

# 101+ Ways to Keep Kids Busy



**BETTER  
KID • CARE**

# To the Caregiver

As a caregiver, you have a very important job. For many hours each day you take the place of the child's parent. You influence the child in many ways.

The early years of the child's life are extremely important. The child is growing and developing. You can help the child grow and develop to the fullest.

Not long ago, a caregiver was discovered who allowed the two children she cared for to watch TV for hours and hours. These two children soon became dull children. They weren't interested in running and jumping,

reading and singing. They became small-sized couch potatoes.

Another caregiver, just down the street, planned every day and had her two children active and reading, helping fix lunch and doing many fun activities. These children were alive. They smiled and laughed and cried and giggled!

Which of these two family child care homes do you think was the happiest? Which one had the most positive influence on the children's growth and development? Of course the answer is the family child care home where the children were

active and doing things. These children were growing and developing to the fullest.

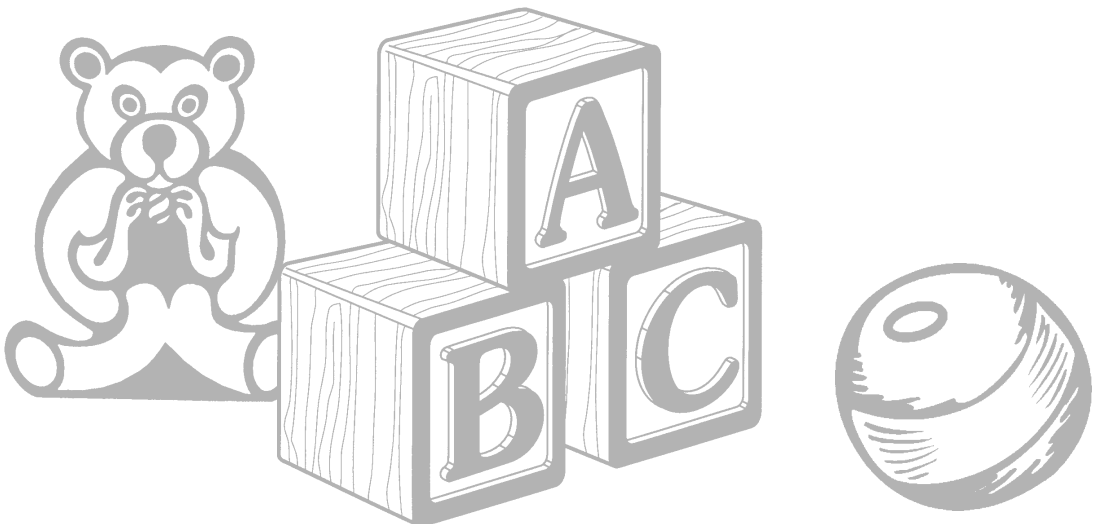
*101+ Ways to Keep Kids Busy* can help you help the children you care for to grow and develop. It's full of wonderful ideas of things you can plan and do with your children.

Young children are supposed to be active, curious, questioning, busy, and a host of other things.

We hope you'll use *101+ Ways to Keep Kids Busy* and we hope you'll make every effort to help your children grow and develop to the fullest.

He or she? Him or her?

*Please note:* In this and all Better Kid Care publications we take turns referring to children as "he" or "she." When we use he or she, we include all children.



# 101+ Ways to Keep Kids Busy

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## Have a Telephone Conversation

A homemade telephone can help younger children build their vocabulary skills and also be a lot of fun. The phone can be made of styrofoam, cardboard, or plastic cups.

The phone line should have two “receivers.” Punch a small hole in the bottom of each cup, and push the ends of a 15 to 20 foot string through the holes. Tie a large knot at each end of the string. The children can stretch out the string and begin their conversation.

## Let's Jump

Have the children stand with their toes at a starting line. When you give a signal, have the children jump five times forward. The distance each child jumped can be measured with chalk or string. Let the children jump again to see if they can improve their distance.

## Obstacle Course

An obstacle course can be set up either in or out of doors. Chairs, old tires, stools, and logs are just a few things that can be used. Make and show the children the pattern of the course so that they know what they have to crawl over, under, or through.

## Make a Necklace

Empty thread spools that are painted different colors can make a safe necklace for younger children. They can even help you make the necklace.

Take the spools and string them together with a soft string or shoe lace. The younger children will enjoy helping you do this.

## Colored Sand Art

Take dry sand from the sand box and put a handful into several small containers. Add some food coloring into each container and mix together until the sand is colored.

Give the children some paper and glue. Have them make patterns with the glue to make a design. When they are finished, let them sprinkle the glue with the colored sand.



## Counting the Dishes

Have the children help set the table for meals or snack and ask them to count how many napkins, forks, dishes, and spoons will be needed.



## Make a Musical Instrument

A musical instrument can easily be made with two small paper plates and beans. Place the beans on one plate. Cover with the other plate. Tape, glue, or staple the plates together. Encourage the child to play the instrument to music. *(Due to choking hazards, this activity is not intended for children under three years of age.)*

## Learning Important Information

Help a child learn his telephone number and address while playing. Tape the house number on a play house or the bedroom door. The telephone number can be taped to a play telephone. Ask the child his telephone number and address frequently.

## Household Items Can Be Fun

Egg cartons, milk cartons, empty thread spools, flour, salt, water, and food coloring can be used to make fun, safe educational toys and materials for the children.

## Paste Jewelry

### *What you need:*

3/4 cups flour  
1/2 cup corn starch  
1/2 cup salt  
warm water

### *What you do:*

Mix the ingredients in a bowl. Add warm water gradually until the mixture forms a dough. Before working with the dough, dust with flour to reduce the stickiness. The children can shape the dough into different shaped beads. A hole can be pierced in each bead with a toothpick. Dry the beads on a screen.

## Go Bird Watching

Make a bird feeder out of a paper milk or juice carton. Cut out two opposite side panels and fold down to make a ledge for the birds to rest on. Let the children decorate the carton. Put a string through the top to hang. The bird feeder can be hung from a tree or clothesline near a window. Let the children add the seed when necessary.

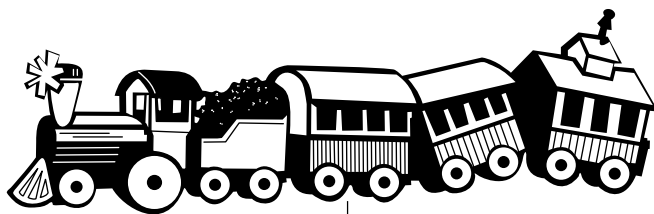
## Fun Play Dough

### *What you need:*

2 parts flour  
1 part salt  
1 part water  
food color

### *What you do:*

Mix and knead until it is doughy and the color is mixed in well. Store in a covered container.



## Egg and Milk Cartons as Toys

Cut egg cartons into individual cups and make them look like flowers. Use a pipe cleaner as a stem. The children can also make puppets out of egg cartons and pipe cleaners.

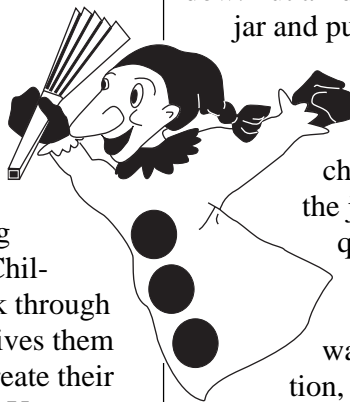
Milk cartons can be transformed into great building blocks or a train.

