



# ACTIVITY GUIDE BOOK FOR 1-3 YEARS KIDS



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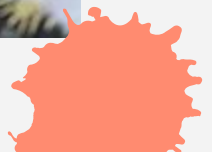
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A young child with dark hair and eyes is shown from the chest up, wearing a light-colored t-shirt. Their hands are covered in colorful paint (red, yellow, green, blue) and are held up to their face, with fingers spread. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. There are decorative paint strokes: a large orange one at the top right, a teal one at the bottom left, and a yellow one at the bottom right.

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Little Movers, a practical and playful guide created to support young children's physical development through engaging, age-appropriate activities.

Inspired by the Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) principles and grounded in research on child development, this book offers a blend of structured and unstructured play ideas for toddlers aged 1 to 3.



## FRAMEWORKS & PRINCIPLES

### **Pedagogical Frameworks Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC**



This curriculum promotes holistic development, emphasizing play as an essential method of learning. It focuses on supporting children's overall growth, including physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development, through child-centered, engaging, and inclusive practices.

### **Montessori Principles (Practical Life and Sensorial Exploration)**

Montessori education emphasizes learning through practical life activities—tasks reflecting real-life experiences that foster independence, concentration, and coordination. Sensorial exploration further supports child development by encouraging the use of senses to understand the environment, aiding fine motor skills, sensory refinement, and cognitive growth.



## **Core Principles Emphasized**

### **Holistic Growth Through Play**

Play is valued as a fundamental way for young children to explore their environment, develop various skills, and integrate new experiences. Activities are designed to nurture all developmental areas simultaneously, allowing children to learn naturally through engaging, meaningful interactions.

### **Encouraging Independence and Confidence**

Activities emphasize children's autonomy, giving them opportunities to make choices, engage independently, and practice skills at their own pace. This nurtures a sense of accomplishment, builds self-esteem, and encourages a lifelong love of learning.

### **Child-Led and Adult-Supported Exploration**

A balanced approach is adopted where children lead their play and exploration, with adults providing support, observation, and safety. This respectful approach empowers children, facilitates deeper engagement, and promotes self-directed learning.





# STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES



## Structured Activities

### 1. Bean Bag Transfer

#### Objective

Strengthen fine motor coordination, pincer grasp, and hand–eye coordination.

#### Key Principle

**Practical Life:** Child refines movements through real or purposeful tasks.

#### Age Range & Adaptation

**For 1–2-year-olds:** Provide **larger bean bags** or soft fabric pouches; they may just scoop with hands.

**For 2–3-year-olds:** Use smaller bean bags or add a small scoop or spoon for an extra challenge.

#### Learning Environment

A low table or floor mat where children can comfortably stand or sit.  
Quiet corner free from heavy distractions.



| Structured Activity 1    | Materials  | Implementation  | Assessment  | Reflection & Next Steps  | Pedagogical Justification  |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Bean Bag Transfer</b> | Two shallow bowls or baskets.  | Demonstration: Slowly show how to pick up a bean bag from one bowl and place it into another.                                 | Observe the child's grip, wrist rotation, and focus.                              | If the child masters the basic transfer, introduce a spoon or small tongs.   | Children develop concentration and independence through repeated handling of objects. This aligns with Finnish ECEC goals of supporting emerging autonomy and offering hands-on learning experiences |
|                          | Several small, soft bean bags (or similarly weighted bags filled with rice/beans). | Child's Turn: Invite the child to transfer each bean bag. If they spill or miss, remain calm and let them correct themselves. | Note if they self-correct or show increasing coordination over repeated attempts. | Consider adding color matching (transferring only red bean bags into a red bowl) to incorporate basic classification skills. |  |
|                          |  | Repetition: Encourage repeated tries at their own pace.   |   |  |  |



## 2. Toddler Step Climbing

### Objective

Enhance gross motor coordination, balance, and spatial awareness.

### Key Principle

Movement with Purpose: Encouraging purposeful physical tasks fosters confidence and autonomy.

