



Welcome Guide

Sampler



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Welcome Guide

A Play and Discovery Program
for Infants and Toddlers

By Beth Alley Wise

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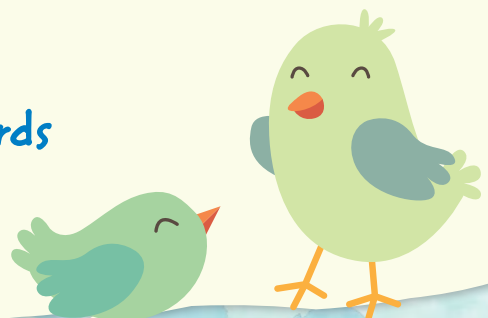
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Welcome!

Welcome to Little InvestiGators™, a play and discovery program for infants and toddlers that celebrates the magic of childhood and the joy of teaching during each stage of growth and development from birth to three years old.

Little InvestiGators™, which includes both the Baby InvestiGators™ and InvestiGator Tots™ programs, is based on scientifically valid research. The program and teaching practices are developmentally appropriate for infants and toddlers and designed to support the delivery of child-focused, family-centered experiences.

Here's what we believe about the way that infants and toddlers learn:

Infants and Toddlers learn through relationships

Much of the cognitive, language, social, and physical learning a child experiences happens through responsive interactions with loving adults. Little InvestiGators™ respectfully nurtures young children's development, giving caregivers the tools to build trust and security.

Infants and Toddlers learn when playing

We understand the power of play and the imagination in young children. In our program, play is central to learning about the physical world, themselves, and others. Play helps them sort out their feelings and explore relationships and roles that are meaningful to them.

Infants and Toddlers learn in rich environments

Helping you create an environment that sparks interest, encouraging and supporting exploration, is one of our missions. Look for hundreds of ideas specifically for each routine (meals, feeding, naps, diapering, toileting), outdoor play, and indoor learning areas.



Responsive Caregiving

What is responsive caregiving and why is it so important? Every moment, infants and toddlers communicate information about themselves. Young children do this in both small, subtle ways and ways that can be very vocal. Responsive caregiving means staying in tune with children's communicative signals. When caregivers listen and watch children's actions, as well as notice their needs and interests, then every action taken by the caregiver can be truly responsive.

The goals, activities, and supportive materials in Baby InvestiGators and InvestiGator Tots reinforce best practices in responsive care, including an awareness of qualities such as:

- tone of voice
- facial expression
- welcomed affection
- open-ended questions
- allowance for free exploration
- praise for cooperation

In Little InvestiGators, the teacher-caregiver plans every day around the needs, interests, and level of development of each child, using *Play and Grow Cards* and other program components to develop a flexible lesson plan.



Research

Children are born with an amazing capacity to gather and organize vast amounts of information. They are active learners, spending their days listening, watching, studying, and trying to make meaning of the world around them.

Current research yields a number of well-supported generalizations, or principles, about how to best meet the needs of individual infants and toddlers. These principles form the foundation for Little InvestiGators.

- All the domains of learning are important and are integrated.
- Growth follows a sequence, with later abilities and knowledge building on those already acquired.
- Infants and toddlers develop at varying rates.
- Growth is influenced both by what a child is born with and her experiences.
- The first three years of a child's life are the most important for brain development.
- Development and learning occur in multiple social and cultural contexts.
- Paths to learning vary and require a wide range of teaching strategies and interactions.
- Play is key to developing self-regulation as well as language, cognition, and social competence.
- Children need secure, consistent relationships with responsive adults.
- Communication between families and caregivers bridges continuity in care.