To make the blocks, simply cut the top off two cartons and push them together. The blocks can be covered with contact paper.

To make a train, cut the top off of the carton and cover with contact paper. For wheels, glue four egg carton cups on the bottom of each "car" of the train. The cars can be connected with string or yarn.

## Homemade Puppets

Old socks, mittens, and lunch bags make interesting hand puppets. Children love to talk through puppets. This gives them the chance to create their own characters. Use markers to make eyes and noses and yarn for hair. The children can even add clothes, a hat, teeth, or ears.



## Ideas with Paper

Children can make a collage or book by cutting pictures out of old magazines and gluing them on a piece of paper or cut out colorful magazine strips and wrap around a toothpick. Pull the toothpick out, glue strip, let dry, and thread between beads.

## Feel Box

Find an old shoe box. Cut a hole in the lid. You can ask the children to decorate the box. Put some things in the box. Let each child put one hand in the hole and try to guess what is in the box by feeling the objects.

## Experiment with Water

Fill three jars with water and mark the level on each jar. Place one jar in the freezer and one in a window. Put a lid on the third jar and put it beside the

jar in the window. Have the children check the jars frequently. Talk about expansion of water, evaporation, and air.

## Make a Newspaper

*What you need:*  
several sheets of paper  
safety scissors  
crayons

construction paper  
glue

*What you do:*

A child can make her own newspaper by drawing or cutting out pictures of events or writing a simple story.

The child can mail the newspaper to relatives or friends.

**A Noodle Necklace**

Big uncooked macaroni, painted or plain, can make a great necklace. Younger children will enjoy threading a string or shoelace through the macaroni.

**Start a Collection**

Young children like to collect things like rocks, shells, or coins. You can help children organize the collection by labeling the objects as to where they were found or who gave them to the child.

**Make a Megaphone**

A clean, empty plastic bleach container with the bottom cut off looks exactly like a megaphone. The children can practice singing or talking to the "crowd."

**A Theme Collage**

*What you need:*  
old magazines  
safety scissors  
glue  
paper

*What you do:*

Have the children decide the theme of the collage. Write the theme at the top of the paper. They can look through magazines and cut out pictures that follow the theme. Some ideas for themes are dogs, cats, or plants.

**Press Some Flowers**

On a nice day, ask the children to collect some flowers and place them inside a big heavy book or a stack of books. (To protect the pages of the book, place a napkin or paper towel in the book first.) After a few weeks the flowers will be dry. The children can make a dried flower picture by gluing the flowers on a piece of paper.



**Dress-up**

Old hats, shirts, shoes, ribbons, junk jewelry, and other old clothing will occupy a child for hours. Let each child pick out his own costume.

**Make Bean Bags**

Help your child sew some scrap material together and then fill with navy or pinto beans. (*Due to choking hazards, this activity is not intended for children under three years of age.*)

**Make a Book**

Have the children cut pictures from an old

magazine. Each child can paste the pictures into a book made of paper and bound with yarn. Each child can write or dictate a short story about each picture.

**Rough and Smooth**

Young children enjoy seeing things change. Let children see the difference between rough and smooth by using a piece of wood. Let them feel the rough wood, and then, with sandpaper, smooth the wood down.

**Flavored Milk**

*Ingredients:*

1 cup milk  
1/2 banana, mashed, or  
1/2 cup orange juice, or  
1/4 cup crushed  
strawberries

Help the child mix the milk with one of the ingredients, and then shake until blended. This is a tasty, nutritious drink.

**Follow the Dots**

You can make a dot-to-dot picture for a child to follow and color. For an older child, make the dots farther apart and number them.

**Sounds in the Home**

Go on a tour of your home with the children and look at everything that makes a sound. Children can make a book of the sounds by drawing the object and writing the sound.

### Stick Puppets

Help the children cut out several pictures of animals or people from a magazine. The pictures can be glued to cardboard and then to popsicle sticks to make puppets.

### Creating a Peanut Butter Sandwich

When lunch time arrives, the children can create their own sandwiches. Put out some bread, peanut butter, sliced banana, crushed pineapple, dried fruit, relish, raisins, grated carrots, or cheese. Let each child decide what she wants in her sandwich.

### Let's Clean House

Young children enjoy helping you clean around the house. Cleaning windows is a favorite. Give each child his own cloth and spray bottle. Let him clean until finished. Don't expect a young child to last too long. Discuss safety rules with the children and let them help put the cleaning supplies away.

### Build with Boxes

Ask parents to help you save food boxes with pictures of fruits and vegetables. Frozen food packages are excellent. These can be used as blocks to build. They could be glued together to make them stable or used as props in acting out a story. The children learn to "read" the picture labels and recognize that

foods come in many forms. They may recognize food boxes used at home.

### Use Posters to Decorate

Visit your grocery store and ask the produce manager to give you some promotional materials, such as large posters or pictures of fruits and vegetables. You can use these to decorate rooms by hanging them on the wall or making mobiles. Children may like to paint or make a collage over large posters.



### Make Your Own Flour

This is a good activity to do after reading "The Little Red Hen." If you want to make your own flour, put 1/2 cup of grain in a blender. Blend on high speed until a flour is produced. One cup of grain will make a little more than one cup of flour. Then you can make pie crust, biscuits or bread. It works best if you combine with "store-bought" flour.

### Cut and Paste Magazine Pictures

Use magazine pictures of fruits and vegetables. The children may tear or cut the pictures and glue, paste, or tape the pictures to paper. Label the collage "My Favorite Vegetables," "The Fruits We Put in Our Salad," "Fruits and Vegetables I Want to Taste," or whatever children suggest.

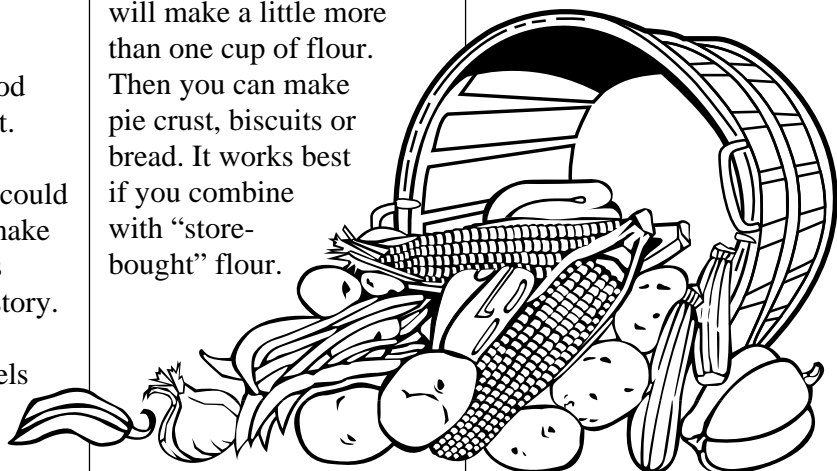
### Classify Fruits and Vegetables

Using plastic models, pictures, or real fruits and vegetables, encourage children to group them by categories, such as: shape, color, "those I like least," "those I have tasted," "those I have never eaten," or any other categories their imaginations provide. As they sort fruits and vegetables, they develop basic classification skills.

