Focused Play, One Step at a Time

Offer fewer toys, reduce distractions, wait patiently, follow your baby’s interests, and refresh the play to support longer periods of attention.

Helps Your Child Grow

Cognitive Self-Regulation (Executive Functioning)

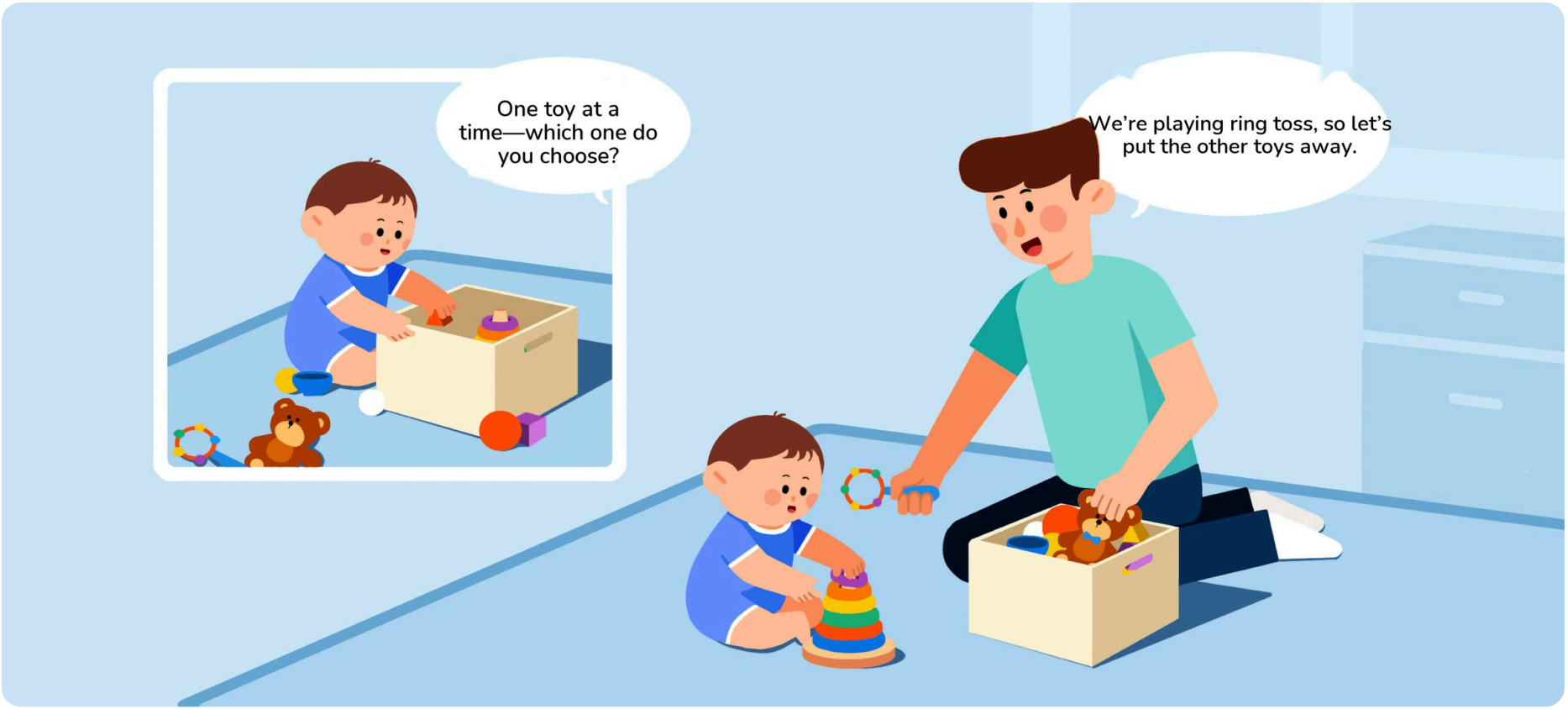
A few simple supports help your baby gradually stay with an activity longer and build the early foundations of executive function.

Fine Motor

Picking up, placing, and removing toys gives your baby repeated fine-motor practice.