Components



Family Corner

Individual Care Plan, monthly activity calendars, and other resources for Little InvestiGator families



Welcome Guide

Helpful resources and templates for caregivers using Little InvestiGators



Continuum of Growth and Development (online resource)

Comprehensive continuum of program goals and indicators for ages 0–4



Rings

Colorful loops for sorting and displaying *Play and Grow Cards*



Infant Board Books

Toddler Board Books

Classic, new, and familiar board books to engage your littlest learners, get them up and moving, and nurture relationships

Request a price list or customized quote.

customer.service@robert-leslie.com

Play and Grow Cards

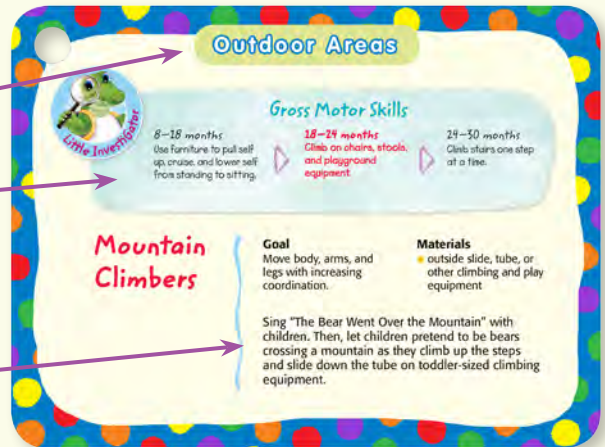


Play and Grow Cards

Simple activities and the guidance needed to spark curiosity and encourage exploration in all domains of learning (200 cards for infants, 300 for toddlers)

Front:

- Learning Environment
- Snippet of Continuum shows age range and skill focus for this card plus development of skill for age groups before and after
- Activity includes Goal, Materials, and simple directions



Back:

Resources and support associated with activity on front:

- Observe (Watch and listen to assess growth)
- Family Time
- Dual Language (or Special Needs)
- Connections to other content areas



Learning Environments

Infants and toddlers make sense of their world through sensory exploration, physical activity, and secure relationships. They are sensitive to both the physical and emotional landscape of their environment.

Emotional Environment

The caregiver creates an environment of security and trust by being responsive to a child's cues and expressions of interest. In addition, soft music, friendly greetings, and a genuine smile help create a warm and caring atmosphere.

Physical Environment

The physical layout maximizes opportunities for infants and toddlers to learn through discovery. Little InvestiGators is organized around three specific features of the physical environment:

Routines

Outdoor Areas

Play Spaces

Elements to guide setup of each setting include:

- Age appropriate furniture and materials.
- Safe and flexible design to meet the needs of all children.
- Visually stimulating with spaces for both quiet play or rest and spaces filled with movement, music, and laughter.
- Pictures, books, and objects that are supportive of cultural and language diversity.
- Hands-on materials and equipment for children with special needs.

Language and Cultural Diversity

The home language is a child's link to the love, values, and cultural traditions learned from his or her family. Little InvestiGators extends and enhances language and cultural connections in many ways, such as:

- Using dual-language labeling in the room.
- Introducing a story with key words from one language before reading in another.
- Increasing the use of nonverbal communication, including expressions, gestures, and body language.
- Providing culturally rich experiences, including songs, dances, art, and storytelling.
- Including materials that represent many cultures, such as dolls, dress up clothes, foods, pictures, musical instruments, and holiday objects.
- Creating an environment where infants and toddlers feel a sense of belonging.

The *Play and Grow Cards* provide daily support and suggestions for supporting dual language learners and cultural diversity. Some examples follow.

Dual Language

Find out from families what words they use in their home language to say *hello* or *goodbye*. Incorporate those words in the waving activity.

Dual Language

Encourage children to use gestures and pictures along with spoken words to help communicate their ideas to one another.

Dual Language

Select books that reflect the infant's cultural heritage and include them in your library and routines.

Children with Special Needs

Little InvestiGators is committed to meeting the needs of all young children, including infants and toddlers with varying abilities, disabilities, and special needs. Children follow different paths to learning and this curriculum incorporates the key components of high-quality inclusive programs including clearly defined *access, participation, and support*.

The *Play and Grow Cards* provide a diverse range of learning experiences that are easily modified to facilitate access for children at different developmental levels.

Access points for levels before and after are shown in black.

The indicator shown in red is the focus age level for the activity.

Routines

Problem Solving

18-24 months
Ask for "more."