### VEGETABLE SOUP

#### *Ingredients:*

- 4 cups water
- 3 large carrots
- 3 potatoes
- 2 onions
- 2 stalks celery



1 can tomatoes  
1 can corn  
1 can peas  
4 teaspoons beef bouillon  
salt to taste

Heat 4 cups of water and bouillon in a large pot. Peel and cut carrots, celery, potatoes, and onions. Simmer all these ingredients until soft. Add tomatoes, corn, and peas. Salt to taste. Cook 10 minutes longer.

#### Cooperation Soup Cooperation Salad

- Everybody helps decide which vegetables or fruits to use.
- Everybody helps wash fruits and vegetables.
- Everybody helps peel and slice fruits and vegetables.
- Everybody gets a chance to eat.

#### *Soup suggestions:*

carrots  
tomatoes  
potatoes  
peas

#### *Fruit salad suggestions:*

apple  
banana  
oranges  
melons

#### *Vegetable salad suggestions:*

lettuce  
spinach  
tomatoes  
celery

Learn about Grains  
Visit a farmer, health food store, or feed mill to get some different grains—wheat, barley, alfalfa, oats. Let the children look at them and touch them. How are they the same or different?

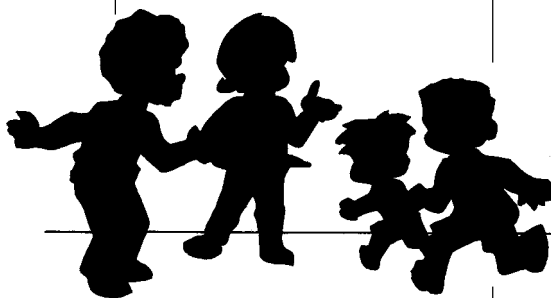
#### “Do You Know the Muffin Man?”

Have the children help you make muffins and sing this song. The children will enjoy pretending to sell muffins to each other. You can make blueberry muffins, apple muffins, cranberry muffins, peanut butter muffins, oatmeal muffins—lots of varieties!

#### Song:

*Do you know the muffin man,  
the muffin man, the muffin man?*

*Oh do you know the muffin man  
who bakes a lot of bread?*



#### Act Out a Story

Read or tell the children the story of “The Little Red Hen.” Then with your help let them tell the story by filling in easy parts that you leave out. Eventually, they should be able to act out the story.

#### An Easy Baby Bib

##### *What you need:*

washcloth  
bias tape  
needle and thread

##### *What you do:*

This bib is simple to make and it is washable. Sew the bias tape on two corners of the washcloth to make ties. The length of the ties will depend on the size of the child. This is an activity that parents can help with as well as older children.

##### Let's Make...

Make something to wear or look at. String cereal and/or macaroni to make a necklace, bracelet, or belt. Wrap tape around one end of the yarn or string to make it stiff. (*Due to choking hazards, this activity is not intended for children under three years of age.*)

Make a collage of cereal or dry pasta.

To help children learn the names of shapes, use square-shaped “Chex cereals” and round “Cheerios” for circles. As the children glue the shapes, talk about

their differences and names, such as, “A square has four sides.”

##### Let's All Sew

##### *What you need:*

cardboard of various sizes, shapes, and colors  
blunt needles

long and short shoelaces  
yarn or heavy string  
paper punch

*What you do:*

Outline a shape on a piece of cardboard. Use the punch to make a series of holes around the shape. For younger children, make the shapes simple—a square for example—and limit the number of holes. For older children the shape can be an animal or person and have more holes. Young children can use a shoelace, while older children can use a blunt needle and string or yarn. Large needles used for needlepoint are good for this activity. They are available in plastic and metal. You may also want to make the holes larger for young children. The cards can be used over and over. (*This activity is not intended for children under three years old.*)

*Variations:*

- Clean styrofoam or cardboard meat and vegetable trays can be used instead of pieces of cardboard. Use the finished lacing as a picture for the children to take home.
- Each hole can be given a number and the children can then lace in numerical order until they complete the card. This activity teaches number awareness and sequencing.
- Divide a large piece of cardboard in half and list

colors and/or shapes on one side. On the other side list the same colors and/or shapes but in a different order. Have the children match the shapes and colors on one side to the shapes and colors on the other. They can lace on the top of the card to match and then return to the bottom of the card to match the next shape.



**From Seed To Flower**

*What you need:*

package of flower seeds  
large piece of cardboard  
glue or tape  
small container and dirt

*What you do:*

This activity will help children understand how plants grow. You can use any type of container to plant the seeds or plant them outdoors in the garden. Let the children look at the seeds. Plant some and glue or tape some on the cardboard and label them with the name of the flower. After the plants have grown, glue or tape some of the leaves and flowers on the cardboard with the seeds to show how a plant grows from a seed.

You can make different displays using different

kinds of seeds. Why not make another display using vegetable seeds and plants?

Let's Find...

*What you need*

a paper bag or container  
to collect things  
list of things to find or  
pictures for nonreaders

Have children collect objects that can be used creatively, such as leaves, nuts, seed pods, sticks, etc. In the fall children can make collages from different sizes and shades of leaves.

**Leaf Figures**

*What you need:*

leaves  
twigs/pipe cleaners  
grass  
crayon/construction paper  
glue  
newsprint/cardboard

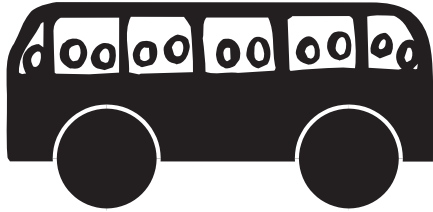


*What you do:*

During a nature walk have children collect leaves of different colors, sizes, and shapes. Using a sheet of newsprint or cardboard, have the child glue a leaf or leaves to form people, animals, and plants. Other body parts may be made by attaching pipe cleaners,



drawing with crayons, or from scraps of construction paper. Leave it to the child's imagination and you'll get a variety of figures!



### How Do I Get There?

When children go to school or child care it is not unusual for them to ask an adult, "How do I get there?" or, "How does this bus driver know where to go?" Draw a map to show where the child lives and how the roads lead to child care. Point out places the child knows like a gas station, a store, a church, or a park.

Ask the child to draw a map of how they would go from the kitchen in their home to their bedroom. Have them show where their home is and other homes in their neighborhood, like friends' houses. Scraps of paper can be glued to add color to this activity and allow a child to use his/her creativity.

### My Room

Children can construct a paper map or model of their child care classroom, school, school building, or outside play area. Small pieces of wood and other creative materials can be used in this project.

### A Model

Older children can discuss with the younger children the model of the child care, school building, outside play area, the neighborhood, or community. Use

"play dough" to let the children make buildings. After the buildings have dried, they can be painted or food coloring can be added to the "play dough" before making the models. Cardboard boxes, milk cartons, paper models, wood, and other creative materials can be used and painted instead of play dough.

### Treasure Hunt

A treasure hunt can help children follow directions on a map. This is a game that can be played indoors or outside. An adult or child hides a treasure and draws a map for the children to follow to get to the treasure. Have them make various stops along the way to collect extra items.

### Let's Play

Preschool children like to play with blocks, trucks, and cars. Often they will make roads for their trucks and cars. Sometimes schools, homes, zoos, and parks appear along the road. Although children may not understand the concept of a map, this is a good time to begin to explain that a map helps people get from one place to another.

