

Let's Play!

Activities for Families

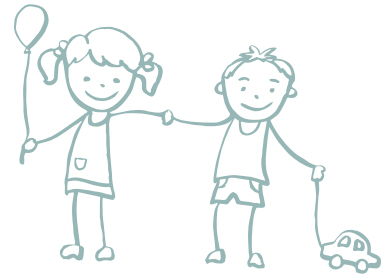


SET
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Engagement with
Others, Materials,
and the World



Be a Friend



What

A common perspective is that “it takes a village to raise a child.” This means that an entire community, in different ways, plays a role in raising children, and that different people and viewpoints are needed for healthy child development. Children learn from their parents, caregivers, community, and elders. They will copy and follow adults’ actions, including how to interact with others. Here are some ideas to help your child feel safe and connected with the community and people around them by practicing friendship skills and developing empathy through play.

1 Create the Environment

When a social activity comes up (child care, school, a birthday party, going to a community centre, a playdate, or having a sibling to play with), talk with your child about what’s going to happen, who might be there, and how they might practice being a good friend.

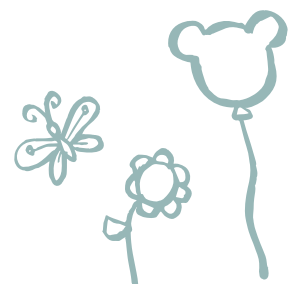
Ask your child what they think it means to be a friend. You may wish to suggest a few things to start the conversation or you may want to read stories about friends. Telling a story using yourself as an example or recalling an example that includes your child might also prompt some ideas. The more your child comes up with ideas on their own, the more they will understand and remember. Here are some examples of what it means to be a good friend:

- Sharing toys/materials
- Taking turns with a toy or activity
- Introducing yourself and smiling
- Responding when someone talks to you
- Being polite, asking to play
- Helping or offering to help
- Sharing with others what you like about them or their efforts

2 Play!

Choose one idea your child has or one idea from the list above to practice during your play time. Play alongside the children and model giving toys or taking turns. Model co-operation and friendliness and say things like, “Here’s a ball for you” or “Your turn on the slide!”

After the activity, tell your child that you noticed what they were doing and positively reinforce that they tried something new. If you noticed other children responding positively, explain to your child what you saw. For example, “You gave a friend a car and she had a big smile! She went to show her mom! I think she was happy.”



Why

Practicing being a friend will help your child to

- Develop a sense of well-being, belonging, and independence
- Strengthen communication skills
- Develop self-regulation and coping skills
- Support conflict resolution and collaboration skills

How

Have a pretend play date! Collect some stuffed animals, cars, figurines or other toys, and have a birthday party! Try role-play of being at a party.

Children often have a lot of ideas about what it means to be a good friend. Write down their thoughts and encourage them to make a story. You and your child can work together to write the words or draw pictures, or maybe your child would like to do it on their own.

If your child is still learning how to play with or around other children, start with playing next to other children. When your child continues to focus on their own play, and then begins to watch other children, try exchanging toys. In this situation, your child is holding one toy and the other child is holding a different toy. You can encourage the children to trade or model actions and positive responses while saying, "Let's trade toys!"

Go to the playground! These are ideal locations to begin practicing friendship skills because there are often other children nearby, and a lot of space for children to play. Playgrounds offer natural opportunities for introducing oneself, turn-taking, and offering to help.

Read a book with your child about making friends or other ideas that connect with this theme. Suggestions are:

- *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?* by Carol McCloud
- *The Rabbit Listened*, by Cori Doerrfeld

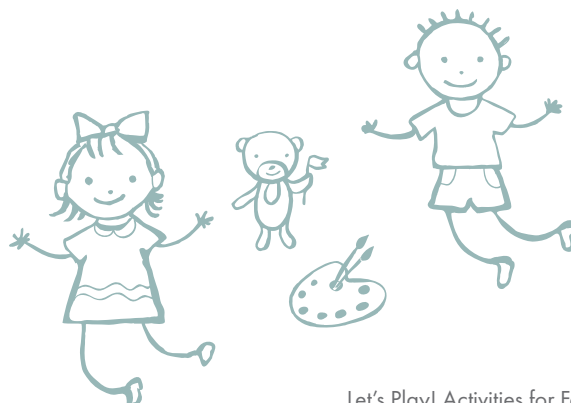
Check out *erase = expect respect & a safe education* for tips and tools about safe and caring school communities and much more: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/erase>

Where

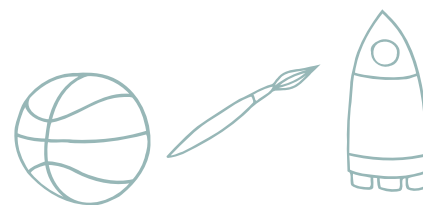
Children can practice friendship skills in any environment.

