Here are some simple, easy-to-set-up activities that you—as parent or caregiver—can use to help meet developmental needs of children in your care. The activities are scaled at 3 levels—for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. Each activity is designed so that your children can practice a specific skill while they play.

Ms. McClanahan, creator of an early-childhood reading series as well as a curriculum writer and trainer of day care teachers, is a reading-sales specialist with Macmillan Company.
CRAWLING & CREEPING

Cat and Mouse

Skill: Creeps quickly from place to place

Here’s a simple game to help your infants with crawling or creeping. Tie a string to a block, a bright ribbon, or any small toy. Put the toy near your infant. Jerk it quickly away. As your infant crawls after it, move it faster and then from side to side so he can practice changing directions as he creeps.

RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

Detective Work

Skill: Investigates other children by touching them

When a new infant or toddler shows up on the scene, use this opportunity to observe. Have the new child play near your infant. Give your infant time to look the situation over. Does he approach the new child and pat him or pull on him? Does he push at him? All of these acts are a step forward in relations with others. Even hitting or grabbing at this stage shows that your infant is venturing out into relating to and testing others.

SPEAKING

Words Only

Skill: Communicates with words only

When your infant first begins to tell you what she wants, she points, pulls, grabs, or uses any physical movement that will help her make you understand. As she grows, your infant will depend more on verbal communication. For example, she may say her own word for milk or food that you understand without reaching for it.

FEEDING

Bottom-Up

Skill: Recognizes difference between nipple and bottom of bottle

Give your infants the bottom of the bottle first. It sounds backwards, but you can gain information about your baby’s development with this activity. As your infants develop visual skills and as they recognize differences in textures, they can discriminate between the nipple and bottom of the bottle.

FINGER DEXTERITY

Books for Infants

Skill: Turns pages of a book

You don’t often think of books and infants as good friends, but they can be. Save those old books with thick paper pages. Be sure they’re books that you don’t want. Hold a book and turn the pages in front of your infant. Then give him the book. He may taste it, tear it, or ignore it. All of these acts are stages in exploring. As his finger control develops, he can turn the pages too. This is good practice for finger dexterity.