

Learning Activities for Young Children

“Let’s play!” Playtime is learning time with the hands-on activities and games in this guide. Below, you’ll find at-home ideas to try with your children. Page 2 features a fun bingo-card format—your youngsters will be excited to mark off each item as they complete it!



Editor’s note: Guidelines are changing rapidly. Make sure to follow all local, state, and federal laws and recommendations on social distancing and other practices when using these ideas.

Number writing

As your child learns to write numbers, a little creativity will add some fun.



Textures. Give him different materials. He might finger-paint numbers. Or spread shaving cream in a pan and let him make a number, “erase” it, and make another one.

Glitter letters. Encourage him to write numbers on construction paper and trace over them with glue. Then, have him sprinkle on glitter (or sugar). When the glue dries, he can shake off the extra glitter.

My post office

Making and delivering “mail” is a good way for your youngster to work on reading and writing.

Let each family member create a mailbox by decorating a file folder and stapling the sides closed. Hang your mailboxes on your bedroom doors, and add addresses (“Hallway Door 3”). Encourage everyone to write messages for each other. *Examples:* “Let’s read a book together” or “Thanks for playing Chutes and Ladders with me.” (If your child isn’t writing yet, he could dictate his messages to you.)

Seal each message in an envelope, and write the recipient’s name and address on it. Stickers can go in the corner for a stamp. Now, your youngster gets to deliver each letter to the correct mailbox. Help your child read his mail. Then, reply to each other’s messages—and send more mail!

ABC strips

Letter by letter, your child can spell and read with homemade alphabet strips.

Cut colorful paper into four long strips. Help your youngster write the alphabet in large letters, leaving about an inch of space between each letter. Have her tape the pieces into one long alphabet strip.

Now, say a short word (*car, box, sit*), and ask her to spell it by pointing to each of its letters on the strip. As she points, she can say the letters aloud (“c-a-r”) and then write the word on another strip of paper. (Give hints as she needs them.) Then, she could use those strips to work on reading the words.

Dance-step coding

Coding is not just for programming computers! Let your youngster practice the same problem-solving skills using pencil and paper—even if she isn’t writing yet. Here’s how to get her started.

Together, think of symbols to stand for different dance steps, and print them on paper as a key. For example, an arrow could mean to take a step forward, backward, right, or left, depending on the arrow’s direction. An X might mean “clap your hands,” while an O may mean “twirl around.”

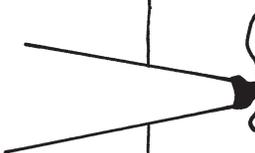
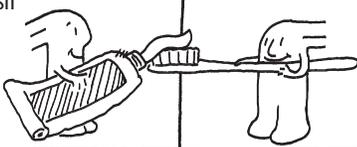
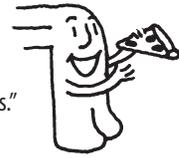
Once she finishes, ask her to use the codes to write a “program” for you to follow. As you dance around the living room, be sure to tell her she’s thinking like a programmer. Then, make up one for her to follow. Put on music and →←XX→OXO →→X the night away!



continued

Instructions: Do the activities on this bingo card in any order you choose. When you get five in a row (vertically, horizontally, or diagonally), you've earned BINGO. Keep going until you've completed the entire card—that's Super BINGO!



B	I	N	G	O
<p>Pitch a reading tent! Drape sheets over chairs, and get books, pillows, blankets, and stuffed animals. Now snuggle up inside to read.</p> 	<p>Gather small toys like a rubber duck and a superhero figure. Use a flashlight to cast their shadows on paper. Trace around the shadows, then color in the outlines.</p> 	<p>Cut out pictures from magazines and catalogs. Glue them on a sheet of paper, and make up a story about them.</p> 	<p>Write the numbers 1–12 on separate craft sticks and put the sticks in an “exercise cup.” Pull out a stick and do that number of any move you choose. <i>Example:</i> 5 bunny hops.</p> 	<p>Choose several board games, and mix and match the boards and playing pieces to invent a new game. Teach your family to play. Don't forget to return all the pieces to their original boxes!</p>
<p>Engineering challenge: Build the tallest tower you can using index cards and plastic cups. Experiment with different arrangements. How many cups can you stack?</p>	<p>Turn empty cardboard tubes into cute critters like butterflies, elephants, and penguins. Glue on yarn for hair or fur, googly eyes, pom-pom noses, and pipe cleaners for ears or antennae.</p>	<p>Illustrate the steps involved in washing your hands. Post your paper on the bathroom mirror. Now make a sign that shows how to brush your teeth.</p> 	<p>Find one item in your home that starts with every letter—from apple to zipper! Draw pictures of all the objects you found.</p>	<p>Have your stuffed animals put on a play—maybe one based on your favorite book. Assign a role to each one and speak their lines for them.</p>
<p>Be a rock star! Record yourself singing your favorite songs. Then, make up new words (“Meow, meow, little cat” to the tune of “Twinkle, twinkle, little star”).</p> 	<p>Design a paper bag city. Decorate each bag to create a building your city needs (school, post office, grocery store). Use tape to make streets on the floor, and place your buildings along the streets.</p>	<p>FREE SPACE</p> 	<p>Read a grocery store circular. Use the pictures to help you read words like <i>lettuce</i>, <i>milk</i>, and <i>bagels</i>. Count the letters. What's the longest word you read?</p>	<p>Make a picture menu of healthy snacks. You might draw celery sticks with cream cheese and raisins (“ants on a log”) or a bowl of fruit salad. Post your menu on the refrigerator.</p> 
<p>Start a journal. Each day, color a picture of something you did or saw. Write letters or words to describe the picture. Decorate your journal cover with pictures or stickers and write your name on it.</p> 	<p>Use a “pointer,” such as a chopstick or ruler, to read words around the house. Look on food packages, book covers, game boxes, and clothes.</p>	<p>Which shape comes next? Complete the pattern: □ △ □ _ Now draw shape patterns of your own!</p>  <p><i>Answer:</i> △</p>	<p>Study your reflection in a mirror, and draw a self-portrait. Display your portrait on the fridge, and encourage family members to add their own.</p>	<p>Set up ramps for toy cars to “drive” down. Stack books and prop one book against the pile. Or lean a piece of sturdy cardboard against the couch. Which ramp lets cars travel the farthest?</p> 
<p>Observe the animals outside your window. Maybe you'll spot birds, squirrels, or lizards. Make “trading cards” by drawing each one on an index card.</p> 	<p>Create a counting book. Label separate sheets of paper 1–10 and staple them together. On each page, draw the matching number of objects. <i>Example:</i> One cat on page 1, two stars on page 2.</p>	<p>Build the entire alphabet out of Legos or other blocks. Arrange the letters to spell words you know.</p>	<p>Invite your stuffed animals to a pizza party. Make a play dough “pizza” with toppings like pepperoni and green peppers. Then, divide it equally among your “guests.”</p> 	<p>Graph family members' names. Spell each name (don't forget pets!) with letter tiles. Line up the tiles in even rows and columns. Whose name is the shortest? The longest?</p>

Early Years