What You'll Need

1. A few familiar toys, such as a ring-stacking toy



Wait and Offer Fewer Toys

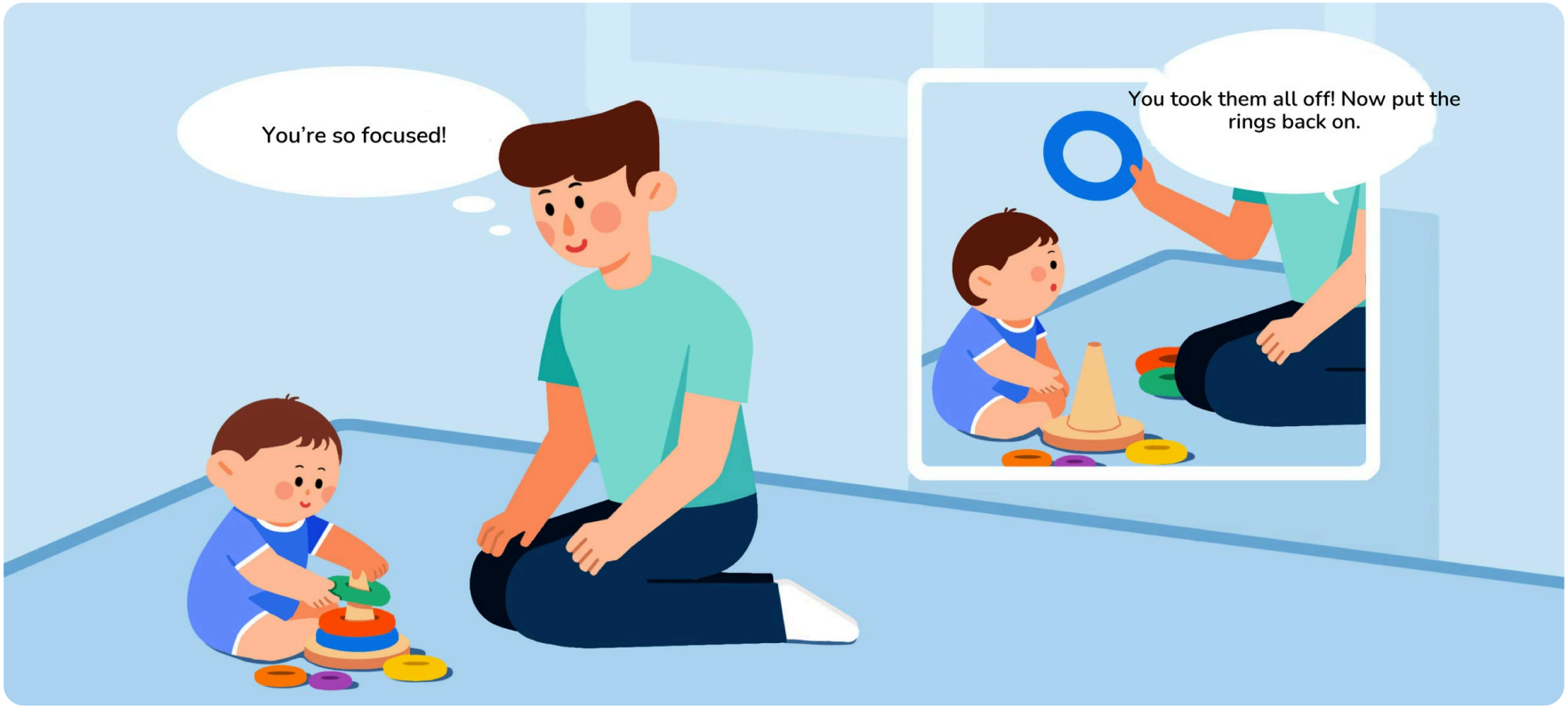
A baby's attention is still brief and easily pulled away. Before play, offer a small choice and let your baby select one or two toys. Give them time to decide, then put the other toys away so the space is not overwhelming.

Observations

- ◯ Reaches for the toy they want
- ◯ Reaches for a favorite toy

Tips

- Your baby may need time to look and touch before deciding what interests them most.
- Babies are more likely to stay engaged with something they chose and enjoy.
- If choosing is difficult, set out only two or three toys and invite your baby to select one.