24-30 months
Know when they don't have as many objects as another child.

30-36 months
Begin to make quantity comparisons.

Grape Gobblers

Goal
Begins to develop interests and skills related to numbers and counting.

Materials
● grapes or other snacks
● small plates

At snack time, place five grapes on each child's plate. As "Grape Gobblers" gobble the grapes, help them compare the number of grapes on their plates to the number left on friends' plates. Make it a game to have each child find a Grape Gobbler that doesn't have as many grapes.

Special Needs

Carry children or use a stroller to help children with limited mobility participate in picking flowers.

Special Needs

Provide larger containers and objects for children who lack the necessary dexterity to handle smaller items.

Some children need additional individualized accommodations to participate fully in play and learning activities. Look for helpful hints on the back of the *Play and Grow Cards* for modifying the activity or strategies to support children with specific developmental needs.

Families as Partners

The family is at the core of a young child's learning and development; as such, the Little InvestiGators curriculum emphasizes the importance of the caregiver-family relationship. Through frequent interactions with family members, the caregiver learns more about the values, expectations, and factors that shape children's lives.

Family Time

Family involvement lets families observe caregivers modeling activities and offering support for their children. Likewise, caregivers can learn strategies from families to create meaningful interactions and relationships with children. The Family Time section of each *Play and Grow Card* provides specific suggestions that link each activity back to children's families, creating a holistic approach to infant and toddler development.

Sharing Shelf

Another essential part of the family-caregiver connection is the creation of a Sharing Shelf in the room—a designated area that provides resources for families and a place to display children's work. It is a family's go-to location to find calendars, daily reports, and enrichment activities. It's also a place where staff and families can bring in toys and books for all to share.



Family Corner (online resource)

Little InvestiGators provides a variety of ways for families to participate in the growth and development of their child through the *Family Corner* online resource.

- The **Individual Care Plan** offers families a detailed way to communicate children's strengths, interests, and needs. The Individual Care Plan documents the child's preferences, routines, and the social and cultural context of his or her home life. Completing this prior to a child's enrollment ensures a smooth transition and consistency in expectations for children, families, and teachers.
- **Monthly Calendars** provide engaging activities for children and their families. Each day offers an activity that promotes children's growth and development; for example, families might provide sponges, funnels, basters, and cups for bath time exploration with water.
- **Family Enrichment Activities and Information** offer valuable suggestions, such as keeping scrapbooks to capture and document children's experiences, ideas for art activities to do at home, and up-to-date information and strategies to foster children's interests.



Assessing Growth and Development

Caregivers engage in ongoing assessment through natural observations and interactions with children. Based on their documentation and reflection, they then develop, revise, and implement plans to meet each child's needs.



Observe

Begin by observing: What is the child doing? How does the child engage in the activity? How does the child interact with other children?

Document

Document your observations using the following tools.

- Use the **Daily Report** on page 14 to capture and communicate the child's daily activities, routines, and experiences.
- Use the quarterly **Progress Report** on pages 15–16 to celebrate growth with families and to plan new learning experiences for their children.
- The **Observation Checklist** on pages 17–19 documents each child's growth in all developmental domains.
- Create a **Portfolio** to collect samples of a child's learning over time through artworks, dictated captions, photos, experiences, and projects. This is also a good home for Checklists and Individual Care Plans.

Reflect and Plan

Reflect on your observations and then begin to plan changes and create new experiences. Implement the plan. Continue to observe the child while you put the plan into action.