### Age Range & Adaptation

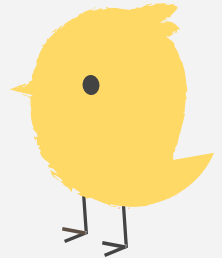
**For 1–2-year-olds:** Begin with a single sturdy step. Provide close supervision.

**For 2–3-year-olds:** Add a small flight of 2–3 steps. Encourage the child to hold a rail or a stable adult hand for minimal assistance.

### Learning Environment

Indoor or outdoor step area, safe and free from clutter.

Rail or low wall for support.



| Structured Activity<br>2     | Materials   | Implementation   | Assessment   | Reflection & Next Steps  | Pedagogical Justification  |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Toddler Step Climbing</b> | Child-height step(s).                             | Demonstration: Show how to step up and down slowly, using the rail for balance.                    | Track progress in stability, step size, and whether the child attempts independent climbing. | If the child shows readiness, provide minimal support.   | Aligned with this activity's idea of freedom of movement, step climbing builds muscular strength and body awareness core elements in Finnish ECEC's emphasis on holistic physical development. |
|                              | Soft mat at the base for extra safety if indoors. | Independent Attempts: Let the child ascend and descend at their own pace, spotting them if needed. | Observe confidence, do they look for help over time?   | Introduce carrying a small object (e.g., a lightweight toy) up the steps to practice coordination. |  |
|                              |   | Repetition: Children often enjoy repeating physically challenging tasks to master them.            |  |  |  |

### 3. Wet Sponge Squeezing

#### Objective

Strengthen hand muscles (fine motor) and develop focus through repetitive motion.

#### Key Principle

**Practical Life:** Water-based tasks integrate real-world actions with purposeful movement.

#### Age Range & Adaptation

**For 1–2-year-olds:** Use larger sponges, shallow water. Might focus more on dipping and feeling texture.

**For 2–3-year-olds:** Encourage precise squeezing into a separate container for added challenge.

#### Learning Environment

Table or tray at child's height, with easy-clean surface.

Aprons or towels for spills.





**Structured Activity**  
3

**Materials**

**Implementation**

**Assessment**

**Reflection & Next Steps**

**Pedagogical Justification**

**Wet Sponge Squeezing**

Two small basins (one with water, one empty).

Demonstration:  
Slowly immerse sponge in water, lift it over the empty basin, and squeeze.

Look at hand strength (do they squeeze effectively?), concentration, and the child's willingness to self-correct.

Introduce color-coded sponges or a target line in the empty basin to measure progress.

Child-friendly sponges.


Child's Turn:  
Encourage them to repeat. If they spill, show them how to wipe using a small towel.

Note how they handle spills and whether they adopt cleaning routines independently.

Integrate wiping tables or real cleaning tasks to build a sense of responsibility.

Repetition: Allow repeated transfers to see the water move from one basin to the other.

Practical life water activities foster fine motor control and focus, echoing the Finnish ECEC practice of combining play with everyday skills.



## 4. Simple Balance Beam

### Objective

Develop balance and core stability through purposeful walking.

### Key Principle

**Senso-Motor Integration:** Fosters the link between the child's movement and perceptual development.

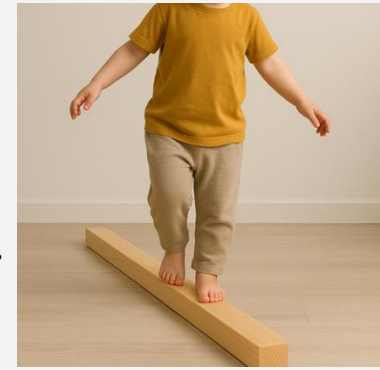
### Age Range & Adaptation

**For 1–2-year-olds:** Use a taped line on the floor or a very low beam (2–3 cm high). Offer hand support if needed.

**For 2–3-year-olds:** A slightly raised beam (5–8 cm) with adult spotting. Encourage arms out to the side for balance.

### Learning Environment

Indoor area with soft floor or mats on either side of the beam.