Maps are all sizes and shapes. They explain a small community, a nation, or the world.

Don't expect a three- or four-year-old to understand all these concepts, but it's an introduction to their learning about how to get around the neighborhood and community. Older children may be familiar with the concept of a map. They may want you to explain more and explore more themselves. They may want to go to the library to get a book, like a children's atlas, and begin activities using it.

### Giant Paint Pen

Roll-on deodorant containers can be used as giant paint pens. If possible, pry off the top of an empty roll-on deodorant container. Wash the container thoroughly and refill it with liquid tempera paint. Push the top back on and you have a "non-messy" paint pen. The tempera paint cannot be thick or lumpy. Remember, not all roll-on containers will work.

### Plastic Eggs

1. Glue the egg closed. Some children may want to put sand in the egg before gluing. This will help it to stand up.
2. Children can paint on a face or cut out eyes, nose, and mouth and paste on the face.

3. Hair can be anything that is available: paper, cotton, yarn, etc.

4. Clothes can be colored tape, paper, paint, or whatever is at hand.

### Finger Puppets

*What you need:*  
paper and material  
tape or glue  
creative materials

*What you do:*  
Children can draw different characters on paper or fabric and cut them out. By taping or gluing a ring on the back of each character the children can slip the character on their fingers and use them to tell a story. How about using this idea with a favorite finger play?

Another way to make a finger puppet is to use a simple pattern that can be glued or sewed together. The face can be drawn or colored. Children can use yarn, string, or other creative materials for the face, hair, clothes, and other features.

### Hand Puppets

*What you need:*  
fabric or heavy paper  
needle and thread or glue  
crayons, markers, paints,  
and other materials  
safety scissors

*What you do:*  
The basic pattern of the hand puppet lets the child control the head and arms of the puppet by using fingers that fit into the puppet's head and arms. If

children can sew, they can use any kind of fabric for the pattern. Younger children can use fabric or heavy paper (glue the sides together) or they can use paper lunch bags. Eyes, nose, mouth, and hair can be colored with crayon or paints or other items that children may want to use to help the puppet "come to life." You may want to help children decide on the size of the pattern before cutting it out. Remember to allow for fingers in the head and arms so that children can make the puppets move. Yarn or string makes great hair, mustaches, and beards.

### Valentine

*What you need:*  
paste or glue  
safety scissors  
crayons or markers  
assorted construction  
paper

*What you do:*  
Children can make a valentine (may be torn or cut) of their favorite colors. They can glue or paste decorations on them or draw pictures.

### Box and Tube Puppets

*What you need:*  
old boxes (cereal,  
crackers, etc.)  
old tubes (paper towels,  
toilet paper, wax  
paper, etc.)  
creative materials

*What you do:*  
Have the children paint or cover the boxes or tubes with paper. They can cut out and paste on the facial features or use anything they want to make their puppets special. Pipe cleaners, yarn, rope, and buttons can all be used to create a box or tube puppet.



### Matching Numbers

1. Use scraps of wallpaper or carpet to make a matching game. Squares can also be used as "stepping stones" by writing numbers on them.

2. An old shower curtain or plastic tablecloth becomes an indoor hopscotch game when permanent-ink



markers are used to make lines and numbers. Be sure to tape the plastic to the floor to prevent accidents.

3. Use two of the same catalog. Cut out a pair of everything. Paste one to a small cardboard. Have children match up the other one.

### Number Hopscotch

*What you need:*  
masking tape  
dice

*What you do:*

This helps children form a better understanding of numbers and sequencing and combines matching concepts with large muscle development.

Use masking tape to form a pattern on the floor. For young children you may want to begin by using one die. For older children you can increase to a pair of dice or make your own dice, using larger numbers. Remember that children playing hopscotch go from one number to another number in sequence. Don't let them touch the lines or put both feet down. Encourage children who cannot hop on one foot to jump on both feet. Make the hopscotch pattern the right size for the children playing the game.

### Make a Book

Cut brightly colored pictures out of magazines. You will need at least four pictures to make a book.

You may use more. You can make a book about babies, food, dogs, cars, farms, or any other subject, or make a book about big things and little things or tall and short things.

Paste pictures on pieces of heavy paper or cardboard. Punch two holes in the edge of each paper or cardboard. Tie the "pages" together with string or yarn.

### Counting

*What you need:*  
cardboard circles  
clip items—clothespins or large paper clips  
markers

*What you do:*

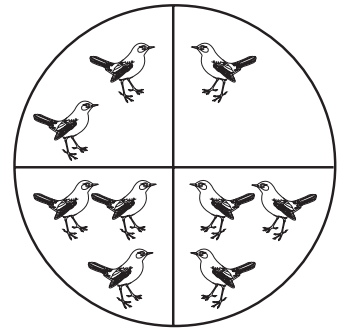
This is a good way to help children match objects with the corresponding numerals or number words. Draw circles on heavy cardboard. Divide circles into sections, depending on ability of the children who will be working with the circles. In each section draw a set of objects, for instance:

2 birds  
3 birds  
4 birds

On the clip-on item, print the number of the word. For instance:

4/Four  
5/Five

Show the children how to clip the item on the corresponding set of objects.



For school-age children, you may want to use this activity for simple math problems in addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division.

### Paper Plate Menagerie

*What you need:*  
paper plates  
crayons  
popsicle sticks  
staples  
safety scissors  
yarn  
tissue  
other assorted items  
(paper and fabric scraps, buttons, etc.)

*What you do:*

Use a paper plate as the base. Young children can create numerous projects that compliment a specific activity, gifts, or seasonal characters, and reinforce concepts and skills.

With the stretch of children's imagination, finished products could become a:

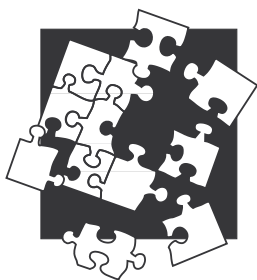
- Hand puppet
- Face made with yarn, scraps of fabric, buttons
- Face with glasses, tissue for nose, comb, etc.

- Turkey
- Tambourine to sew or lace
- Pumpkin person
- Mask
- Matching activity (good game)
- Cat (cut-out)
- Fancy face (stick puppet)
- Easter bonnet
- Clock face
- Rhythm instrument
- Christmas mail box
- Turtle
- Banjo
- Flower (large)
- Teddy bear
- Match and tell (object and its use)
- Man
- Elephant
- ABC clock
- Sad-glad Raggedy Ann
- Rabbit
- Owl
- Clown
- Angel
- Read-a-book caterpillar

### What Shape Is It?

1. Glue various colored paper shapes (circles, triangles, squares, and rectangles) to the outside of a large plastic container. See how many shapes a child can identify.

2. Cut shapes out of the sides of a plastic bottle or shoe box. Cut the same



shapes from paper. Have the children sort paper shapes by putting them through the correct opening in the bottle or box.

3. For a matching game, use egg cartons. Cut shapes out of stiff paper or felt. Glue one of each shape in a section of the egg carton. The children can match the paper or felt shapes with the ones in the egg carton.

4. Make puzzles from clean plastic supermarket meat trays. Cut out a circle, square, triangle, and rectangle. Let the child fit them back in where they belong—a great activity for eye-hand coordination as well as identifying shapes.