Daily Report

Date _____

Name _____

Today I was:   

Today I ate: _____

Other notes: _____

Things I did: _____

Diaper/Toilet: _____

Naps: _____

Date _____

Name _____

Today I was:   

Today I ate: _____

Other notes: _____

Things I did: _____

Diaper/Toilet: _____

Naps: _____

Progress Report

Progress Reports are completed and shared with families every three months. The report includes the child's current status and developmental achievements in addition to outlining plans to meet individual needs in each domain:

- **Language Development and Communication**, including Listening and Understanding, Communicating and Speaking, and Early Reading and Writing
- **Physical and Motor Development**, including Gross Motor Skills, Fine Motor Skills, and Health Status and Practices
- **Cognitive Development**, including Exploration and Discovery, Memory, Problem Solving, and Imitation and Symbolic Play
- **Approaches to Learning**, including Initiative and Curiosity, Persistence and Attention, and Creativeness and Imagination
- **Social and Emotional Development**, including Trust and Emotional Security, Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Relationships





Progress Report



Child's Name _____ Age _____

Caregiver _____ Date _____

New Skills Observed

Skills from each domain recently observed.

Developing Skills

What you will be watching for and encouraging.

Working Together

Caregiver and family plans to support developing skills. Plans for addressing concerns.





Child's Name _____ Age _____

Caregiver _____ Date _____

Record dates the child's progress toward each goal was observed.

Language and Communication Development

Listening and Understanding	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Listens with interest to language of others			
Goal 2: Understands and responds to nonverbal and verbal communication			
Goal 3: Responds to simple directions or visual cues			
Communicating and Speaking	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Uses sounds, gestures, or words to communicate			
Goal 2: Responds to simple statements and questions			
Goal 3: Takes turns in simple back and forth conversations			
Goal 4: Responds to and uses a growing vocabulary			
Early Reading and Writing	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Shows interest in songs, rhymes, finger plays, and stories			
Goal 2: Answers simple questions about stories			
Goal 3: Develops interest in and involvement with books and other print materials			
Goal 4: Shows an interest in letters by asking about and naming some of them			
Goal 5: Makes marks and scribbles to communicate for a variety of purposes			
Goal 6: Demonstrates phonological awareness			

KEY

NY = Not Yet (New skill or behavior not observed yet.)

D = Developing (New skill or behavior developing as expected for age.)

S = Secure (Skill or behavior is demonstrated with confidence for age.)

Physical and Motor Development

Gross Motor Skills	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Demonstrates increasing balance, stability, control, and coordination			
Goal 2: Develops increasing ability to change positions and move body from place to place			
Goal 3: Participates in active physical play indoors and outdoors			
Fine Motor Skills	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Develops small muscle control and coordination			
Goal 2: Coordinates eye and hand movements			
Goal 3: Uses tools that require finger and hand control			
Health Status and Practices	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Shows characteristics of healthy development			
Goal 2: Expresses physical needs nonverbally or verbally			
Goal 3: Begins to develop self-care skills			
Goal 4: Begins to understand safe and unsafe behaviors			

Cognitive Development

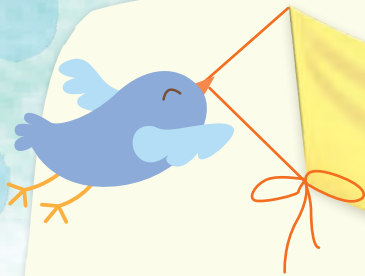
Exploration and Discovery	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Pays attention and exhibits curiosity in people and objects			
Goal 2: Uses senses to explore people, objects, and the environment			
Goal 3: Shows interest in colors, shapes, patterns, and pictures			
Goal 4: Makes things happen and watches for results and repeats actions			
Memory	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Shows ability to acquire and use information in new ways			
Goal 2: Recognizes familiar people, places, and things			
Goal 3: Searches for missing or hidden objects			
Problem Solving	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Experiments with different uses of objects			
Goal 2: Uses imagination and creativity to solve problems			
Goal 3: Begins to develop interests and skills related to numbers and counting			
Imitation and Symbolic Play	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Observes and imitates sounds or behaviors			
Goal 2: Uses objects to represent other things			
Goal 3: Engages in imaginary play to recreate experiences and explore relationships and roles			

