

Problem Solving

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your busy learner is gaining many skills. She can put puzzles together (six pieces or maybe more), draw some shapes (circles and squares), and identify a few colors. She can match an object to a picture of that object and notices many similarities and differences. She is very curious about how things work, and your answers really help her understand and learn.

Box o' Blocks

Collect blocks and small boxes for your child to use for building. Build things together. Card-board pieces make great roofs, and rulers or paint-stirring sticks make great bridges. Make a town. Add some toy cars and toy people. The town will come to life!

Picnic Memory Magic

Pretend that you are going on a picnic to help your child develop her memory. Say, "We're going on a picnic, and we're bringing apples." Encourage your child to think of the next item. "We're going on a picnic and we're bringing apples and (cookies)." Take turns and keep adding new items. How many items can she remember? This is great fun while riding in the car or on the bus!

Mr. Sticks

Ask your child to draw a stick figure on a paper plate or piece of cardboard. Say, "This is Mr. Sticks." Hide Mr. Sticks, and give your child clues to lead to Mr. Sticks: "He's in a room with water but not the bathroom. He's in a drawer near a door." Finding Mr. Sticks earns a big hug. Now it's your child's turn to give you clues.

Money Management

Make play money from green paper. Pretend to be the storekeeper and say, "Those socks cost \$2. This lunch costs \$3." Help your child count the right amount of money. Now let your child be the storekeeper. Add to the fun by collecting cereal boxes or empty milk cartons to make a store.

Picture Shopping List

Cut magazine or newspaper pictures of some foods you'll be shopping for. Place them in an empty envelope and take them to the supermarket. Let your child pull out the pictures and remind you of what you need. If he is holding a picture of eggs, say, "Yes, we need eggs today." When you buy the items, be sure to thank him for helping you remember!

Set the Table

Let your child help you set the table. Put a plate at each place. Now ask your child to count the plates. Ask your child to tell you how many spoons she will need. Help her count them out loud. As she gets better at counting, add other items: "How many napkins do we need? You are a very good helper."

Big, Bigger, Biggest!

Gather four or five shoes of different sizes. Make a line on the floor with tape or string, or draw a line on a large piece of paper. Ask your child to line up the shoes. Show him how to start with the smallest, then find the next biggest, then the next, until the biggest shoe is at the other end. Once he has the idea, gather up all the shoes again and mix them up. Ask him how fast he can line them up from smallest to biggest. Ready, set, go! Try this game with other items such as rocks or pinecones.

Notes:



Don't Forget! Activities should be supervised at all times by an adult. Any material, food, or toy given to a young child should be reviewed for safety.

Personal-Social

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Your child is becoming more and more sociable. He can be very helpful with household tasks and can take care of many of his personal needs. He plays with other children but still needs support at times to cooperate and share. Your approval and attention are very important to him. He likes being silly and making others laugh, especially you.

Dress-Up Fun

Let your child play dress up in some old or interesting clothes. Boots are fun, as well as large hats, belts, and other accessories. A scarf or necklace adds a nice touch. A purse, wallet, or vest also makes the play interesting. Make sure there are some buttons to button, zippers to zip, or gloves to stick fingers into. Put a mirror at your child's level: "Where are you going today?"

Counting Turns

Help your child learn to manage taking turns by counting how long a turn will last. For example, tell your child he can swing until the count of 10 and then it will be his brother's turn. Count 10 swings out loud: "Okay, now it's your brother's turn for 10 swings. Help me count." Your child will learn that the wait for a turn will soon be over.

Wonderful Rhythm and Rock

Read or recite poems and rhymes to your child at special cozy quiet times. Cuddle up and rock a little to the rhythm of the words, or just cuddle and rock. Let your child fill in missing words to a familiar rhyme: "Humpty Dumpty sat on a..." Wall!

Cupcakes for All

Let your child help you bake cupcakes. She can sift, pour, and stir as much as she is able. Let her spread icing with a plastic knife. Talk about who the cupcake is for. Place it on a napkin and write that person's name on the napkin. Let your child share the special cupcakes.

Counting Goodnight Kisses

When you put your child to bed, count kisses out loud. Ask your child how many kisses for the chin: "Three? Okay, one [kiss], two [kiss], three [kiss]. How about your nose?" What a happy way to learn to count!

Counting Cars

Riding in the car or on the bus, ask your child to count all the blue cars he sees. Help him watch for blue cars and count them out loud. Remember, blue trucks don't count. Next time, let your child choose what to count!

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Gross Motor

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Your child can usually kick a ball forward, jump, and perhaps hop on one foot. She likes to do things for longer periods of time now and may spend quite a long time riding a tricycle or pulling things in a wagon. Climbing is getting to be one of her favorite activities. She also enjoys active play with friends. Having used all that energy, she will usually sleep well through the night.

Marching in the Band

Show your active child how to march like a member of the band. Be sure to get those knees up high! Invite a friend to join you. Add a drum and a flag and make a parade!