| Structured Activity<br>4          | Materials  | Implementation  | Assessment  | Reflection & Next Steps  | Pedagogical Justification   |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|--|---|
| <p><b>Simple Balance Beam</b></p> | <p>Low wooden beam or a strip of tape on the floor to simulate a “balance path.”</p> | <p>Demonstration: Show slow, heel-to-toe walking along the beam or tape.</p>      | <p>Observe foot placement, posture, and how the child reacts to slight wobbles.</p> | <p>If the child struggles, revert to a floor-level line until they’re comfortable.</p> | <p>Encouraging coordinated movement helps children build gross motor skills and confidence, key goal in Finnish ECEC practices of fostering independence and self-assurance</p> |
|                                   |  | <p>Child’s Turn: Spot them as they try, reinforcing calm, deliberate steps.</p>   | <p>Note improvements in balance or the number of steps taken successfully.</p>      | <p>Add music or silly prompts (“Walk like a quiet cat!”) for variety.</p>              |   |
|                                   |  | <p>Progression: Gradually reduce your spotting if the child gains confidence.</p> |   |  |   |

## 5. Scooping & Pouring Station

### Objective

Strengthen fine motor skills and hand–eye coordination through practical life tasks.

### Key Principle

**Order and Independence:** Children learn precise motor control by self-correcting as they pour and scoop.

### Age Range & Adaptation

**For 1–2-year-olds:** Use large scoops, chunky containers, and bigger grains (like dry beans) to limit spills.

**For 2–3-year-olds:** Offer smaller scoops, narrower containers, or finer materials (rice, lentils) for added challenge.

### Learning Environment

Low table or tray at child height, with simple containers.

Cloth or brushes for easy cleaning.



| Structured Activity<br>5                     | Materials  | Implementation   | Assessment  | Reflection & Next Steps  | Pedagogical Justification  |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Scooping &amp; Pouring Station</b></p> | <p>Two containers (one filled with beans/rice, one empty), child-sized scoops or spoons.</p> | <p>Demonstration:<br/>Scoop beans from one container and slowly pour into the other.</p>     | <p>Note improvements in pouring accuracy and reduced spills over time.</p>    | <p>Rotate in different materials (dry pasta, seeds) for sensory variety.</p>     | <p>This practical life exercise fosters precision and concentration while reinforcing personal responsibility for tidying up, an integral part of Finnish ECEC learning environments</p> |
|  |  | <p>Child's Turn: Let them repeat at their own pace. If beans spill, model calm cleaning.</p> | <p>Watch for increased focus and repetition if the child enjoys the task.</p> | <p>Observe if the child chooses this station independently during free play.</p> |  |
|  |  | <p>Extension: Add a funnel or narrower jar as a new challenge for older toddlers.</p>        |   |  |  |



# UNSTRUCTURED ACTIVITIES



# Unstructured Activities



## 1. Freedom to Climb & Cruise

### Objective

Promote gross motor strength and coordination through self-directed exploration.

### Key Principle

**Prepared Environment:** Child-safe furniture at child's height supports free movement.

### Age Range & Adaptation

**For 1–2-year-olds:** Low, sturdy furniture or foam blocks.

**For 2–3-year-olds:** Add small stools, tunnels, or climbers.

### Learning Environment

Indoor or outdoor space with secure, stable climbing structures.

Soft mats to cushion potential falls.



| <b>Unstructured Activity</b><br><b>1</b> | <b>Implementation</b>                                       | <b>Assessment</b>   | <b>Reflection &amp; Next Steps</b>                                   | <b>Pedagogical Justification</b>   |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Freedom to Climb &amp; Cruise</b>     | Organize safe furniture or blocks; ensure no major hazards. | Observe which challenges children pick (stepping, pulling up, or crawling under). | Rotate or rearrange furniture to spark new interest.                 | By giving children freedom to navigate a prepared space, they develop balance and self-confidence—a hallmark of child-led practice and a Finnish ECEC emphasis on learning through play. |
|  | Let children decide how to climb, crawl, cruise, or step.   | Note balance improvements and confidence.   | Add music or themes (like a “mountain climb”) for imaginative flair. |  |
|  | Intervene only if safety is at risk.                        |   |  |  |



## 2. Outdoor Nature Exploration

### Objective

Foster gross motor skills (walking, running, climbing small inclines) and sensory awareness.



