playing with your baby from birth to 12 months**, grab my best-selling book, "[Understanding Your Baby](#)" on Amazon today! <https://amzn.to/2HbF33I>

At *Strength In Words*, we create resources to improve the quality of your family's interactions by sharing easily digestible information that increases your knowledge about early development. Come join our community of families and help us spread the word about *Strength In Words*.

Thanks for making me part of your journey through parenthood,

**Ayelet Marinovich, M.A., CCC-SLP**

[www.strengtheninwords.com](http://www.strengtheninwords.com)

# MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS



1. [“Corks In A Box” Shaker](#)
  2. [Drum Set For Littles](#)
  3. [Paper Roll Microphone](#)
  4. [Paper Roll & Tissue Paper Drum](#)
  5. [Rain Stick / Shaker](#)
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# MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

## "CORKS IN A BOX" SHAKER



### Materials

- A few corks (3-4 or more, depending on the size of your container)
- A small container, easy for little hands to hold, push or pull

### Instructions

- Place your corks in the container
- Ensure the container is sealed completely
- Shake, shake, shake!



- From birth, infants benefit from hearing many different kinds of sounds
- From 3-4 months, typically developing babies start to reach and grab objects. Around the age of 6 months (or when a baby starts to babble - putting a consonant and vowel sound together), we often see rhythmic banging/tapping of the arms as well. For more information on this, refer to the *Strength In Words* podcast episode, "[\*The Babblers & The Bangers.\*](#)"
- Regardless of whether your baby chooses to mouth, shake, grab, watch you play, or play the instrument herself, she is learning about its properties!

# MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

## DRUM SET FOR LITTLES



### Materials

- A variety of bowls, pots, measuring cups, pans, etc.
- A paper towel holder
- One square of aluminum foil
- *Optional:* wooden spoons (or other “mallets”)



### Instructions

- Turn your bowls, pots & other “drums” upside down
- Take your square of aluminum foil and fold the sides inward (creating a somewhat circular shape), and rest it on top of the paper towel holder, creating a “cymbal”

- From about 3-4 months, infants start to reach, grasp and see farther than the previous ~12 inches. Young infants can enjoy grabbing for these objects (and potentially mouthing them) during tummy time.
- From around 6 months (or when your infant is able to sit up without your help), a drum set might be a wonderful way to harness an emergently babbling and banging little one.
- Imitate your baby’s rhythms - when you do this, you make rhythms together, take turns, and validate and repeat what your baby creates. This reinforces the turn-taking element of conversation, and enhances opportunities for “joint attention,” which you can learn more about in the *Strength In Words* podcast episode [“Why Sing?”](#)

# MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

## PAPER ROLL MICROPHONE



### Materials

- A paper towel roll or toilet paper roll
- *Optional:* aluminum foil, washi tape, stickers, markers, double-sided tape or other decorating materials



### Instructions

- Once the paper has all been used, save your empty roll and decorate as you see fit (or engage an older child in the decorating)
- To make it look more like a microphone while retaining the actual amplification effect, attach aluminum foil on one end of the roll (I used double-sided tape)

- The use of a microphone as a play material can be a wonderful way to encourage vocal play or imitation, and calls attention to vocal turn-taking, an essential component of any conversation.
- Encouraging your little one to feel the reverberation effect against her lips and mouth as she vocalizes can be a nice (and immediate!) sensory reward!
- You can model using the microphone yourself (heightening the silliness factor to increase the allure) and offer it to your baby to encourage her to imitate a specific sound or word or take a conversational turn.
- Typically, older babies start to play a lot with their voices by taking turns, babbling, “singing,” or vocalizing/verbalizing.
- “Call and response” songs like the one we used in the *Strength In Words* podcast episode [\*“Play With Words,”\*](#) are great ways to integrate microphones into musical activities.

# MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

## PAPER ROLL & TISSUE PAPER DRUM



### Materials

- A paper towel roll or toilet paper roll
- A small piece of tissue paper
- *Optional:* washi tape, stickers, markers, double-sided tape, other decorating materials

### Instructions

- Once the paper has all been used, save your empty roll and decorate (or offer to an older child to decorate)
- Stick paper into one end of the roll, or use the paper roll as a mallet for the tissue paper. This creates several options for creating sounds.