Kangaroo Kid

Show your child how a kangaroo jumps around. Pretend to be a mother kangaroo. With your feet together, jump, jump, jump. Call for your baby kangaroo to follow you. This is fun outdoors or with a friend.

Freeze!

Let your child dance or move around in any way he wants. When you say, "Freeze," he has to stop right away in the middle of a motion. Start the movement up again by saying, "Melt." Take turns playing this silly game.

Soccer Fun

Give your child a medium-size ball. Show her how to kick it by swinging a foot back, then forward. Turn a cardboard box on its side and encourage your child to kick the ball into the box for a goal. Shout, "Goal!" when your child gets the ball into the box.

Airplanes Everywhere

Let your child pretend to be an airplane and run with arms outstretched. Show him how to lean to the left, then to the right. Make some airplane noises. Swoop down low, and then fly around in a circle. Time to slow down! Bend down and land.

Big Box Basketball

Place an open box or laundry basket on a table or surface higher than chair level. Give your child a ball to throw overhand into the box or basket. You can also tie a ribbon across the tops of two chair backs with the box on the other side. Show your child how to throw the ball over the ribbon and into the box: "You did it! Hooray for you!"

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Fine Motor

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Your child is becoming more skilled at buttoning and zipping clothing. He can use a fork and spoon to feed himself. He can spread soft butter, hummus, or jam on bread. He can hold a pencil or crayon with his thumb and two fingers and likes to draw. He may be able to draw circles or other simple shapes or letters.



Button-Up Bear

Let your child dress a large stuffed teddy bear or large doll. Make sure the clothes have a couple of large buttons or snaps to let your child practice small finger work. You might even find some baby shoes with Velcro or other similar closures. Tying or buckling shoes is probably too difficult right now. Say, "What a good Papa Bear you are!"

Beautiful Necklace

Cut small circles or flowers out of colored paper, and punch a hole in the center. Then, cut a large plastic soda straw into pieces. Let your child string the flowers and straw pieces with a shoelace. Show her how to make a pattern—flower, straw, flower, straw. She may not always repeat the pattern, but that is okay. Tie the ends, and she will have her own beautiful necklace!

Picking Peas

Buy a few fresh peapods at the market. Show your child how to find the peas inside the shell. Give him a few in a plastic container to shell for himself. When he is finished, rinse off the peas and eat them. Yum!

Sidewalk Artist

Let your child draw pictures on the sidewalk or driveway with colored outdoor chalk. You can also give your child a small paintbrush and let her paint a picture with water. The painting will be fun, and so will the magic of evaporation: "Where did your picture go?"

List Maker

Give your child a small pad of paper with a pencil or pen. Ask your child to help you make a shopping list. Let him write his own "words," and even draw pictures. When you get to the market, ask him to "read" his list. He is learning the magic of writing by putting meaning with his scribbles.

Little Snipper

Let your child practice cutting with safety scissors. Show her how to open and close the scissors while you hold the paper. Later, show her how to hold the scissors in one hand while she holds the paper with the other. At first, snipping edges is great progress. If she snips off a few pieces, save them in an envelope. Later, she can glue the little pieces on paper for a special art project!

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Communication

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Your child is learning to use complete sentences to tell you all about what's happening. He also can follow more than one direction at a time. He has probably learned both his first and last name and can tell you if you ask. He loves to have conversations with a friend or maybe a toy doll or bear. He has learned that a voice on the telephone really comes from a person, even though he can't see the speaker, and your child is more likely to talk than just listen.

Good Night

When it's time to go to bed, give goodnight kisses all over. Tell your child, "I'm going to kiss you on your knee. I'm going to kiss you on top of your head. Now I'm going to kiss you behind your ear. Good night back there! Good night everywhere!"

Who's This Person?

Pretend you suddenly forgot who your child is. Say, "What's your name, little girl? Is it Samantha? Is it Rosita? Do you have another name?" When she tells you her name, you can be very happily surprised!

Love Notes

Put little notes to your child here and there. A note might say, "You are a very helpful brother to your baby sister." A note on your child's toy shelf can say you noticed that the toys were put away. A note by the plate at dinnertime can say that Dad will read a favorite story at bedtime. Read these notes to your little one so that he learns reading is fun and important.

Where the Creatures Live

Go for a walk outside and look for living things. Ask your child questions about the world around her. "Where do we see birds?" Up in the sky. "Where do bugs live?" Under rocks. Your child may need a little help at first, but soon she will know the answers.

Weather Person

At the start of the day, ask your child to look out the window and tell you about the weather. Is it sunny? Is it raining? Is it cloudy? What will the weather be today? Have your child draw a picture of the sun if the day is sunny, raindrops if the day is rainy, and clouds if the sky is cloudy.

A Card of Love

Collect paper and glue; little craft items such as stickers, stamps, or ribbons; and pictures of favorite things and animals. Make a birthday or greeting card for someone special. Talk about this person, and help your child write a message. Address the card, stamp it, and mail it. This little kindness will bring much appreciation.

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