5. Sandpaper, flocked contact paper shapes, and letters are other materials used for teaching through the sense of touch and shape identification.

6. Make a “fishing” game with a magnet, paper fish, a pencil, string, and paper clips. Children can practice shapes, colors, letters, numbers, and words through this game.

### Valentine Animals

*What you need:*  
 construction paper  
 paste or glue  
 scrap materials  
 safety scissors

### *What you do:*

This is a good activity after a trip to the zoo, reading animal stories, or taking care of favorite pets.

Get children to discuss their favorite animals or something they have learned about animals.

Children may use any number of hearts to form shapes of their favorite animals. Some animals may be placed in cages to provide a zoo-like background. Scrap materials may be used to add features to each animal.



### Fun With Plants

#### *What to use for planters:*

- milk cartons—they can be cut to various sizes
- juice or other cans—make sure there are no sharp edges
- pie or cake pans
- plastic containers
- paper or styrofoam cups
- cottage cheese or yogurt containers

#### *What kind of soil:*

You can buy potting soil in a store or you can use top soil and peat moss mixed in equal amounts. Regular outdoor garden soil may

not be able to hold moisture, so be careful that you use soil that will help plants grow.

*What you need*  
cotton, yarn, sand  
newspaper or paper towel  
water  
containers  
seeds

*What and how to plant*

For rapid growth try grass seeds. Lettuce grows quickly, but does not do well in hot sun. Bean seeds grow fast and tall. They can be grown in moist cotton, yarn, a paper towel, or a piece of newspaper. Once the plants have sprouted, they will need to be replanted in soil in a container. Water when dry, but not too much.

Carrot, beet, and pineapple tops can be placed in a shallow container of water to grow. Let them stand a few days after cutting before placing in water. It is often difficult to get them to grow in dirt.

Shake a Pudding

1. Pour 1 cup milk and a 3-ounce package of instant pudding mix into a jar.
2. Put jar top on very tight.
3. Hold with two hands and shake.
4. Pour into bowls.

Tasting Party

Taste different cheeses by having a tasting party. Include two or three

different kinds of cheese such as Mozzarella, Brick, Swiss, or Edam.

Let the children taste each one, comparing color, taste, and appearance. “Swiss cheese has holes.” “Mozzarella is white.” “Cheddar is yellow.”

Broiler Sandwiches



For something different you can broil or bake open-faced sandwiches. The children can help put them together.

*Some ideas:*

- Peanut butter and honey
- Cold cuts, cheese, and tomato
- Cheese, olive, and crisp bacon
- Cheese in cookie cutter shapes

The children can arrange the ingredients on the bread.

You do the next part. Bake or broil the sandwiches in the oven. Cool before serving.

Encourage children to clean up work area and table after eating. They learn important self-help skills and cooperation from these kinds of activities.

Cardboard Boats

*What you need:*  
cardboard tubes from  
paper towels, wax  
paper, toilet paper, etc.  
glue  
straws  
scraps of colored paper  
paints, crayons  
safety scissors

*What you do:*

Cut the cardboard tubes in half lengthwise to make two separate boats. Cut paper or plastic straws in various lengths. Have the children cut various sizes of triangles from the colored paper or cut and color white paper. Glue the triangles to the straws and the straws to the bottom of the boats. The children may want to paint or color the cardboard tube before the sails are glued to the boat. You may also want to glue a half circle to each end of the tube.

Busy Boxes and  
Busy Bags

*(helping children be creative)*

“What can I do?” is a question every caregiver and parent has heard many times. Actually, children can do lots of things at little cost if simple, everyday items—even pieces of junk that usually get tossed away—are made available to them.

A great idea is to divide collections of such odds and ends into “busy boxes” or “busy bags.” For example, children of all ages

are delighted with a container of:

- odds and ends of colored paper
- old greeting cards
- pipe cleaners
- cotton
- string
- cardboard rolls from kitchen or bathroom
- tissue paper
- wrapping paper leftovers
- used ribbons and bows
- cotton
- paper doilies
- egg cartons
- clean plastic meat trays
- several magazines
- paste and glue
- nontoxic paints
- a “clean-up” cloth or paper toweling
- safety scissors
- crayons, pencils, markers

Every box, regardless of its purpose, should contain the last five items.

Neighbors and grandparents are usually happy to give caregivers and parents their “junk,” making it possible for caregivers to provide busy boxes for any season or special event:

Halloween  
sick day  
snow time  
birthday  
May Day  
rainy day  
Thanksgiving  
Easter  
Valentine’s Day  
playmate day

Even a box for:

cooking  
painting  
dress-up  
clay  
sewing  
cardboard sculpturing  
tracing and coloring  
assorted blocks  
bottles  
pie pans  
other aluminum items

Groups of caregivers and/or parents can find it helpful to spend some time sharing ideas on:

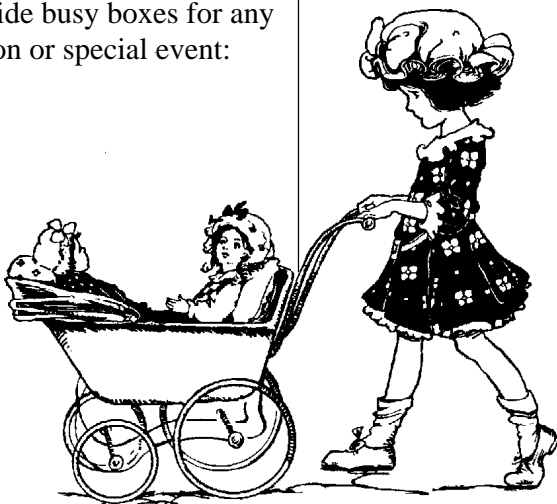
- what kinds of boxes to provide
- what to put into each box
- how children can use each box

A good idea is to prepare one box in advance and, as children start using it, start making another box. This way there will always be one busy box or bag available at all times.

Remember, too, that children will need a place to work.

Some items everyone might begin saving are:

milk cartons  
aluminum foil pans  
magazines with color pictures  
pizza boards  
yarn  
buttons  
small empty bottles and boxes  
rick-rack, ribbon, scraps of fabric  
sandpaper  
plastic spoons  
old greeting cards  
oatmeal boxes  
old socks  
nails, screws, bolts  
brown paper bags  
corks, sponges, magnets  
empty shoe polish bottles  
popsicle sticks  
cardboard tubing  
straws  
old pots and pans  
measuring cups  
rolling pin  
potato masher, egg beater  
clothespins  
cookie cutters  
shells  
vegetable and juice cans (no sharp edges)  
dress-up clothes  
old clock that ticks  
wallpaper scraps  
string



plastic flowers  
coffee cans and lids  
baby food jars and lids

(Due to choking hazards, the busy box activity is not intended for children under three years of age.)