Stay Nearby Without Interrupting

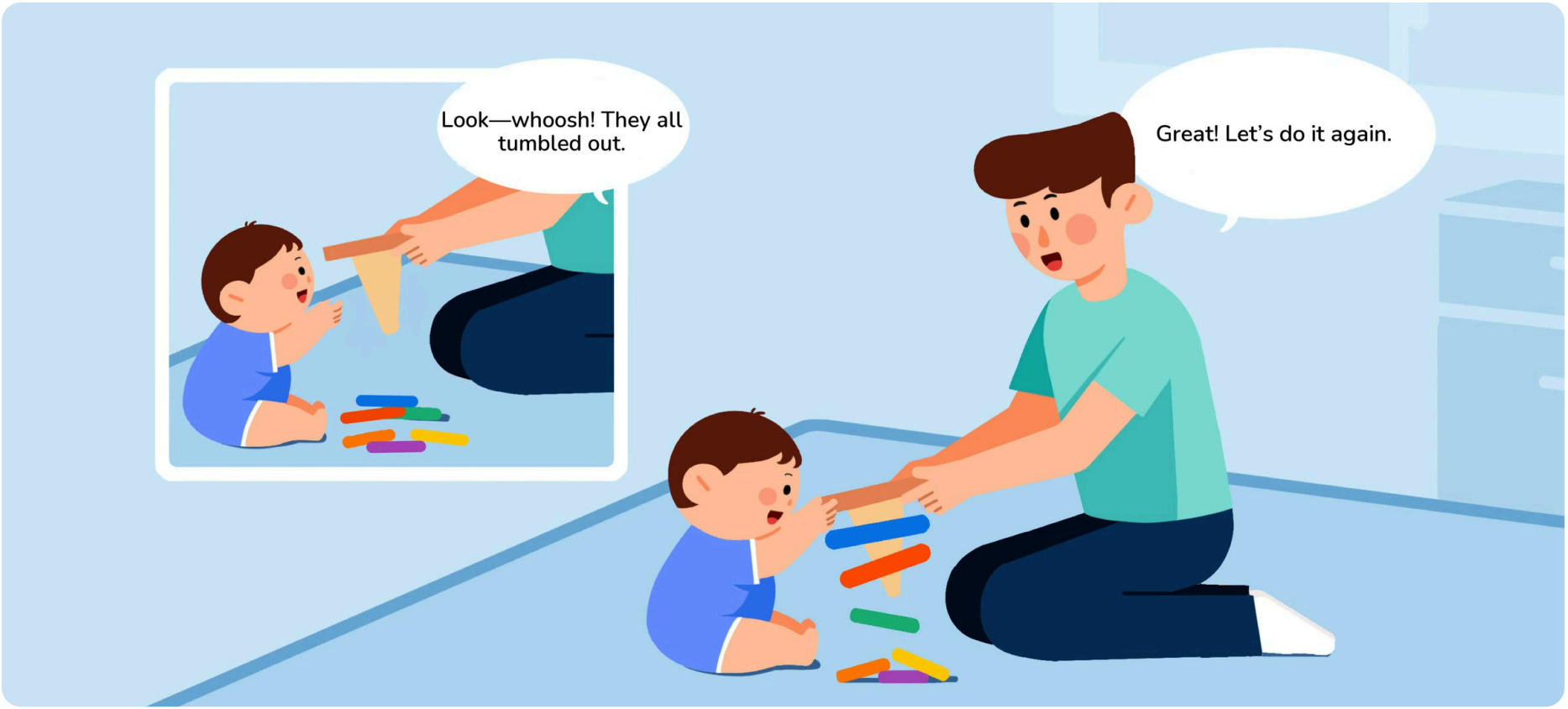
When your baby is absorbed - for example, taking rings off a stacker - sit quietly nearby and watch without interrupting. If they reach a point they cannot manage, such as after all the rings are off, help return the rings and let them continue.

Observations

- ○ Stays focused for a while when a toy interests them
- ○ Grasps and removes a toy with their hand

Tips

- Trying to make your baby laugh during meals, interrupting their play, or asking them to do two things at once can pull their attention away from the activity.
- Some actions are not yet within your baby's current ability. They may be able to remove rings before they can put them back.
- A calm, simple environment makes it easier to focus.
- When you join your baby, keep your attention on them and their activity instead of your phone or another task.



Refresh the Play and Follow Their Interest

When one activity becomes familiar, demonstrate another possibility to renew interest. If your baby clearly prefers their own idea - such as tipping the ring stacker over - follow their lead and repeat that game together.

Observations

- ◯ Plays with a familiar toy for gradually longer periods
- ◯ Watches you demonstrate a new way to play after hearing your words

Tips

- A baby's play may look unusual, but it is often their own way of investigating. Each variation can be a discovery or invention.
- Showing several ways to use one toy helps your baby learn that an object can do more than one thing and may keep the play going longer.
- Looking around, slowing down, or pushing the toy away can signal that your baby is losing interest.