### Key Principle

**Connection to Nature:** Outdoor environments inspire holistic development through real-world exploration.


### Age Range & Adaptation

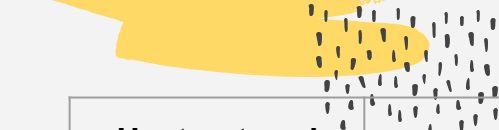

**For 1–2-year-olds:** Start with gentle terrain, short walks, and plenty of time to observe.

**For 2–3-year-olds:** Let them climb tiny hills, hop over sticks, or gently run short distances.

### Learning Environment

Safe, enclosed outdoor area (e.g., yard, park) with varied surfaces (grass, small slopes, gravel).



| Unstructured Activity 2           | Materials   | Implementation  | Assessment   | Reflection & Next Steps  | Pedagogical Justification   |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Outdoor Nature Exploration</b> | Child-sized outdoor clothing/shoes.                                       | Let them roam freely at their own pace.   | Observe improvements in navigating uneven ground or climbing.        | Introduce seasonal themes (collect autumn leaves, watch snow fall).                      | Outdoor exploration nurtures physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being. This advocated contact with nature for self-discovery, aligning with Finnish ECEC's emphasis on nature-based learning |
|                                   | Baskets or bags for collecting natural items (stones, leaves) if desired. | If a child shows interest in a leaf, insect, or puddle, encourage deeper exploration. | Note if children engage in longer periods of self-directed movement. | If children show sustained interest, bring found objects inside for further exploration. |   |
|                                   |   | Offer gentle reminders about boundaries without stifling curiosity.                   |  |  |   |

### 3. Water Play Exploration

#### Objective

Strengthen arm coordination, hand–eye control, and sensory awareness through open-ended water play.

#### Key Principle

Sensorial: Children learn via direct contact with elements like water, building independence in exploration.

#### Age Range & Adaptation

**For 1–2-year-olds:** Use a shallow bin or tray with just a small amount of water.

**For 2–3-year-olds:** Slightly deeper water, adding cups, funnels, small boats, or sponges.

#### Learning Environment

Indoors on waterproof mats or outdoors in a shady spot.

Towels ready for spills or drying hands.



| Unstructured Activity 3              | Materials                                    | Implementation  | Assessment  | Reflection & Next Steps  | Pedagogical Justification   |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|---|
| <p><b>Water Play Exploration</b></p> | <p>Shallow container with water.</p>         | <p>Fill the container to a safe level.</p>                            | <p>Observe them testing cause-and-effect (what happens if I stir, pour, splash?).</p> | <p>Add color or water wheels if children show extended interest.</p>   | <p>Unstructured water plays taps into children's natural curiosity, refining fine motor and sensory skills. This open-ended format aligns with Montessori's respect for independent exploration and Finnish ECEC's holistic approach.</p> |
|                                      | <p>Cups, small ladles, floating objects.</p> | <p>Allow children to pour, splash, scoop, or watch objects float.</p> | <p>Note improvements in gripping and transferring water objects.</p>                  | <p>Some children may just enjoy watching water; others will be more active—both are valuable learning experiences.</p> |   |
|                                      |  | <p>Step in only if they need help or conflict arises.</p>             |   |  |   |

## 4. Open-Ended Object Basket

### Objective

Encourage fine motor exploration, problem-solving, and free experimentation.

### Key Principle

**Freedom of Choice:** The child selects and manipulates objects that spark interest, refining coordination in the process.

