



Explore through Movement and Play



Children learn through movement, such as touching, dropping, stacking, crawling, and running. Exploring their surroundings helps children prepare for sports and even math. Get ready to explore and play with your child using your own ideas or choosing from the list of suggestions below. Select activities that best correspond with your child's current stage of development. Any activity may be counted repeatedly.

1. Show your child how to clap for the syllables in his name; for example, clap three times for Jonathan.
2. Play a hide and seek game with your child using alphabet refrigerator magnets. Hide a letter and ask her which one is missing.
3. Handling playdough is a fun way to strengthen the muscles of the hand that will be used for writing. Show your child how to make a snake, cube, ball, etc.
4. Play *Simon Says* with your child, giving him two or three-step directions; for example: "Simon Says jump up and down and shout hooray."
5. Provide opportunities for your child to draw and scribble with crayons on paper, chalk on a chalkboard, a stick in the dirt, etc.
6. Show your child how to draw and trace basic shapes.
7. Take a walk around the neighborhood with your child and talk about signs, numbers, letters, etc., that you see.
8. Go to places where your child can practice activities like running, climbing, and catching a ball.
9. Play *Follow the Leader* to help your child develop listening and observation skills.
10. Provide experience with safety scissors for your child, such as cutting pictures from a magazine.
11. Take an old cardboard box and turn it into something fun! It could be a race car, kitchen appliance, ship, etc. The options are limitless! Play along with your child and discuss what you might do and why.
12. Play simple board games together to help your child practice taking turns.
13. Play peek-a-boo with your child as he hides behind a blanket.
14. Play classical music and move to the beat with your child.
15. Play children's music while you and your child each use a scarf or even a sock to move with the music.
16. Find books for your child that go with a song or can be sung to a familiar tune. *Wiggle*, by Doreen Cronin, can be sung to *Do Your Ears Hang Low?*, an action song. Try it out!
17. Add a spoonful of rice to a plastic egg. Tape/seal the two halves of the egg securely. Show your child how to shake the egg to the rhythm of a favorite song.
18. Give your baby ordinary kitchen objects, such as plastic cups or wooden spoons, to play with while you are fixing a meal.
19. Let your child help make the meal. Let her tear the lettuce for a salad, stir the cake batter, or put napkins on the table.
20. Ask your toddler to name the foods you are preparing or to fix a pretend meal for his toy animal or doll while you fix dinner for your family.
21. Notice what delights your child at the park. Give her more of these experiences, such as gliding on a swing, tossing piles of leaves, sitting in the sandbox, etc. Describe these activities or make up a song: "What did you do in the park today, dear little girl of mine? I threw some leaves in the park today, mama dear of mine."

22. Let your child collect rocks, leaves, or other natural things that fascinate him at the park or on walks. Sorting helps your child learn to form categories by seeing the differences and similarities between objects.

23. Use colored chalk to draw pictures on the sidewalk or driveway with your child.

24. Get a large ball. Roll it to your baby and encourage your baby to roll it back.

25. Go outside with your child and play with a medium-sized ball together. Take turns tossing and kicking it.

26. Take turns with your child, pretending to drive a car on a trip. Use a couch or chairs. A pillow could be the steering wheel.

27. Help your child use craft sticks or cotton balls to make letter shapes. Try this with socks or crayons.

28. Use a non-toxic, washable ink pad to help your child make thumb and fingerprint pictures in a spiral notebook. Write the date on the page. Keep the notebook and fill it up with future activities.

29. You don't have to read a book exactly as written. See if you can use your child's name in the story to make her laugh.

30. Gently pat your baby's tummy to the rhythm of a song or nursery rhyme.

31. Set your baby in your lap and make up fun actions to a favorite nursery rhyme that involve the whole body. Even if you're just rocking back and forth, this will help strengthen his core muscles and increase his balance.

32. Build a clubhouse with some chairs and a blanket or large towel. See where your child's imagination takes her!

33. The Greenville County Library System locations have many manipulatives to help children learn through play. There is also a Play and Learning Center at the Hughes Main Library in downtown Greenville. Visit your favorite library and play with one of the manipulative toys with your child.

34. Blow bubbles with your child.

35. Sing *The Itsy Bitsy Spider* with your child, showing her the finger motions for this song.

36. Draw a hopscotch board outdoors with sidewalk chalk and play a simple version with your child. This activity helps him learn numbers and develop gross motor skills, such as throwing and jumping.

37. Make a silly hat by cutting a circle out of the center of a paper plate. You and your child can each decorate one!

38. Brown paper lunch sacks are great for decorating and turning into puppets. Help your child make one. Now have a puppet show!

39. Help your child gather books around your house and set up a pretend library. Sign up family members for library cards and help them check out books.

40. Paint together! Mix the paint of two primary colors (red, yellow, blue) to make secondary colors (orange, green, purple).

41. Help your child use playdough to create different animals. Act out a story together with these animals.

42. Help your child use a green marker to color craft sticks. Cut out images of flowers from old magazines and glue one on top of each stick. "Plant" them in an old flower pot full of soil or modeling clay.

43. Use the playground to teach cause and effect! Take a handful of sand and show your child how to drop it through holes/spaces between equipment. Discuss what happened and why.

44. Learning how to move their bodies is essential for children to discover the world around them. Pick an object in the room and ask your child if she can get to a certain spot in three jumps. How about three steps? Three slides?