When

You can practice when children are in a variety of emotional states (excited, calm, tired). Keep in mind that skill levels vary based on how we are feeling.



Discovery Toy Basket



What

This experience is inspired by the idea of “Heuristic Play,” a term coined by Child Psychologist, Elinor Goldschmeid. It simply means to discover the properties of objects. This activity is also called “Heuristic Toy Basket.”

1 Create the Environment

- Place a variety of found objects such as keys, kitchen utensils or other household items into a basket, and present it to the child without directing their play.
- If you happen to be away from home, try a themed collection of items from your surroundings (for example, natural materials found at a beach or park). Any container (a bowl or a bag) that can hold your collected items can be used instead of a basket.

2 Play!

This child-led play allows endless opportunities for exploration, creativity, and invention! In addition to developing creativity, children learn the fundamentals of science by using their senses to explore what they find in the basket. By asking open-ended questions you are also able to support the development of children’s communication and literacy skills.

Why

Through this experience, children will learn to

- Explore the world using their bodies and all of their senses
- Develop their abstract and critical thinking skills, as well as their creativity and invention skills
- Build independence and confidence as new objects are explored
- Enhance fine motor abilities through manipulating, opening, closing, and pulling items apart

How

Some suggested items are hair rollers, cups, wooden spoons, a metal whisk, shaker, an empty spool, an old CD, old keys, bubble wrap, or small carpet samples and fabric scraps. Include natural items and materials such as driftwood, shells, rocks, leaves, and pinecones.

Add different items such as stacking objects (Russian dolls or measuring cups). You can also try larger marbles, holiday ornaments, sea sponges, a jar of buttons, rubber tubing, acorns, plastic flowers or plants, a wooden brush, an egg carton, or a clothespin.



Ask open-ended questions such as

- “Can you tell me what you have found?”
- “What do you see/feel/hear?”
- “What do you think this is used for?” There are no right or wrong answers. You are asking what is being sensed and how the child is interpreting the object
- “Do you like how it feels (and why)?” or “How does it make you feel?”

Place smaller objects into a fabric bag or sock. With no direction, a child will naturally feel around the sock and reach inside to explore the hidden items. Ask open-ended questions — a guessing game of what is inside may naturally emerge. Remember to focus on the senses to help children feel and guess what is hidden.

Read a book with your child about found objects or other ideas that connect with the activity. Here is a suggestion:

- *Ashley Bryan’s Puppets: Making Something from Everything* by Ashley Bryan

Where

This experience can be completed anywhere, preferably in an area with ample room for a child to spread out items and explore them individually.

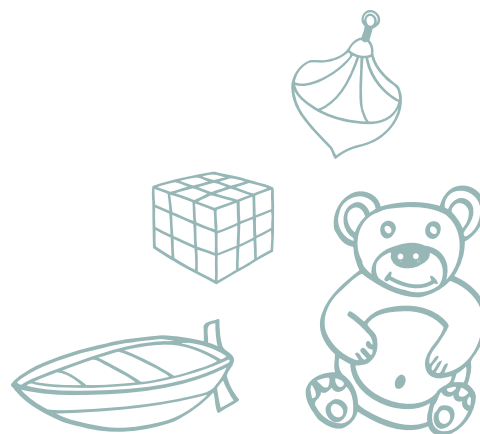
When

This activity can occur at any time of the day and is best explored individually or in small groups.

Reference

Ranson, Anna (2010, October 28), *Heuristic Play-Treasure Basket*.

Retrieved from <https://theimaginationtree.com/heuristic-play-treasure-baskets/>



Freeze Dance



What

Children are interested in music, rhythm, and dancing. Try this activity that explores music literacy skills. This experience encourages children to explore music and dance from diverse cultures. Through play, children can practice various ways of moving as well as controlling their impulses.