### Bead Strings

*What you need:*

safety scissors  
paints  
string or yarn  
cardboard tubes  
(from paper towel or toilet paper rolls)  
large macaroni

*What to do:*

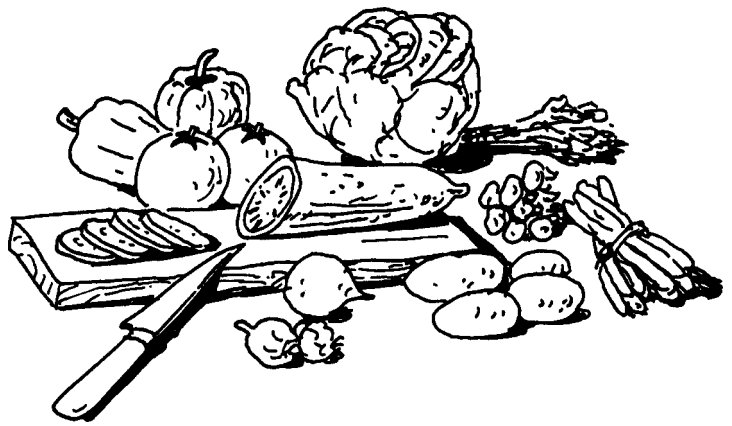
Cut cardboard tubes into various lengths. Have the children paint the tubes and macaroni. When dry, they can string their cardboard tube and macaroni “beads” on the string or yarn.

### Bead String Games

Sequencing and color matching games can be played using the strings of beads.

Using the same colors as those on the homemade beads, draw color patterns on pieces of cardboard. For instance, red, red, blue, blue, etc. Have the children make the same pattern with their beads on their string. Some children may want to draw their own patterns on the cardboard to make their own games.

The children can also make necklaces, bracelets and other jewelry. Keep the beads and strings in boxes



or storage cans. (*Due to choking hazard, this activity is not intended for children under three years of age.*)

### Design a Sandwich

Instead of plain old peanut butter and jelly, let children decorate their sandwiches. Use a saucer to trace and cut a “face” from a slice of bread (save the cut-away bread to make crumbs). Bread can be cut into shapes with cookie cutters or into triangles, squares or rectangles. Then spread on peanut butter or cheese spread and decorate. Older children can squirt designs with softened cheese spread from a pastry tube onto the bread.

*Decorations:*

Carrot curls, apple slices, raisins, banana slices, cheese squares and triangles, pickle and olive slices, slices of cucumber, or radishes.

### What's for Snack?

Let the children plan snack. Make a chart of the days of the week. Write in the name of the snack and add a picture of the snack.

You might want to give the children a few approved choices or you make the choices and the children select the days. Then refer to your week's calendar/chart to help the children develop time concepts and reading skills.

### Make a Sandwich Filling

When a young child prepares a simple sandwich filling, he learns to:

Plan ahead and organize

Measure ingredients

See different forms of food

Make something good

Clean up after himself

*Filling:*

1/2 cup drained, flaked tuna OR 3 hard-cooked eggs

2 tbsp. mayonnaise  
chopped olives, celery, or pickles (optional)  
salt and pepper

Children can peel eggs, chop ingredients with a blunt knife, mix them together, and spread on bread to make a sandwich. Encourage them to clean up when done.

### Story Time

Children love to listen to stories and talk about them. It is important to read to children every day.

Your local library is a good source for books. If possible, take the children to visit the library. They can choose books to read. The children's librarian can help find books that are right for their age. Some children will be able to choose their own books.

Give the children a chance to look at books, turn pages, and look at the pictures. Older children can read to younger children. After you read a story, talk about it with the children.

### End the Story

Read part of a story and ask the children to make up their own ending. They may want to develop new characters and places and even combine another story they know. You may want to make up a story and let the children give it a new ending.

### After Reading a Story, Ask Questions

Have the children talk about the sequence of the story. Use a story to introduce new words, ideas, or an activity. Some children might like to bring a book from home and share it with the other children.

### Add a Story

Begin a story and let each child add to the story. Watch how ideas, characters, and places change. This helps children develop creativity, improves their ability to use oral language, and learn to cooperate with others.



### Draw a Story

Give each child paper, crayons, paints, markers, or pencils. Let the children draw some of the scenes and characters they liked in the story. Ask children to talk about their drawings with the other children.

### Let's Pretend

Have some of the children act out a familiar story that you have read. If they really like the story, they may want to make masks, or if a dress-up corner is available, dress up like some of the characters.

### Pack a Snack

Planning a field trip? Take along a simple snack, such as orange juice and celery sticks. Take along an old sheet or light blanket for a place to sit while they are eating their snacks.

### Television Can Be More Fun

Use some of the story activities for television programs that the children watch. Ask them: "What would you do if you were in that television program?" Some children may want to pretend that they are on television when acting out a story.

### Eat a Snack You Have Read About

Plan snacks that relate to books the children enjoy.

*Blue Berries For Sal*—blueberry muffins

*Stone Soup*—vegetable soup

*Little Red Hen*—bread and butter

*Bread and Jam For Frances*—bread and jam

### Encourage Good Snack Habits

Children need regular snacks and meals each day. Serve nutritious snacks with the same routines as mealtimes. Have the children sit down to eat, not eat on the run. (Eating on the run is not healthy or safe for children or adults.) Use meal and snack times to introduce new foods. Never make a snack a reward for good behavior.

### Pretend You Are Popcorn

Children like creative movements. First pretend they are little kernels of corn. Then they begin to sizzle, sizzle, and then POP! They jump up as



larger pieces of popcorn. The next step is to be a salt shaker or melted butter.



### Fruit and Vegetable Display

Set up an interesting display for children to explore.

On a low table, shelf, bench, or even on the floor, set up a display of several fruits and vegetables with a common theme. Print a sign that tells how they are alike.

#### *All of these are red on the outside:*

tomatoes  
apples  
radishes  
beets

#### *All of these grew under the ground:*

potatoes  
radishes  
carrots  
beets

#### *All of these are apples:*

red apple  
green apple  
yellow apple

#### *All of these are potatoes:*

Idaho potato  
red potato  
sweet potato  
new potato

### Paper Bags for Puppets and Masks

Small paper bags can be used to make hand puppets. The children can draw faces on them or glue on scraps of paper to make different puppets.

Larger paper bags can be used to make masks. The bag can be cut and decorated in many ways.

Fill a paper bag with newspaper. Tie the open end around a stick with string to make a stick puppet. The children can make these in different sizes and shapes.

Fabric scraps can be used to make costumes for the puppets.

### Play Restaurant

Make your own props or visit a restaurant or fast food store and ask for cups, empty boxes, hats, bags, menus, and other items. Set these up so the children can pretend to be customers or restaurant workers.



### Scrambled Eggs

Crack open an egg, put it in a bowl, and pass it around for everyone to see.

Then crack open 5 or 6 eggs, add salt and pepper, and beat. Cook in an electric skillet. Compare the raw egg and the scrambled eggs. Talk about what you did to make them different. Taste the scrambled eggs. (*Never taste or eat raw eggs.*)

### Stick Puppets

#### *Materials:*

stick  
pencil  
straw  
paper  
safety scissors  
paints and crayons  
strip of heavy cardboard  
small strips of wood  
ruler  
cardboard  
glue

Children can draw a face, figure, or animal on paper and glue it on a stick. They can make more than one and use them to tell a story or put on a play. They can cut pictures out of magazines and glue these to the sticks. Yarn or crayons can be used to make hair. Paints or crayons can be used to create many different kinds of puppets.

### Stage for Finger Puppet Play

Large cardboard boxes make excellent stages for children to perform finger plays after creating their puppets. Cut a section out of the bottom so that children can reach through with their puppets. They can make curtains or other

decorations for the front of the “stage.” If you do not have a cardboard box, any flat surface can be used.