- Tap the roll against your hand, tap the tissue papered end of the roll against your hand, or tap the roll against the tissue
- Play with the different sounds these two materials can make together or on different surfaces (your hand, a table, a rug, your leg, etc.), and/or use them to mark the rhythm of a song or nursery rhyme.
- Around the age of 6 months, or when a baby starts to babble (putting a consonant and vowel sound together), we often see rhythmic banging/tapping of the arms as well.
- Engaging in musical events plays into cognitive skills such as pattern recognition - rhythm is one of the elements that creates those patterns, and varying the sounds that keep the beat can make for a fuller, richer experience!
- When presented with open-ended toys like this, we can watch how our babies enjoy making rhythms and using tools to create sounds, or explore materials in different ways!

# MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

## RAIN STICK / SHAKER



### Materials

- An empty (with rounded edges) spice jar that you have saved - glass or plastic
- Rice, lentils, or other small grain or kernel
- Packaging tape or other reliable tape

### Instructions

- If you care to, remove any labels by soaking the container in hot water & peeling it off
- Pour in your grains/kernels, filling about  $\frac{1}{2}$  -  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way full (or experimenting with different levels of fullness for different kinds of sounds!)

- Cover the seal entirely with tape to prevent escaping grains/kernels
- For best results, roll on a carpeted surface - on wooden or other surfaces, the sound of the rolling can overpower the contents. OR, alternate on various surfaces to highlight the differences!
- From birth, this simple instrument makes a soft, calming sound, and you and your baby can play or enjoy exploring it by rolling it back and forth in your baby's vicinity (the sound is soft and not too overwhelming for a new infant!)
- Place the shaker near your baby's hands or feet to allow wandering fingers and toes to experience early notions of cause and effect
- Your baby may roll, pick up, shake, or mouth the shaker - all different ways to make sound with and manipulate this simple instrument!

# COMMUNICATION / LITERACY ACTIVITIES



1. [Animal Images](#)
  2. [Dishwashing Glove Puppet](#)
  3. [Familiar Family Book](#)
  4. [Feelings Faces Plates](#)
  5. [Wordless Picture Book](#)
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# COMMUNICATION / LITERACY

## ACTIVITIES

### ANIMAL IMAGES

#### Materials



- A search engine & printer *OR* old magazines / catalogues/books/wrapping paper - images should be at least 2-3 inches for young babies
- Protective sheet protectors or durable reinforcement (card stock, cardboard, laminated pockets)
- *Alternatively:* use puzzle pieces - peg puzzles are often a good size, provide clear graphics, and are easy for a young baby to grasp & safe to mouth

#### Instructions

- Find images you desire & print/cut them out
- Affix the images to the reinforced surface that works for you
- When you offer the images, hold them up in front of your baby's face two at a time to allow your baby to make a choice. Based on his gaze (it may linger on one for longer), reinforce what he communicates to you by singing a song (like the one in the *Strength In Words* podcast episode "[\*Routines & Routines\*](#)") about that animal.
- Hold them up far enough apart that you can see your baby distinctly looking at each one, and close enough for him to be able to move toward / reach either one of them.
- From around 4 months old, babies typically develop "binocular vision." Around this time, fine motor control & dexterity in the hands also tends to develop enough to allow a baby to reach, grasp and mouth.

# COMMUNICATION / LITERACY

## ACTIVITIES

### DISHWASHER GLOVE PUPPET

#### Materials

- 2 dishwashing gloves (any color will do, but a lighter color like yellow will allow you to draw more detailed faces!
- Various permanent marker colors (black is most necessary, but more variety in color can “dress up” the faces you create!

#### Instructions

- Ensure your gloves are clean and dry. Lay them on a flat surface.
- Draw a face on the top section of each finger - use differently shaped features, eye, lip & hair colors & styles, add accessories...



