

Active Play: Simple Games and Activity Ideas

Children have different needs and abilities depending upon their age. Children need a safe environment that promotes and encourages their physical, intellectual, emotional and social growth.

Keep the ages and needs of the children in your care in mind when planning games and activities. Younger children have shorter attention spans, and are just learning how to coordinate their bodies, while older children may get bored with not enough of a “challenge” in the game or activities. Read more about children’s developmental ages and stages:

[Growth and Development](#)

[Child’s Development](#)

[Ages & Stages](#)

Go, Go, Stop

Pick a leader, and start and end spots. Have children line up at the start and the leader stand at the end with his back to the children. The object is to get to the end where the leader is. Have the leader yell go, go, go for a few seconds (i.e., 2 second, 10 seconds, etc.) and then yell stop. All children stop and freeze. If the leader turns around and sees any child moving, that child has to go back to the starting spot. The game ends when a child touches the leader.



Follow the Leader

To begin the game, you may want an adult to lead. Children line up behind the leader. The leader decides the actions for children to follow. The children mimic the leader's actions. Any players who fail to follow or do what the leader does are out of the game. Change leaders and give every child time to lead the others. Begin with simple actions like:

- hand on heads
- sit down
- star jumps
- stand up
- hop on one foot
- twirl around

Simon Says

Designate one child to be Simon, the other children are the players. Standing in front of the group, Simon tells players what they must do. The players must only follow the commands that begin with the words "Simon Says." If Simon says, "Simon says touch your nose," then players touch their noses. But, if Simon simply says, "jump," without first saying "Simon says," players must not jump. Those that jump are out.

Oliver Twist (for younger children)

Children take turns providing a movement that everyone copies. For example “Oliver Twist you can’t do this (child jumps up and down) but what’s the use of trying. Touch your knees, touch your toes, clap your hands and around you go!”

Ring Around the Rosie

Use a space that has enough room for players to hold hands, walk around in a circle, and sit down without hitting anything. The group links hands and recites the following verse while skipping, hopping, walking, or just being goofy in one circular direction. “*Ring-around-the-rosy. A pocket full of posies. Hush-a Hush-a. We all fall down!*” On "fall down," everyone sits quickly on the floor. This part is usually a hit!

London Bridge Is Falling Down

Choose 2 children to create an arch by facing each other and joining both hands together and lifting their arms up (one or two adults to make the arch ensures the success with younger children). Make two bridges if there is a larger number of a child. Line up the other children so they can walk under the arch. Begin reciting or singing, "London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down, London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady." Walk the line of children under the arch and back around, creating a circle of children walking under the arch. Instruct the 2 children to drop their hands down on the last word of the rhyme, trying to capture a child between their arms. Repeat these actions with each verse of the rhyme until all the children are captured.

Skating

Make "skates" from empty tissue boxes, let children decorate the boxes. Have children place their feet into the openings and start skating around the room.

Duck Duck Goose (for older children)

Sit children in a circle, facing each other. One child is chosen to be 'it.' 'It' walks around the outside of the circle, gently tapping each player on the head or shoulder, naming each player as a 'Duck.' Then, choosing one player to be the 'Goose,' 'It' taps that player and says, 'Goose.' The player selected as 'Goose' stands up and runs around the circle in the opposite direction, racing "It" to get back to the spot where 'Goose' was sitting. Whoever gets to the spot first is safe and the other player is "It".

What Time Is It Mr. Wolf (for older children)

Choose a person to be Mr. Wolf. The wolf stands with his back turned to the players. Children line up behind the "wolf" and together, loudly chant, "What time is it, Mr. Wolf?" Mr. Wolf answers with different times, with the players taking the correlating number of steps forward (10 o'clock for 10 steps, 2 o'clock for two steps, and so on). Eventually, Mr. Wolf yells out, "lunchtime!" When this happens, Mr. Wolf turns around and chases the children who have been approaching him. The player who is caught assumes the duties of the wolf.

Socket Ball

This version of basketball is great for any age. All you need is a bucket/ box for the basket and a rolled up sock (or a small, light ball or beanbag). Each player takes a turn throwing the sock-ball into the basket. Make it more challenging by having children stand on one foot and aim the sock-ball or close their eyes.

Traveling Basketball (for older children)

Place large bowls/baskets in different rooms and give each child a rolled-up sock or crumpled up piece of paper. Children can stand in the doorway and take aim, trying to get their ball into the bowl. When a player scores a 'basket', he or she takes a step back and throws again until missing. Move the bowl/basket into harder locations (higher up, behind a stack of blocks etc.)

"Snowball" Throwing

Crumple pieces of paper into balls, and let children go crazy throwing them at a snowball target. When it's time to clean up, children can shoot the snowballs into the recycling bin as a basket.

Balloon Floating

Blow up multiple balloons, toss them into the air and challenge children to not let them touch the ground. Outside this could be done with a baton made with a coat hanger and nylon stocking pulled over a hanger shaped like a paddle. Be sure the handle is rounded to prevent injury.

Balloon Pop (older children)

This requires the players to deliberately pop the balloons! Spread balloons around the floor (one for each child). Then on the word “Go!,” let the children try to pop them by sitting on them. This can be great fun for young kids as long as they’re not frightened by the popping balloons. Be sure to clean up any balloon pieces after the popping as these can be very dangerous to young children putting them into their mouths.

Bowling

Set up bowling pins using empty recycling/water bottles/plastic cups and a tennis ball.