Many children know and love the game “Freeze Dance.” Children dance or move to music, but when the music is turned off, children must freeze their body in their dance/movement position. This version of a “freeze” game introduces children to songs and rhythms of varied cultures. You will need a source of cultural music for this activity such as YouTube, a music streaming application, or a radio station that plays world music.

1 Create the Environment

- Invite your child to play a dancing game.
- Find or create a space together where you can use your whole bodies to move while listening to music.
- Explain that the game is to dance and freeze to music.
- Practice a few times together using the cues “Dance!” and “Freeze!” either with or without music.

2 Listen and Freeze!

- Listen to songs from your own culture or from around the world and dance to them.
- While you are dancing, turn off the music and say, “Freeze!”
- Observe when your child is ready for a different song, or when to change or finish the game. Talk about your observations by saying, “It looks like you’re ready for a new song. Should we try the next one?”

Why

Through this experience, children will

- Learn multicultural songs, including songs from your own culture and traditions
- Practice self-regulation by taking control of their bodies to either start or stop dancing
- Increase communication and music literacy skills

How

Ask your child which song they would like to listen and dance to. Dance along to the song with your child.

If your child is not yet freezing on command, help them to freeze by scooping them up, or holding their hands and making silly faces. Say, “Freeze!” each time to help them make the connection.

Children may be able to turn off the music when they want everyone to “freeze.” Or, follow their lead when they freeze on their own.



Find different types of music from around the world that can be played during different parts of the day. For example, in the morning or afternoon, play music that is energizing. In the evening, choose music that is more calming and soothing.

To support their conversation skills, ask your child questions like, “How do you feel when the song is played?” or “What is your favourite part of the song?” In exchange, share how you feel and share your favourite part, too.

Try asking where your child would like to dance. This experience can easily occur inside or outdoors. Ask your child “Do you like dancing outside? Or is it more fun to dance inside? What do you like better?” Let your child choose where they would like to play.

Read a book with your child about dancing or other ideas that connect with this theme.

Suggestions are:

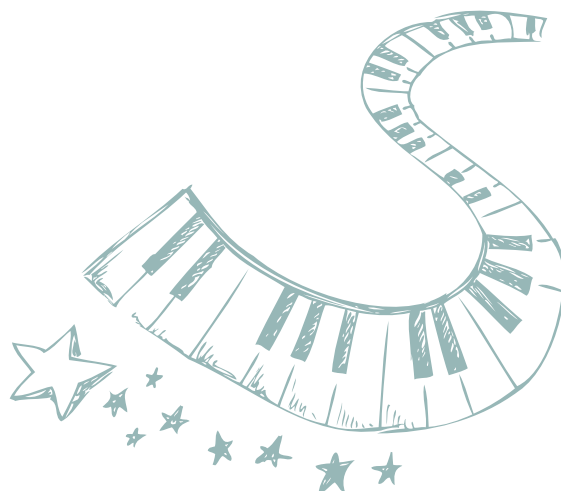
- *The Jingle Dancer*, by Cynthia Leicht Smith
- *Dance Baby Dance*, by Andrea Spalding

Where

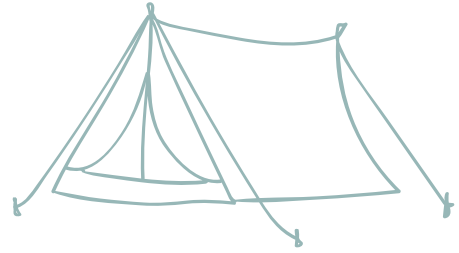
This activity can take place where there is enough space for children to move around and where music is accessible.

When

This activity can take place any time throughout the day.



Let's Go Camping!



What

Real camping or pretend camping is a great way to get your child excited for the start of springtime weather, and to get outside more and enjoy nature! Here are some steps to create a fun camping experience with your child:

1 Create the Environment

- Set up play tents (or small real ones).
- Provide sleeping bags and even create a pretend fire made of wooden blocks in brown, red, orange, and yellow (or create from old paper towel rolls and tissue paper).
- Make a forest mural painted with trees, a starry night sky, and some woodland animals with your child.
- Tell your child, "Let's think of one kind thing we could do for each other while we're camping."

2 Camping Activities

Ask your child what sort of activities they would like to do while camping. Some ideas:

Go fishing!