- Even your actual fingers will be entertaining when you pair them with a finger play, interaction, rhythm & and your undivided attention! Playing with pacing, taking pauses in unexpected places and creating moments of anticipation and silliness will “up” the fun factor!
- Place the gloves on your hands and recite the finger play of choice! Some ideas from *Strength In Words* podcast episodes include those within: “[Become A Puppeteer](#),” “[Communication: The 1st 6 Months](#),” & “[Holistic Learning](#).”
- Play at home, during a caregiving routine, or while out-and-about... an easy toy to fit into your pocket or purse!
- From birth, infants are more interested in looking at human faces than other objects, and are learning to focus on objects within 12 inches of their faces
- The movement, paired with the sound of your voice, will intrigue even a young infant & support communication, social/emotional, and visual/motor development.

# COMMUNICATION / LITERACY

## ACTIVITIES

### FAMILIAR FAMILY BOOK



#### Materials

- A photo album *OR* binder with sheet protectors
- An assortment of photographs representing your little one with primary caregivers doing fun and familiar things he enjoys
- A pen and paper / sticky note *OR* printed out document describing each photo

#### Instructions

- Once you've selected your photos, place one on either the left or right side of the album
- On the other open page facing the photo, place a description of that photo with simple answers to "who/what/when/where/why" questions serving as conversational prompts

- Make your book available for your baby to access any time it's desired within your home, whether you're present or not
- Make your book available to less familiar caregivers as a tool for them to get to know your baby (his interests or types of experiences his environment offers), as well as a useful tool for distraction if you've left, to ease separation anxiety
- When reading the book, try to incorporate musical experiences like the ones exemplified in the *Strength In Words* podcast episode, "[\*The Permanence of Objects.\*](#)"
- Around the age of 6-12 months, when the concept of "object permanence" is likely to be developing, giving an infant the tools to engage with photos and stories about his favorite experiences and favorite people is a wonderful way to support all types of development. It also helps him develop a mental representation of people and previous experiences.

# COMMUNICATION / LITERACY

## ACTIVITIES

### FEELINGS FACES PLATES

#### Materials

- 5-6 paper plates
- A search engine (to locate 5-6 images of various emotions such as happy/sad/excited/mad/tired / hungry) and printer, *OR* a nice marker and some artistic talent!
- Brightly colored markers to write the name of the emotion (to highlight print!)
- Tape



#### Instructions

- Affix each picture on a separate plate with the tape (or draw the various pictures directly on the plates)

- Place them all face down, and either turn one over yourself or allow your baby to choose which plates she wants / wants you to flip over (either by simply doing it herself, or by pointing to, gazing at, or moving her body toward the desired plate)
- Talk about what you see in the picture and how that baby/child feels. Tell a story about why the baby feels this way (each time, you might tell a slightly different story to keep the activity more interesting!) Let the emotion shown on the plate dictate the verse of a song you sing (listen to the *Strength In Words* podcast episode "[Labelling Emotions](#)" for an example of a song that goes well with this activity)
- Model the use of gestures or signs to entice your baby to imitate, creating a truly multi-sensory experience!
- When you label emotions - of people in the environment (especially when strong emotions are witnessed), or those your baby expresses, you give words to feelings, and reassure her that feelings of all kinds are valued!

# COMMUNICATION / LITERACY

## ACTIVITIES

### WORDLESS PICTURE BOOK



#### Materials

- Collect a series of images (~7-20) around a common theme - favorite places, a recent/upcoming experience, a collection of favorite/daily activities, etc. Find in magazines, through a web image search, or from your own photo collection
- Organize images in sheet protectors, laminated pages in a binder, or place in a photo album



#### Instructions

- Get started by following some or all of the great tips from Megan Lingo of **Chickadee Lit** ([www.chickadeelit.com](http://www.chickadeelit.com))

- With a young infant, you'll be doing all the talking, but a baby will enjoy hearing your voice & looking at the images.
  - Tips from Chickadee Lit: for more details and ideas, listen to *Strength In Words* podcast episode, "[Wordless Picture Books.](#)"
1. **Take a Picture Walk:** flip through pages, look at what your little one notices, build engagement and interest before you start reading
  2. **Think Aloud For Your Child:** use "stem" questions to get started, show them that *you* wonder and *you* have questions, don't be afraid to model confusion
  3. **Encourage Expressive Language:** sit face to face when reading, use gestures & pointing, make the funny sounds in the book
  4. **Focus on Inference:** look at the characters' faces, try to figure out what they're thinking/feeling based on their expression and situation
  5. **Extend the experience:** you can never read it the same way twice!