### Age Range & Adaptation

**For 1–2-year-olds:** Include larger objects (wooden rings, chunky lids) to avoid choking hazards.

**For 2–3-year-olds:** Add smaller puzzle-like pieces, container lids, or stacking rings for more challenge.

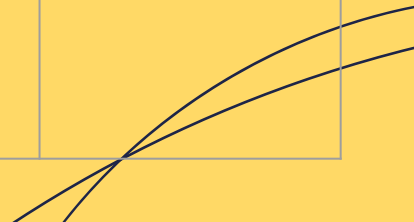
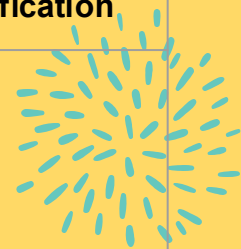
### Learning Environment

Indoor area with a soft rug or mat.

Basket placed on a low shelf for easy child access.



| Unstructured Activity 4                | Materials   | Implementation  | Assessment   | Reflection & Next Steps   | Pedagogical Justification   |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| <p><b>Open-Ended Object Basket</b></p> | <p>Basket containing safe, diverse items (e.g., wooden spoons, large spools, silicone rings).</p> | <p>Introduce the basket. Show a couple of objects, naming them or demonstrating how to manipulate them.</p> | <p>Note how each child grasps or manipulates objects.</p>            | <p>Rotate objects weekly to maintain novelty.</p>   | <p>This self-directed exploration boosts fine motor, cognitive, and sensory development. In line with Finnish ECEC, children's agency fosters deeper engagement and skill-building.</p> |
|  |   | <p>Allow the child to freely choose items to explore.</p>   | <p>Look for creative uses (e.g., stacking lids, rolling spools).</p> | <p>If a child becomes very focused on a certain item, offer slight extensions (e.g., a second item that fits inside).</p> |   |
|  |   | <p>Observe without interfering unless safety is a concern.</p>  |  |   |   |



## 5. Child-Led Music & Movement



### Objective

Strengthen gross motor coordination and body awareness through free dance or rhythmic movement.

### Key Principle

**Respect for Individual Expression:** Movement can be a personal and creative process, guided by each child's sense of rhythm and joy.

### Age Range & Adaptation

**For 1–2-year-olds:** Simple music, shorter durations. They may just bounce, sway, or crawl to the sounds.

**For 2–3-year-olds:** Introduce scarves, ribbons, or “freeze dance” moments if they can handle light structure.

### Learning Environment

Clear, open space with minimal trip hazards.  
A music source at child's ear-friendly volume.



| Unstructured Activity 5               | Materials                               | Implementation  | Assessment   | Reflection & Next Steps   | Pedagogical Justification   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Child-Led Music &amp; Movement</b> | Child-safe music player.                | Play gentle, rhythmic music.  | Observe if children coordinate movements with the beat or experiment with new actions. | Occasionally invite them to “freeze” when the music stops, building listening skills.     | Children’s motor coordination and creative expression flourish when given autonomy in music-based activities. |
|                                       | Optional: Scarves, ribbons, or shakers. | Let children move however they like—encourage them to jump, spin, or wave arms. | Note any social interactions (dancing together, copying moves).                        | Add different genres (classical, children’s songs, light drums) to vary movement quality. |   |
|                                       |   | Provide simple prompts (“Let’s sway together!”) but remain flexible.            |  |   |   |



## Final Notes

### Safety and Supervision

Ensure the environment is prepared and free of hazards, especially for 1–2-year-olds who may still be unsteady.

### Adaptation

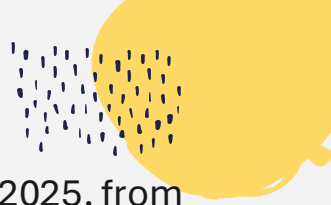
Each activity can be scaled by simplifying for younger children or adding challenge for older toddlers.

### Observing & Reflecting

Core Finnish ECEC is adult observation—rather than immediate intervention—enabling children to self-correct and grow in confidence.

By integrating these 10 inspired activities, educators and families can provide rich opportunities for physical development in a manner consistent with Finland’s holistic, child-centered approach to early childhood education.

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