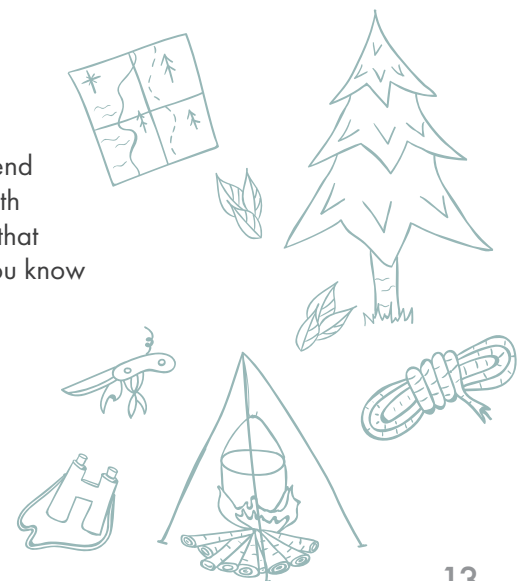
- Fill a blow-up paddling pool, or other shallow tub with cardboard fish cut-outs with paper clips for mouths or pipe cleaner fish.
- Make fishing poles out of sticks, string, and magnets tied on the end, or use pipe cleaners formed into hook shapes.
- Catch your fish! As you catch fish, talk with your child about how fish live in our rivers, lakes, and ocean, so fish is common in the diet of people in BC.

Storytime

- Sing camp songs and tell ghost stories (age-appropriate, of course), or tell stories from your cultural background that you learned or heard as a child from your family or community.
- Read a book from your local library or a story from your bookshelf that would be fun to read around the "campfire."

Explore nature outside

- A big part of camping is to enjoy nature. Even if you are pretend camping, go outside in your backyard or to a nearby park with your child and look at the trees, flowers, leaves, and animals that are around you. Feel and smell the different types of plants you know are safe. Hear the birds chirping. Ask your child questions about what they hear, smell, and feel.



3

Try creating “Camping Food”

Ask your child, “What types of foods would you like to eat while camping?”

Try exploring fun and nutritious camping foods such as

- **Bannock or Fry Bread:** Talk to your child about how bannock can be made on sticks over the fire. Serve with plain yogurt and berries, or melt cheese on top or in the middle. A recipe can be found here: <https://www.appetitetoplay.com/healthy-eating/recipes/bannock>
- **Potato Boats:** Wrap small potatoes in aluminum foil and bake in oven at 400 degrees for around 30 minutes or until easily pierced with a fork. Allow to cool slightly, then give one to your child. Try offering toppings such as cheese, Greek yogurt, green onions, steamed/diced broccoli, cooked beans, or chicken.
- **Banana Splits:** Have your child help prepare the bananas by laying a whole or half banana on a sheet of greased aluminum foil or parchment paper. Allow your child to practice cutting by using a plastic knife to cut the banana in half lengthwise. Try offering them toppings such as shredded coconut, semi-sweet chocolate chips, granola, berries, and nuts, or seed butter (depending on allergies). Bake in a 200 degree oven for 15-20 minutes until bananas are no longer firm when squeezed with tongs. Let cool slightly before serving to your child in the foil for true camp-style eating!



Why

Through this experience, children will learn to

- Explore the world around them using their bodies and their senses
- Build, create, and design using different materials
- Be creative and expressive in a variety of ways (for example, singing, storytelling)
- Develop a sense of wonder for natural environments

How

Together with your child, try the activities based on their interests.

- Create a space for your child to explore the different activities independently, and try watching from the sidelines. Observe their interests, and ask questions that encourage exploration.
- Encourage your child to think of new games and ideas that use the camping theme.
- Read a story with your child about camping or other ideas that connect with the activity. Here is a suggestion:
 - » *Scaredy Squirrel Goes Camping* by Melanie Watt
- Check out BC parks: <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/reserve/>

Where

This activity can occur either indoors or outdoors. Playing pretend camping in the backyard is always fun and exciting.

When

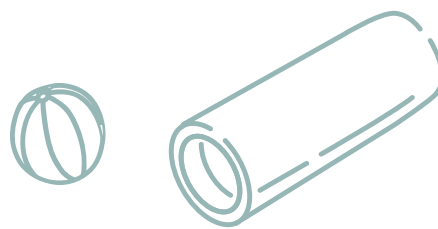
Try these activities in the morning or the afternoon. Storytime can happen at any time of the day.