45. Make a series of rhythmic claps. Ask your child to repeat the pattern. Ask him to repeat it each time you add a new rhythm.

46. Playing a peek-a-boo game with your toddler lets her see that you can disappear but gives her the comfort that you'll always come back. This helps reassure her when you really are away.

47. Use old clothes and costumes to help your child dress up as different characters. You dress up too!

48. Take a resealable plastic bag, fill 1/4 of it with pudding, and seal the bag. Help your child "draw" on the pudding to make a face, shape, pattern, etc. When finished, enjoy a pudding treat together!

49. Give your child different-sized plastic containers with lids. Can she match the lids to the right containers? Can she put the smaller ones inside the bigger ones?

50. Make a paper towel roll into a telescope—one for you and one for your child. Go outside together and “spy” things. Make this into a game by saying, “I see something sparkly. It’s a rock. Can you find a sparkly rock too?”

51. At the beach or a pond, take turns as you and your child throw pebbles into the water and watch the ripples that form.

52. Play some familiar upbeat music and dance with/next to your child. Have a contest to see who can make up the silliest dance.

53. Play an opposites game with your child. Use an everyday object, such as a sock. Put it on your child’s foot as you say, “On!” Take it off, as you say, “Off!” Repeat until your child can provide the correct words. Other opposites to use can be over/under, in/out, up/down, stop/go, near/far.

54. . Help your child build towers with colored blocks. How tall can she make a tower using one color of blocks? How tall will it be if she uses them all?

55. Help your child learn about texture using paper (or similar materials). Let your child feel how smooth the paper can be. Crumple it up and let him feel the bumpy surface.

56. Play ball with your child. Start by rolling the ball and progress to throwing it. This helps her build hand/eye coordination.

57. Help your child practice fine motor skills by using lacing cards. You can make your own by punching holes in a cereal box and showing your child how to thread yarn or a shoelace through the holes.

58. Introduce safety scissors to your young child and monitor him closely to prevent him from cutting his hair or clothes. Let him cut up magazines and junk mail to reduce costs and waste. Older children can make collages with glue sticks.

59. Have a dance break to help your child celebrate getting her toys put away before moving on to a task she might resist, such as her bedtime routine. Try using the song *If You’re Happy and You Know It*.

60. Toddlers and twos are learning all the time. They learn through their play, so be sure to give your child lots of time for both indoor and outdoor play experiences. Blocks, animal figures, dress-up clothes, cardboard boxes, bubbles, sticks, leaves, balls, and interesting kitchen utensils (pots and pans, empty plastic spice containers) can all be exciting tools for learning through play.

61. Play outside with your child. Remember your own outdoor experiences of building forts, playing on the beach, sledding in the winter, or playing with other children in the neighborhood. Make sure your child creates outdoor memories too.

62. Puddles can provide endless fun and exploration for your child (and you!). Put on your raincoats and head outside together on the next rainy day to jump in puddles. Ask your little one to describe what happens to the water when you jump into the center of the puddle.

63. Your toddler starts pretending the first time he picks up a set of keys and pretends to drive. His keys are the “costume” which serves as a prop for pretend play. Your preschooler doesn’t need a set of keys to pretend to be a driver. He could pick up a round plate and make it into a steering wheel. Provide lots of props and opportunities for these imaginative play experiences.

64. Create an “office” for your child. Gather different kinds of paper, envelopes, crayons, stickers, and labels. Place them on a shelf near a desk or table or in a basket your child can carry to a comfortable place for writing or drawing. Add interesting and exciting items like address and date books, calendars, or an old computer keyboard.

65. Take a bucket of water and a paintbrush outside and let your child “paint” or practice writing on the sidewalk, driveway, or house. This is a fun, no-mess way for your child to play and be creative.

66. Offer paper, crayons, glue, yarn, scraps of cloth, and other materials so your child can make his own creations.

67. Give your child a pile of blocks and have her sing a song and stack one block for each word. Can she make a tower as tall as a song?

68. Find props to go along with favorite stories and offer them to your child to use in his play. Pretend fruit makes *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* much more interactive!

69. If your child has a favorite character from a book, allow her to dress up like that character! She can retell the story through the character’s perspective. (“I am a very hungry caterpillar. What should I eat first?”)

70. Using strips of paper and other craft supplies, help your child decorate bookmarks for friends and family members.

71. Let your child turn the pages of a story. It doesn’t matter if he skips a page or wants to reread one. This helps him learn to love books!

72. Help your child use toys or puppets to reenact her favorite stories or make up her own.

73. Make a fort with your child by draping blankets over furniture. Get inside together and tell each other a funny made-up story.

74. Act out stories or nursery rhymes with your child.

75. Take a story you and your child have read together and make it into a puppet show using stuffed animals.

76. Give your child a piece of paper and crayons or markers. Praise and encourage scribbling. These early efforts lead to later drawing and writing.

77. Check out a children's craft book from your library and make a craft with your child.

78. Hold hands with your child. Step in a circle while singing, "Ring around the rosie, pocketful of posies. Ashes, ashes. We all fall down!" At the end, you both gently sit down on the floor.

79. Choose a song your child likes and ask him to show you his own dance moves. For a younger child, celebrate the body parts he incorporates in his moves, "Look at you shake your hands and wiggle your feet!"

80. Freeze songs are a great way for your little one to practice control. Yes, freeze songs are really exciting and often result in a lot of laughter, but they also teach your child to listen, focus, react, and control her body.