If there is a finger play or song the children like, they can make puppets to use when singing or performing the finger play.

### Finger Puppets

Use washable markers to draw a face on one or more fingers. Teach children to use only materials that wash off easily.

Tape a piece of paper around one or more fingers. The children can draw a face on the paper and have the puppets talk to each other.

Fingers from old gloves can be cut and decorated to create slip-on puppets. People or animals can “come alive” with a child’s imagination.

Various shapes and sizes of heavy cardboard can also be used. Two holes for fingers will allow children to use their fingers for legs. This is an activity that older children may enjoy doing with younger children who are not able to use scissors to cut the cardboard.

### Nature Walk

Plan a nature walk. Have the children talk about what they might see. Give each child a bag

and have them collect interesting items, such as small rocks, leaves, pine cones, or sticks. When they return home, have them talk about what they collected. They can glue some of the items to a piece of cardboard or put the items in a shoe box. A nature walk is a good time to talk about outdoor safety.

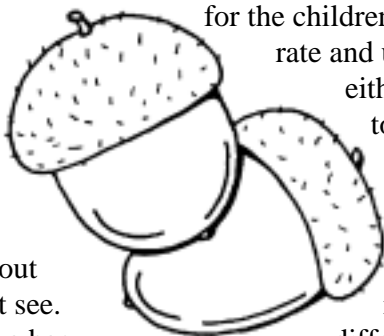
### Ring Toss, Bean Bag, Racket and Hoop Games

*What you need:*  
heavy cardboard  
safety scissors  
paint and brushes  
milk cartons  
bean bags  
clothes hanger  
tape  
nylon stocking

*What you do:*  
Cut rings from heavy cardboard. Let the children paint them. An empty soda can or a stick placed a few feet away can be used as a target for ring toss games. Some children might want to make their own games and rules.

### More Ring Toss and Bean Bag Activities

Save empty milk cartons for the children to decorate and use for either the ring toss or bean bag games. Make various sizes of rings for different size



targets. The ring should be 2 to 3 inches larger than the target. Milk cartons can also be used as targets for bean bag games. The children can throw the bags into the cartons. Cartons can be stacked in various heights and knocked down by throwing the bean bags. Encourage children to develop their own games and rules. Activities like these are fun for many children, including older ones.

### Racket and Hoop Games

Bend the hook of a wire clothes hanger so that it makes a small circle. Tape the end so that it does not hurt the hand. Shape the body of the hanger into a large circle or oval. Slip a nylon stocking over the body of the hanger until it fits tightly. Since the stocking surface is going to be used to hit small light objects it must be as tight as possible. Use “twist ‘ems” to secure the stocking and cover with tape. Electrical or masking tape works best.

Give the children light weight bean bags, sponges, or light weight balls to hit back and forth with their rackets.

Remove the stocking from the hanger and use it for hoop games. It can be hung from a tree to make a moving target, held by a child from any distance, or hung like a basketball

hoop. If a child holds the hoop, be sure that it is at arm-length and that the object to be thrown is soft and does not have any jagged edges.

Like the ring toss and bean bag games, children can make their own rules and games. These games can be made out of many items that you might normally throw out. If you do not have the items handy, ask parents to bring some things from home.

### Cardboard Houses and Villages

Cardboard boxes of all sizes allow children almost limitless play activities and experiences. Small boxes can become cars, trains, boats, the beginning of a house or some other building. Larger boxes may be available by contacting a local appliance or department store. These boxes can be used to make a house. More than one box can be used to make a village. Make sure that all sharp objects like staples and wood are removed before children begin to play. You can cut windows and doors. The children will love to paint them.

The only thing that makes cardboard a short-term play item is the weather. Rain will reduce the boxes to paper in a matter of minutes, but children will enjoy them while they last. If the rain does damage the play house, don't pass up

an opportunity to talk about the changes in the cardboard and how it happened. You can help the children dispose of the cardboard after they have finished playing with it.

### Let's Make a Tent

Use old sheets or blankets to make tents. Hang some clothesline or thin rope between two poles or trees. Secure the bottom with small sticks or rocks. If you use old sheets or blankets, the children can draw or cut holes for windows. Tents can be used for many different play activities.

### Painting Rocks

Smooth rocks provide a good surface for the children to create a picture using tempera paint. If the rock absorbs the paint, put a coat of clear varnish on the surface before the children begin to paint. After the children complete their picture, use clear varnish or fingernail polish to protect the painting as well as to give the rock a glossy finish. The painted rock can be used as a paper-weight for a gift. Rock painting is an activity for all ages. Give it a try.

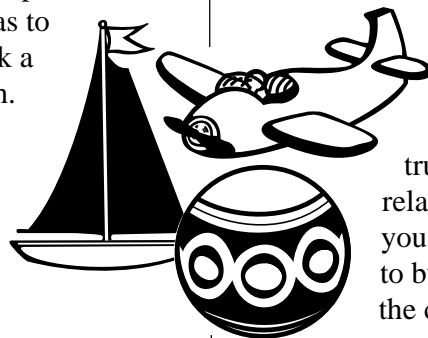
### Outside Water Play

The warm summer months are great for outside water



play. Use a hose or a sprinkler for children to run through the spray. Children must be closely supervised at all times around water. Children usually love to play in the water, but some children may not want to get wet. Remember to plan all activities with the children in mind. If one child does not want to play in the water, try to plan another activity for him to enjoy. Forcing or embarrassing children to participate will

create more fear and break down the trusting relationship you are trying to build with the children in your care.



### Sand Toys

Plastic and wooden spoons, pots and pans, metal spoons, and many inside toys can be used for

playing in sand. You can remind the children that some toys will be ruined if used in the sand. Try making some sand toys. Cut a large plastic milk jug in half. Put tape on any rough edges. Half can be used as a funnel and half as a bucket.

Children enjoy wet sand. A variety of sizes and shapes of plastic containers can be used to make wet sand molds.

### Sand Boxes or Sand Piles

You do not need to buy a sand box for sand play. An old tire filled with sand makes a great sand box. If you are able to buy or get some lumber, you can make a box to hold sand. You can also dig a shallow hole that sand can be dumped in. These “sand box” ideas will help you and the children keep the sand in one area and make it last longer. Be sure to have a protective cover for your sand box.

Set rules before children play in the sand area. Make sure the rules you set are realistic for the age of the children. Not throwing sand is very realistic and important. Most children can understand this rule. However, telling children not to get their hands dirty or sand in their clothes is not realistic; most of the time it is impossible. Hands and clothes can be washed after sand play.

### Catch the Rabbit

“1-2-3-4-5.”

*(pop up fingers on the right hand)*

“I caught a rabbit alive.”

“6-7-8-9-10.”

*(pop up fingers on the left hand)*

“I let it go again.”

“Why did you let it go?”

“Because it bit my finger so.”

“Which finger did it bite?”

“The little one on my right.”

*(wiggle little finger on right hand)*

### Number Walk

A walk around the neighborhood can be a fun time to use numbers. Children can count houses, cars, trees, people ... almost anything.

