



# A Practical Guide for Exploration

Each unit offers a suggested flow of experiences designed to support deep, meaningful learning through play. You'll notice intentional repetition—this is purposeful. Repeating activities builds memory, mastery, confidence, attention, and focus, forming the foundation for long-term learning.

The experiences are open-ended & process-driven, focusing on how children learn rather than what they produce. This allows for a range of learning styles & encourages exploration at each child's unique pace.

## Flexibility Matters

Each unit includes a suggested daily activity guide to support your planning—but it's not meant to be followed rigidly or completed in a set order:

- **Follow the children's lead:** If they're deeply engaged, slow down. If interest fades, it's okay to pause and return later. Some children need time to warm up to new ideas—don't move on too quickly. Repeating an invitation over several days can spark richer engagement.
- **Move at your own pace:** Stretch a week into two, repeat activities as long as needed, and allow units to grow over time.
- **Revisit, don't rush:** There's no need to introduce a new unit each month. Returning to a familiar concept—like revisiting water after exploring texture or paint—deepens understanding and strengthens memory. Revisiting isn't starting over—it's going further.

**This guide is about making space for curiosity, experimentation, and meaningful learning. Use it as a springboard—trust yourself, trust the children, and allow learning to unfold naturally.**



# Unit: Light, Shadow, & Reflection Exploration

Light captures a toddler's attention like magic—casting shadows, bouncing off mirrors, and glowing through translucent colors. This unit invites toddlers to explore how light moves, reflects, and changes. These simple yet captivating experiences nurture curiosity, creativity, and scientific thinking through sensory-rich, hands-on play.

<b>Domain</b>	<b>How It Supports Development</b>
<b>Physical</b>	Strengthens gross and fine motor skills as toddlers move bodies to cast shadows, chase light spots, or position materials on a light table. Enhances coordination and spatial orientation.
<b>Cognitive</b>	Supports cause-effect thinking, spatial reasoning, and visual discrimination. Toddlers experiment with shadow size, light direction, and reflection, building early inquiry and problem-solving skills.
<b>Language</b>	Introduces descriptive vocabulary ("big shadow," "bright light," "shiny mirror") and encourages early question-asking ("Where did the light go?"), boosting expressive and receptive language skills.
<b>Social-Emotional</b>	Encourages parallel play and social referencing. Children delight in copying one another's shadow movements or co-discovering light patterns, which supports peer connection and emotional engagement.

# Unit: Light, Shadow, & Reflection Exploration

**Focus Materials:** Flashlights, mirrors (acrylic or baby-safe), CDs, translucent scarves, colored blocks, light table, glow sticks, transparent cups, aluminum foil, shadows on walls, projectors

**Books:** Bear Sees the Light by Katy Hudson, & What Makes a Shadow? by Clyde Robert Bulla

**Songs:** You Are My Sunshine, and Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star

**Vocabulary:** Light, shadow, mirror, reflection, bright, dim, glowing, shiny, flashlight, sun, shade, silhouette, sparkle, flicker, beam, glowing, move, appear, disappear, bounce

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1	Flashlight Tracking	Flashlight Tracking	Light Table Sensory Play	Light Table Sensory Play	Flashlight Tracking
Week 2	Magna-Tiles Over Light	Magna-Tiles Over Light	Shadow Puppets	Flashlight Tracking	Shadow Puppets
Week 3	Color on Transparent Paper	Color on Transparent Paper	Shadow Puppets	Magna-Tiles Over Light	Mirror Painting
Week 4	Mirror Painting	Light Table Sensory Play	Flashlight Tracking	Color on Transparent Paper	Shadow Puppets

# Unit: Light, Shadow, & Reflection

## Suggested Activities

- **Flashlight Exploration & Tracking:** Toddlers follow moving light beams with their eyes or bodies. Shine flashlights on walls, floors, and ceilings for dynamic visual play, & allow them to explore & experiment with the flashlights as well.
- **Light Table Sensory Play:** Provide a variety of translucent materials (cups, blocks, shapes) on a light table for sorting, stacking, and sensory exploration.
- **Magna-Tiles Over Light:** Use Magna-Tiles or other translucent building tiles on a light table or window. Toddlers build, create patterns, and watch how color and light combine.
- **Shadow Puppets:** Shine a light behind hand puppets or cutout shapes against a wall or sheet. Toddlers observe silhouettes, movement, and storytelling in visual form, while also being welcome to join-in and play,
- **Color on Transparent Paper:** Offer colored markers and sheets of transparency film or plastic. Toddlers color freely, then hold or layer their creations over a light source.
- **Mirror Painting:** Toddlers paint on flat acrylic mirrors using washable paint and brushes. They explore reflection, color, and self-recognition as their images appear and disappear beneath each brushstroke. A sensory-rich, open-ended art experience.



# Unit: Light, Shadow, & Reflection

## Alternatives and Extensions:

Explore these simple variations to extend play, supporting repetition, variety, and deeper sensory learning:

- **Reflection Basket:** Fill a low basket with safe, reflective items like mirrored blocks, stainless steel bowls, mirrored tiles, and CDs. Toddlers explore shape, light, and distorted reflections through sensory play.
- **Overhead Projector Tracing:** Place transparent shapes, leaves, or objects on an overhead projector. Toddlers see large projected images on the wall and interact by tracing, dancing, or observing light and shadow movement.
- **Glow Bottles in the Dark:** Fill clear plastic bottles with water, glow sticks, or glow-in-the-dark beads. Toddlers shake, roll, and observe the soft glow in a dark or dimmed space—soothing and visually captivating.
- **Mirror or Light Tunnel:** Use acrylic mirrors or string lights to create a simple tunnel or three-sided enclosure.
- **Sand Over Light Table:** Sprinkle a thin layer of play sand on the light table. Toddlers use fingers, brushes, or tools to make marks and reveal glowing patterns beneath—combining tactile exploration with light and early mark-making.