Musical Chairs/cushions

Play music and when the music stops, children have to find a cushion or small mat to sit on -- like musical chairs, but using cushions spread out on the floor. The mats could also be used for games which encourage children to jump or crawl from one to the other.

Spider Trap

String painter's tape up in a doorway to create a spider web pattern, and then ball up pieces of paper to make spiders, and take turns throwing them against the web.

Paper Racquets

Using paper plates and some kind of stick, create racquets to bat a balloon or pom pom back-and-forth with. Batons made of nylon stocking and a coat hanger would also work! Be sure the handle is rounded to prevent injury.

Maze (for older children)

Use yarn and some tape to create a maze. Children try to crawl over and through, without touching the yarn/tape to get to the end.

Tower Topple

Set up a tower using plastic cups and figurines. The children take turns knocking the tower down using soft balls.

Toss it

Decorate a bucket to be the mouth of a clown or other type of “mouth” and let the children toss the ball in. Depending on their age, challenge them with the distance they have to throw, or ask them to rolling it or throwing in different ways, like underhand, with one eye closed or facing backwards.

Pom Pom Race (for older children)

Create a race track out of masking tape. Then give each child a straw and have the children blow small pom-poms or crunched up paper balls down the course as fast as they can, but keeping the balls inside the track or they have to go back to start.

Disco Down

Dim the lights, close the blinds, hand each child a flashlight and a small scarf to twirl around. Cue up some classic tunes like "Dancing Queen," by ABBA, and "I Will Survive," and watch the disco magic unfold.

Popcorn Popping

Have children hold onto the edge of a blanket or parachute. Place a number of soft balls on top of the blanket. Everyone holds on, lifts the blanket and starts pumping up and down to make popcorn and pop the balls off the blanket. Small stuffed animals could work.

For older children: the adult calls out two children's names and they have to run under the parachute and change places, before the parachute falls. Try it with something soft/safe in the middle of the parachute - a skipping rope could be a "snake" – the goal is for the children to raise the parachute high enough to keep the "snake" from touching them while the change places.

Red Light, Green Light (for older children)

One person is the "traffic light" at one end, and the other players are at the other end. When the traffic light faces the group of children, he says, "Red light!" and everyone must freeze. The traffic light then turns his back and says, "Green light!" while the group tries to get as close to the traffic light as possible. The traffic light turns around quickly, again saying, "Red light!", and if anyone is spotted moving, they have to go back to the starting place. The first person to tag the traffic light wins and gets to be the next traffic light.

Mother, May I older children

One person is the "mother". The children in the group ask the person in the front, "Mother, may I take '5' steps forward?" The person at the front then says, "Yes, you may." or "No, you may not." "Mother" can change the request by including options such as taking baby steps, spinning steps, leaps or whatever creative idea they have. The first person to tag the person in the front wins and is the next person in the front as "mother".

Freeze Dance

When the music starts, everyone dances the crazier the better. When the music stops, the dancers must freeze in their position. Anyone caught moving after that is out. Play continues until there is one person left, the winner. Children enjoy being caught in these crazy comical positions; you can play the game without a "winner" for younger children.

Infants and Toddlers

Tummy time provides important physical stimulation to encourage the brain to connect with motor development. Being on the stomach helps baby to strengthen their neck muscles as they practice keeping their head up.

Tummy time also helps with limb coordination and overall strength, preparing baby for crawling and other developmental milestones. Place toys or other appropriate objects just out of reach, so babies try to reach and grasp for the items.

Provide rattles or other noisy toys such as wooden spoons and saucepans to play with. Provide toys and objects made from different materials, or with different textures, for them to touch and squeeze

More mobile infants should be provided with as much time as possible in a safe, open area to practice their movement and reach their physical milestones. Time spent in stationary activity centers or other props like “bouncy” chairs should be limited. (no more than 15 minutes at one time).

Crawling

Children should be offered different textures to crawl on and over, as well as sturdy objects to pull themselves up to. Create play tunnels and place toys far apart in open areas to encourage children to crawl. Outside crawling time is also important for early exposure to nature’s variety – including grass, small hills and other objects like low balance beams to add to their physical learning.



Stair Practice

Many dangers lurk around stairs and require the use of gates and blockades to protect young children. This is very important for safety, but stairs are also a great way to give a toddler the support to develop physical skills and strength.

Take time to allow a toddler to crawl up the stairs at their own pace, while always being supervised by you, making sure all the other children are supervised as well. (There also might be the opportunity to close off a flight of stairs and allow safe access to only a couple of stairs for safer “practice”). Show her how to turn around at the top and come down feet first. When you are back at the bottom, toss a toy up to the top and have her go get it. A toddler may want to go through this many times, and this is fantastic exercise for them.

Playing with balls

Introduce balls of all shapes and sizes. Allow the toddler to explore the balls however he wishes. Take time to sit on the floor and roll a ball back and forth with him. Show him how the balls can bounce.

Move to music

Moving to music is also fantastic for this age. Provide opportunities to get children bouncing, marching, and tapping to the beat of music. Toddlers love a dance partner, so join the fun! Adult movements or involvement is the best form of encouragement to get toddlers moving, if they see you having fun they will want to join in.

Move with stories

Children can be motivated to move with the action of favorite stories. Examples of good stories that can be acted out are Three Billy Goats Gruff and We’re Going on a Bear Hunt.

Children begin to socialize and play cooperatively with other children. They acquire important skills to get along with others such as turn-taking, sharing and following instructions, as well as skills that will help them academically such as drawing, counting, reading, and writing.

References

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