Reference

Child Health BC. (2017). Appetite to Play.

Retrieved from <https://www.appetitetoplay.com/healthy-eating/tips-ideas/lets-go-camping>

Mystery Tube



What

Try this experience if your child is showing interest in manipulating objects, hiding smaller objects in larger objects, or is curious about the different components of toys or objects.

This experience involves experimenting and predicting what might happen when your child rolls balls of different sizes through a tube (poster tube, or piping for construction often works well).

1 Create the Environment

- You can find poster tubes that people have received in the mail. Often they will give them to you for free. You can use tennis balls or other balls you may already have.

2 Play!

Start with one ball that fits through the tube. Put it in on one side and lift that side so the ball comes out the other way. Talk to your child about what you're doing. "Let's put the ball in here. Is it going to fit? Yes! What will happen if I lift the tube? Wow! It came out the other side!"

Look through the tube at the child on the other end. Let the child try it and comment on what is happening. Try making different faces for your child to copy or label.

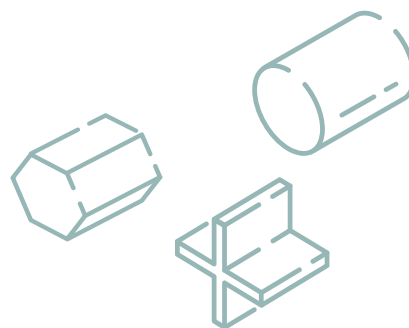
Once the child has had an opportunity to explore the tube and ball, you can add other balls of different sizes. Some will fit, some won't. Try reflective talking with your child by speaking about what your child is doing. "You put the ball in the tube!"

Have fun experimenting together and talk about what is happening to enrich the child's understanding and vocabulary. Use words like "big, bigger, biggest, small, smaller, smallest, fits, doesn't fit." Ask the child what they think will happen (making predictions).

Why

Through this experience, children learn to

- Explore two objects and how they interact with each other in a new way
- Predict what might happen (the foundation of many scientific experiments)
- Explore new vocabulary as well as numerical concepts, such as counting the amount of balls you are sending through the tube, and talking about the colours and sizes of the balls



How

You can start to explore the tube and the ball separately. Play peekaboo through the tube, and roll the ball back and forth. Once the child is familiar with both objects, you can combine them.

Roll the ball through the tube, and then, give your child some time to explore and try it. Comment on what's happening. You can ask your child to predict what is going to happen like, "What happens when you put the ball in and you don't lift the tube?" You can also introduce different sized balls. Some will fit, and some won't. Try asking questions like, "What happens when you put in a smaller ball or a larger ball?" Your child can try to predict what will happen.

Try asking your child, "What else can you do with the materials?" They may want to build a structure that includes ramps or different types of tracks. Encourage them to experiment and explore with different types of materials, balls, and objects, and predict what is going to happen.

Read a story with your child about exploring or other ideas that connect with the activity. Here is a suggestion:

- *Not a Stick* by Antoinette Portis

Where

This activity can be played indoors or outdoors.

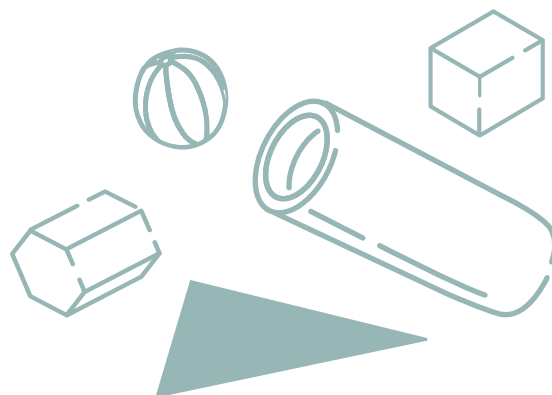
When

As with all activities, it's best to play when your child isn't sleepy or hungry but feels alert and ready to explore.

Reference

Community Action Program for Children (CAPC).

Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/childhood-adolescence/programs-initiatives/community-action-program-children-capc.html>



Orchestra



What

Even before birth, babies begin to gain awareness of their world through sound. Whether it is the sound of their mother's heartbeat, voices of their parents, or music, children develop the foundation for language and communication through these sounds.