# MOVEMENT / SENSORY ACTIVITIES



1. [Cloud Bed For Movement](#)
  2. [Photo Mailbox](#)
  3. [Scarf Song Prop](#)
  4. [Sensory & Vocabulary Bowl](#)
  5. [Train Box](#)
-

# MOVEMENT / SENSORY ACTIVITIES

## CLOUD BED FOR MOVEMENT



### Materials

- One piece of approximately 2 meters or 2 yards of organza fabric

### Instructions

- Play using some or all of Ania and Ayelet's tips
- Organza is a strong, synthetic and transparent fabric that comes in all manner of color options
- Tips from Ania Witkowska ([www.witkowska.com](http://www.witkowska.com)), Somatic Movement Educator and Therapist, on *Strength In Words* podcast episode, "[Understanding Babies Through Movement](#)"

- Place the fabric under the infant lying flat on his back or tummy, presented as an additional type of texture to experience
- Place the fabric under the infant lying on his tummy (ensuring that he can use his hands to reflexively protect his head) and gently pull baby along. For a baby who is attempting to move forward on his belly but is not yet managing the coordination or the effort to do it, this can be a bit of light release, and can break a cycle of frustration for him, let him have a "breather," let him have a little experience, and then he can go back to trying again
- Gently touch your baby with your skin and alternate with the fabric, talking about the different textures, using descriptive words like "smooth" or "rough," or use different touches
- Use the fabric to play peek-a-boo, hiding under it and then peeking out again
- Throw the fabric up into the air and together, watch how it flows downward, talking about the pace (sloowly) or making the sound of it ("woooosh")

# MOVEMENT / SENSORY ACTIVITIES

## PHOTO MAILBOX



### Materials

- One cardboard box - about the size of a shoe box
- Small knife
- Decorating materials of your choosing
- An assortment of photo of loved ones or special places
- Cardboard pieces, sized to photos (as reinforcement for photos)
- Packaging or regular adhesive tape, laminator

### Instructions

- Decorate your box to make it look more like a "mail box"

- Cut a hole in the top of the box, ensuring your photos fit inside
- Laminate or protect your photos with tape and affix them to the cardboard (I simply wrap the packaging tape around photo & cardboard together)
- Sing a song like the one modeled in *Strength In Words* podcast episode "[Building & Supporting Relationships](#)," or your own repetitive chant to begin before you/your baby choose another photo to help her learn to anticipate the steps to a ritual or social routine
- Allow for "open-ended" narrative - you might tell the same story about the photo, or vary it slightly, talking about different aspects of the person or scene
- From around 6 months, your baby may enjoy the act of putting in and taking out
- Your baby will benefit from hearing about the people in the photos, building associations and experiences with the images while bonding with you!

# MOVEMENT / SENSORY ACTIVITIES

## SCARF SONG PROP



### Materials

- A square-shaped scarf or bandana (flowy, floaty materials tend to work best!) for each of the participating children and adults. Bright and varying colors or patterns can be particularly interesting for small hands to manipulate.

