

# Parenting the Preschooler

---

 **Working for Wisconsin Families**

Joan E. LeFebvre  
Area Family Living Agent  
University of Wisconsin-Extension  
Vilas, Forest, Florence Counties

---

## Finger Plays

Remember what fun it was to play finger games when you were very young? Enjoy them again as you teach them to your preschooler.

Finger games have some advantages over more organized games. You can play them with one child or several children. Everyone can play together. They can be played anywhere, on a moment's notice, without any equipment. So when your toddler gets fussy while you are waiting in line at the market: do finger plays!

Finger plays can be used to help children relax from active play, as a transition from active or quiet activities.

Go through the motions as you say the words. At first, speak slowly and clearly so the child has a chance to follow what you are doing. Then let your preschooler try to do the motions with you. Later, the child will learn the words. After awhile, your preschooler may want to say the rhyme and go through the motions "all by herself."

Introduce one finger play at a time. Teaching two finger games at one time can be confusing. If older children ask for more games, judge how much you can teach by the way the child remembers the first game.

Start with short and simple finger plays. As you and your preschooler become experienced, move on to longer ones.

Children enjoy games more when they're familiar with the objects mentioned in them. If new things are mentioned, you may want to discuss what the game story is about before you start teaching it. Perhaps show pictures or the objects mentioned in the game.

### Hands

Open, shut them, open, shut them,  
Give a little clap.  
Open, shut them, open, shut them,  
Lay them in your lap.

Creep them, creep them,  
Creep them, creep them  
Right up to your chin.  
Open wide your little mouth,  
But--do not let them in!

### Five Soldiers

Five little soldiers standing in a row.  
Three stood straight and two stood so.  
Along came the captain and what do you think?  
Those soldiers jumped up, quick as a wink!

(The five soldiers are the five fingers in your right hand. But since only three stand straight, the right thumb holds the forefinger down. When the left hand forefinger, the captain, come marching in, the thumb and forefinger join the other soldiers by snapping up.)

### Here Is An Engine

Here is an engine  
That runs on this track  
It whistles -- "Toot Toot"  
And then it runs back.  
(Use left arm for track and let the right hand be the engine running up and down the arm.)

## Birds Flying

Up, up in the sky, the little birds fly (fingers flying like birds)  
Down, down in the next, the little birds rest (hands form nest)  
With a wing on the left, and a wing on the right (hands on each hip)  
Let the little birds rest all the long night. (head to one side like tucking under wing)

## Grandma's Spectacles

These are Grandma's spectacles, (bring index finger and thumb of both hands together and place against face as if wearing glasses)  
This is Grandma's hat. (bring fingertips together in a peak over head)  
This is the way she folds her hands (clasp hands over head)  
And lays them in her lap. (lay hands in lap)

## Teensy, Weensy Spider . . .

A teensy, weensy spider  
Climbed up the water spout (fingers climb upward atop each other)  
Down came the rain (wiggle fingers to make rain)  
And washed the spider out (hands and arms flung downward and outward)  
Out came the sun (hands form circle)  
And dried up all the rain (hands opened wide and outward)  
And the teensy, weensy spider  
Climbed up the spout again (fingers climb upward as before)

## Houses

This is a nest for Mr. Bluebird, (cup both hands, palms up, little fingers together)  
This is the hive for Mr. Bee, (both fists together palm to palm)  
This is the hole for bunny rabbit, (fingers clasped together to make a hole)  
And this is a house for me (fingertips together to make a peak)

## Little Turtle

There was a little turtle (make small circle with hands)  
Who lived in a box (hands form box)  
He swam in a puddle (hands swim)  
He climbed on the rocks (fingers climb up)  
He snapped at a mosquito (snap fingers)  
He snapped at a flea (snap fingers)  
He snapped at a minnow (snap fingers)  
He snapped at me. (snap fingers)  
He caught the mosquito (clap hands)  
He caught the flea (clap hands)  
He caught the minnow (clap hands)  
But he didn't catch me. (shake head no, no and point to self)

## The Apple Tree

'Way up in the apple tree, (point up)  
Two little apples smiled at me. (close thumb and forefinger of each hand)  
I shook that tree as hard as I could, (grab imaginary tree and shake it)  
Down fell the apples (raise hands and arms high, then let fall)  
M-m-m were they good! (rub tummy, satisfied smile on face)

## The Counting Lesson

Once I saw an ant hill  
With no ants about; (hand closed)  
So I said, "Dear little ants  
Won't you please come out?"  
Then as if the little ants  
Had heard my call  
One! Two! Three! Four! Five came out! (fingers open one by one)

### Sources:

Lois Klessig, *UW-Extension Child Development Specialist*, 1973.  
*Favorite Finger Plays*, State Department of Health and Social Services,  
Division of Family Services, 1972.

Author: Joan E. LeFebvre, Professor, Department of Family Development, University of Wisconsin-Extension  
Reviewer: Dave Riley, Extension Specialist, Child Development and Early Education, UW-Madison

For more information on Parenting and Child Development, contact:  
JOAN E. LEFEBVRE, Area Family Living Agent, University of Wisconsin-Extension, P O Box 369, Courthouse, Eagle River WI 54521, 715-479-3653, FAX 715-479-3605, E-Mail joan.lefebvre@ces.uwex.edu  
September, 1993

Revised August, 1997