Introduction: Animal Explorers!

Welcome, little explorer! Today we're going on an adventure to learn about some amazing animals! Animals live all around us - some fly, some swim, and some walk on land. Let's see which ones we can learn about today using our special cards.

Activity: Matching Animal Friends

Let's lay out our special work mat. This is our space for learning about animals.

- Meet the Animals (Control Cards): Let's look at these cards first. They have a picture and the animal's name. (Lay out 3-5 control cards picture with label attached. Point to each one.)
 "This is a dog." (Say the name clearly.) "This is a cat." "This is a bird." (Encourage the child to repeat the names.)
- Picture Match Fun (Picture Cards): Now, look at these cards. They only have pictures. Can you find the picture card that looks exactly like this dog card? (Hand the child the picture card of the dog. Guide them to place it below the matching control card.) Great job! Let's match the cat picture. Now the bird picture! (Continue until all picture cards are matched to the control cards.)
- 3. **Word Detective (Label Cards Optional/Introduction):** Look! These little cards just have words. This word says "dog". Can you find the picture of the dog and place this word underneath it? (*Place the label card under the matching picture card. For preschoolers, focus on visual matching of the label to the label on the control card, rather than reading.*) Let's try matching the word "cat"! (*Assist as needed. This introduces the concept that printed words represent spoken words and objects.*)
- 4. **Explore and Play:** Now you can try matching the cards all by yourself! You can mix them up and match them again. (*Optional: If using animal figurines, the child can match the figurine to the correct picture/control card.*)

Closure: Animal Parade!

Wow, you did such a great job matching our animal friends! Can you tell me the name of this animal? (*Point to one card.*) And this one? Fantastic! Let's sing a quick song about one of the animals we learned, like 'Old MacDonald Had a Farm' or 'B-I-N-G-O'. Now, let's carefully put our animal cards back in their special place. Thank you for exploring animals with me!