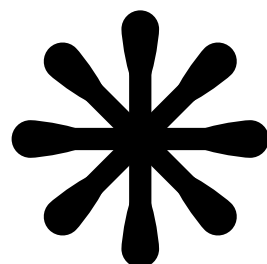
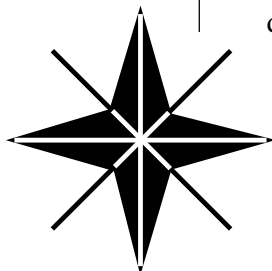
### Number Footsteps

*What you need:*

cardboard  
marker  
safety scissors

*What you do:*

Trace children’s footprints on the cardboard and cut them out. Number the footprints and arrange them on the floor so that children will have to follow a sequence. You can increase the number of footsteps as children begin to understand larger numbers.



### Number Puzzles

*What you need:*

stiff cardboard  
safety scissors  
marker  
ruler

*What you do:*

Cut the cardboard into squares or rectangles—all the same size. Use a marker to write a large number on each piece of cardboard. For the number 1, you will not do any cutting. For all the other numbers, use a ruler to divide the cardboard into sections. For example, there should be 2 sections for the number 2, 3 for number 3, etc. This activity will help the children understand the number and allow them to count pieces of the puzzle that equal that number.

### A Calendar for All Seasons

Make a large piece of cardboard into a calendar. Paint or cover the cardboard with paper and mark it off as a calendar. Numbers can be made or cut out of an older calendar and pinned or taped on day by day. This is an excellent way for children to learn the months of the year,

days of the week, and numbers. A record of

the weather can be kept by having small symbols represent weather conditions: a sun, raindrop, cloud, umbrella, snowflake, etc.

### Winter Mobile

An easy-to-make mobile can be fashioned by bending up the ends of a coat hanger. The children can make a variety of things to be hung by string or ribbons, like a snowman, a snowflake, a sled, and a snow shovel. Pictures of winter scenes can be cut from magazines, pasted on construction paper, and hung on the mobile.

### Dress Yourself for Winter

Have the children lie on a large piece of paper such as wrapping paper. Draw an outline around each child's body. Let each child dress himself or herself for winter, using crayons or paints to draw what to wear. Remind children that we need to dress warmly, which means wearing hats, gloves or mittens, boots, etc.

### Shape Snowmen

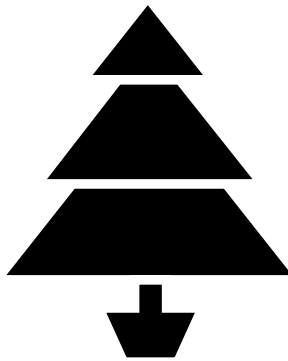
*What you need:*  
white and colored paper  
safety scissors  
glue  
crayons or markers

#### *What to do:*

Cut circles out of the white paper. Cut various small squares, triangles, and rectangles out of colored

paper. Glue circles to paper to make snowmen. Make faces, hats, and scarves from the other shapes.

This is a good activity for children to practice cutting. They can review shapes, colors, and talk about size.



### 3-D Trees

*What you need:*  
tree pattern  
green construction paper  
pencil  
safety scissors  
glue  
cotton balls, glitter, paper scraps

#### *What to do:*

Fold paper in half. Trace and cut evergreen shapes out of paper. You will need three shapes for each tree. Glue two of the tree shapes together on one side only. Do the same with the third tree shape. You will now have a 3-D tree that will stand up. Glue pieces of cotton or other trims to decorate trees.

### Paper Chains

Cut strips of colored paper. The children can glue these together in circles to make paper chains. They make

a colorful decoration for a holiday or special occasion.

### Paper Mache

*What you need:*  
newspaper  
wallpaper paste or  
homemade paste

#### *What to do:*

Tear the newspaper into strips and soak in a container of water for 24 hours.

Mash the paper into a pulpy mass and squeeze out excess water. Mix with paste. This mixture can be molded into a variety of objects. The children can paint their paper mache objects after they are completely dry.

#### *Homemade paste*

Mix 3 tablespoons flour with 1 pint water and boil until consistency of heavy cream. Add 1/2 teaspoon salt and mix.

### Candle Holder

To make a candleholder, glue small pieces of colored paper to a bottle. Another idea is to mix Elmer's glue with a little water, dip construction paper or tissue paper into the mixture, and stick it to the bottle. Or tear bits of masking tape and put them on the bottle. Paint or use shoe polish to add color. For a finished look, paint with a coat of shellac or varnish.

### Pencil Holder

Glue a paper cup to a piece of wood. Paint and then decorate with small bits of wrapping paper or small pictures from old greeting cards.

### Cornstarch Clay

*What you need:*

1 cup cornstarch  
2 cups salt  
1-1/2 cups cold water  
food coloring (optional)  
mixing bowl

*What you do:*

Put salt, food coloring, and 2/3 cup of water in a saucepan and boil. Mix the cornstarch and the remaining water and stir well. Put the two mixtures together and knead like bread dough. The finished clay can be used by the children like regular clay. Store in a covered container in the refrigerator. The children can mold different objects and paint them after they have dried.

### Play Dough

*What you need:*

1-1/2 cups flour  
1/2 cup salt  
1/2 cup water  
1/4 cup vegetable oil or a few drops of liquid detergent  
food coloring (optional)

*What you do:*

Mix the flour with the salt. Add the water, oil (or detergent), and food coloring. Knead the mixture as if it were bread dough. Store in a covered

container or plastic bag in the refrigerator.

The children can make objects and allow them to harden. Beads are easy to make and can be strung on a string or yarn. Roll into any size of ball or other desired shape. Before the mixture hardens, poke a hole through the middle with a nail, knitting needle, or other slim object. When the beads harden, the children can paint and string them.

### Sawdust Clay

*What you need:*

2 cups sawdust  
3 cups flour  
1 cup salt  
water, as needed

*What you do:*

Mix the dry materials together. Add water until the mixture is moist, but not wet. This clay dries very hard and is good for modeling and painting.

### Potatoes and Avocado Pits

Potatoes and the pits of avocados can be rooted in water and then planted. Both make nice house plants.

#### *Potato plants*

Select a potato with eyes. One that has begun to develop shoots is best. If you have a narrow neck glass jar you can fill the jar with water and rest the potato

on the neck of the jar. If you do not have a narrow neck jar, put toothpicks in the potato—four or five will do—and rest the toothpicks on the top of the jar. Make sure that water is always touching the potato. The potato will start to vine in 2 to 3 weeks. Some people have been able to plant the potato vine in soil and have the plant grow.

#### *Avocado plants*

Starting an avocado plant is very similar to starting a potato. Be careful when you peel the avocado so that you do not damage the pit. Allow the pit to “rest” for a few days before putting into water. The fat part of the pit is the bottom and this should be resting in water. This is done by putting toothpicks around the middle of the pit. Make sure that the bottom is the only part in water. Roots will start to form in a few weeks and then the pit can be placed in soil. Make sure the soil is appropriate for plants. Potting soil is best. Place the bottom half of the pit in the soil. Water lightly and keep moist, but not wet. In a month you will have the beginning of an avocado tree. To

encourage full growth you may want to “pinch” the main shoot when it is about 6 inches tall.







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Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research, extension, and resident education programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, Acts of Congress May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Pennsylvania Legislature. T. R. Alter, Director of Cooperative Extension, The Pennsylvania State University.

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Produced by Information and Communication Technologies in the College of Agricultural Sciences

CAT UA229 rev20M6/02cdt4526

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