Approaches to Learning

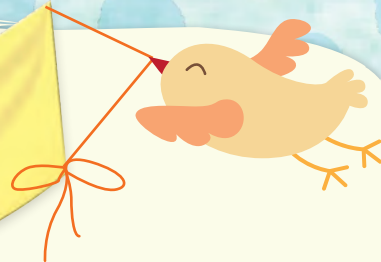
Initiative and Curiosity	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Shows curiosity and interest in exploring the environment			
Goal 2: Demonstrates initiative by making choices			
Goal 3: Seeks to discover and learn new things			
Persistence and Attentiveness	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Maintains attention and focus			
Goal 2: Explores thoroughly and tries to solve problems even when encountering obstacles			
Creativeness and Imagination	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Begins to experiment with objects in new and unexpected ways			
Goal 2: Engages in pretend play with familiar objects and experiences			
Goal 3: Uses imagination and creativity in playful, silly, or messy ways			

Social and Emotional Development

Trust and Emotional Security	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Engages in behaviors that build relationships with familiar adults			
Goal 2: Shows emotional connections and attachment to others			
Self-Awareness	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Expresses feelings, needs, or wants through facial expressions, sounds, or gestures			
Goal 2: Develops positive self-identity and sense of belonging			
Goal 3: Expresses positive feelings and confidence in what they can do			
Goal 4: Shows awareness of relationship to family/community/cultural group			
Self-Regulation	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Begins to manage own behavior and shows increasing control of feelings			
Goal 2: Begins to express emotions and seek help for interpersonal conflict			
Goal 3: Begins to understand simple routines, rules, or limitations			
Relationships	NY	D	S
Goal 1: Shows interest in and awareness of peers and adults			
Goal 2: Begins to recognize similarities and differences between self and others			
Goal 3: Develops the ability to engage, interact, and build relationships with familiar adults and other children			
Goal 4: Begins to recognize and respond to the feelings and emotions of others			
Goal 5: Begins to show concern for others			



Lesson Planner



Date _____ Caregiver _____

Language & Communication

Goals _____

Cards _____

Physical & Motor

Goals _____

Cards _____

Cognitive

Goals _____

Cards _____

Approaches to Learning

Goals _____

Cards _____

Materials

Social & Emotional

Goals _____

Cards _____



Sample Play and Grow Cards

Play Spaces



0-8 months
Use household objects for play.

Creativeness and Imagination

8-18 months
Do new things with familiar objects.

18-24 months
Do new things with familiar objects.

Pots and Pans Play

Goal
Begins to experiment with objects in new and unexpected ways.

Materials
● plastic bowls
● pots and pans

Provide young infants with pots, pans, and plastic bowls. Encourage infants to explore the objects by picking them up, banging them together, or nesting them. Infants should respond to and enjoy the loud noises created by the metal pots and pans, as well as the larger scale of these "toys."

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Observe

How does the infant engage with the objects? Does he or she repeat any actions?

Family Time

Remind family members that even ordinary household objects can provide a lot of entertainment for young infants.

Special Needs

Provide support for infants with physical limitations by helping them pick up and manipulate these larger objects.

Connections

This activity also relates to:

- ▷ Participates in active physical play indoors and outdoors.
- ▷ Uses senses to explore people, objects, and the environment.
- ▷ Shows curiosity and interest in exploring the environment.

Routines



Health Status and Practices

0-8 months

Hold bottle or sippy cup independently.

8-18 months

Cooperate in washing and drying their hands.

18-24 months

Wash and dry their hands, but may need adult help.

Scrub-a-Dub

Goal

Begins to develop self-care skills.

Materials

- soap and water
- towel

With your hand over the child's, help him or her wash and dry their hands as you sing this washing song:

*This is the way we wash our hands,
wash our hands, wash our hands.
This is the way we wash our hands,
to keep them nice and clean.*

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Observe

Do children begin to anticipate hand-washing times? Do they assist you in washing and drying their hands?

Family Time

Share hand-washing strategies with families such as singing as the child lathers up to increase the scrubbing time to at least 20 seconds.

Special Needs

Children with allergies may require special soaps. Ask family members to suggest allergy-free soaps.

Connections

This activity also relates to:

- ▷ Develops small muscle control and coordination.
- ▷ Maintains attention and focus.
- ▷ Engages in behaviors that build strong relationships with familiar adults.

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