### Instructions

- Once each person has a scarf prop, start to hum a simple tune with action words (like the one modeled in *Strength In Words* podcast episode, "[Assuming Intentionality](#)." Take a turn first and do something with the scarf, like dance / swish/throw/wear a hat/turn/peek-a-boo



- When it's your baby's turn, state what you see her doing - how is she engaging with the scarf? Is she looking at it? Holding it? Touching it? Patting it? Crawling or looking away from it? Whatever action you witness, speak/sing about it!
- Once you've sung about what your baby is doing, take another turn or move to a next person's turn (this can be a nice game in a small group or with a toddler)
- For as long as your baby is engaged with the scarf, continue to sing (or chant) and remember - it's a prop! If your baby moves on and wants to play with something else, you might continue to sing about what she's doing with the next object!
- Even very young infants engage with items in their immediate environment. You can talk about whatever your baby does with or to the scarf. She may put it in her mouth (ensure safety!), look at it, reach for it, etc. These are all actions you can label, modeling vocabulary!
- Older babies will notice you talking about about what they are doing and may imitate what you do with the scarf when their turn comes

# MOVEMENT / SENSORY ACTIVITIES

## SENSORY AND VOCABULARY BOWL



### Materials

- Mixing bowl
- An assortment of baby-safe items in your home for your baby to explore while you supervise. You might consider objects that are: soft/hard, cold/warm, things that move, various shapes and colors



### Instructions

- Place a few items in the bowl - up to 5 at a time
- Ask your baby to choose an object - respond to his gaze, reach, touch, grab, point, vocalization, what it looks like (attributes of the object)

- Put your description to song, like the one modeled in the *Strength In Words* podcast episode, "[Open-Ended Play](#)," as this may enhance his enjoyment of the activity or keep his attention for a longer period.
- From the age of 3-4 months, you might place two objects close to your young baby so that he can reach towards one, effectively making a choice between the two.
- Sensory bowls / bins / baskets / trays are a wonderful way to introduce new materials to your infant, or objects that you wouldn't traditionally put together
- Consider grouping the objects by category (i.e., color, texture, function) or by activity (i.e., dressing, feeding, washing stuffed animals or dolls)

# MOVEMENT / SENSORY ACTIVITIES

## TRAIN BOX



### Materials

- Box or bin (plastic bin, cardboard box, laundry basket, baking sheet, pizza pan, etc.)
- Instruments (paper roll microphone, bell, train whistle, or your voice only)
- *Optional:* blanket or pillow (for added comfort and/or support)



### Instructions

- Take an empty bin/box that is large enough for your older infant (able to support himself upright in a seated position, with any additional supports to ensure he can support his trunk/core muscles while the container sways)

- Sing a song or rhythmic chant about trains, such as the one modeled in the *Strength In Words* podcast episode, "[Holistic Learning](#)."
- Put together rhythm, movement, words, concepts (opposites like backward/forward, fast/slow, etc.) to create an interactive, playful experience between you and your baby
- From birth, your baby can benefit from the movement of your body and sounds of your voice - so instead of placing a younger infant in a bin, you might simply hold him or gently sway a cradle to the rhythm of your song
- In addition to developing his social/emotional, cognitive and communication abilities, you're also targeting his motor development when your older infant can support himself and engage his core muscles to stay upright as you move the container! This can be a wonderful core strengthening exercise

# LEARN MORE ABOUT STRENGTH IN WORDS...

*Strength In Words* became a reality in the spring of 2014, when my son was just a few months old. I wanted to create a resource for myself and for other baby-caregiver pairs that promoted interaction and supported education. Since its inception, *Strength In Words* has brought together many of my skills and interests, as a pediatric speech-language pathologist, a singer, and a mother.

Since then, it has evolved into many different kinds of resources serving communities all around the world. We are constantly adding new valuable services and resources for families with infants and toddlers of all developmental levels. I invite you to listen to my [introductory podcast episode](#) and check us out at [www.strengthinwords.com/](http://www.strengthinwords.com/)

**If you've ever wished for a step-by-step guide to supporting your baby's development...**

Distilled, research-based developmental information paired with simple activities to play with your baby on a week-by-week basis, guiding you and your baby through the first year of life.

When we understand more about how our babies learn and develop, we feel more empowered to do that big job of parenting tiny humans - and we feel more confident that we can maximize those precious moments with our little ones. **That's why I wrote the best-selling book, "Understanding Your Baby."** It's a week-by-week development and activity guide for playing with your baby, from birth to 12 months. Grab it on Amazon today!

Ayelet Marinovich, M.A. CCC-SLP

Founder, Producer, Author of *Strength In Words* and *Understanding Your Baby*

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