1 Create the Environment

- Introduce instruments (or items that make sounds) to your child. These "instruments" could be pots, plastic cups, items that jingle, a whistle, or anything that makes an interesting sound. Allow ample time for your child to explore these items freely. This will help them focus on guidance that will be provided later in the activity.
- Help your child to experiment with different tones, rhythms, and sounds by using a variety of instruments.
- While your child explores the instruments, explore along with them. Make comments and tell stories about music you both enjoy or musical experiences you've shared. This helps children make connections across events and environments.
- Consider using noise-cancelling headphones for children with an auditory sensitivity, so they can explore without being overwhelmed.

2 Play in an Orchestra!

- Explain the role of a conductor in an orchestra. Talk about different types of instruments and model how a conductor guides an orchestra by conducting. Express the importance of the conductor's role as a leader of the group and the use of a baton in conducting.
- Find something to use as a conductor's baton, such as a wand or wooden spoon. Wave or move the baton and together you can interpret what each movement might mean. Try these movements and interpretations or make up your own: wave the baton gently from side to side (free play), bring it up high (loud), down low (soft/quiet), and make a tapping motion in the air (play to the beat). Try holding up your hand with an open palm and close it into a fist, explaining how this means that you would like music to stop. Together, you and your child can decide on what other movements mean. Practice these movements a few times.
- Move around in a space with the instruments, like a marching band, which encourages moving or marching to the music. This supports large motor skill development.



Why

Through this experience, children will

- Develop a sense of well-being, belonging, and self-confidence,
- Practise large and small motor skills
- Strengthen literacy and communication skills
- Develop artistic expression and musical interest
- Engage in turn taking, co-operation, and listening

How

In a group, everyone can take turns being the conductor and leading the speed and rhythms of the orchestra. Children sometimes need support with taking turns, so a visual aid, such as a sand timer or egg timer can help to understand how long turns will take.

Take the opportunity to introduce new vocabulary such as rhythm, tempo, orchestra, conductor, baton, volume, and beat. Invite children to clap after each conductor, which will contribute to children's positive self-esteem and confidence.

Have a performance! Practice a few times together by using a variety of instruments. Consider extending this activity by using costumes, inviting guests, and setting up a stage and a place for an audience.

Consider introducing more complex vocabulary related to tempo (the speed at which a piece of music is played): *presto* (very fast), *allegro* (fast/ lively), *moderato* (moderate), *andante* (moderately slow or slow walking), and *adagio* (very slow).

Choose songs or music together and practice conducting and playing along freely or to the beat.

Read a book with your child about playing in an orchestra or other ideas that connect with this theme.

Here are suggestions:

- *The Orchestra Pit*, by Johanna White
- *Play This Book*, by Jessica Young

Check out Performing Arts BC for regional festivals of the arts: <http://www.bcprovincials.com/>

Where

This activity can occur indoors or outdoors.

When

This activity can be explored when children, family, or caregivers are ready for sounds and noise.



Personalized Story



What

Children may experience some difficulty in adjusting to new routines or experiences. Creating a Personalized Story to support transitions, while also supporting early literacy can be helpful. In this activity, you and your child will talk and write about something new or challenging.

1 Create the Environment

Talk with your child about a challenging experience or routine. Explain that you are going to write a story together about how it looks, feels, and its participants. Your child can help you choose a theme. Some common themes are

- Getting ready in the morning for school or child care
- Getting ready for bed
- Trying new foods
- Going to the doctor
- Going to the dentist

2 Gather pictures

If you have access to a computer and printer there are many free clip art images available online, or you can draw and colour your own.

3 Write some words or sentences to accompany the pictures

The content should be as specific as possible using names, a range of emotions, and situations that are familiar to your child. The phrases should be simple, clear and reflect your child's perspective. The story should go through the whole routine, from start to finish, and show a success. Examples include

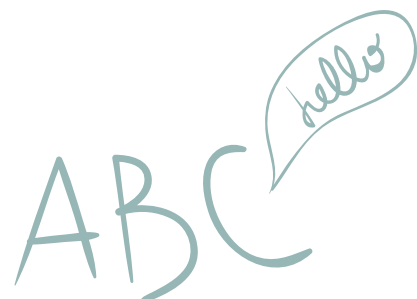
- At school, I like...
- I think it's scary when...
- I can ask for help if...
- My caregiver will be so proud when I...

4 Assemble your Personalized Story

Staple the pictures together to create a booklet or use a large piece of paper or poster board to display pictures in a sequence. If the routine changes sometimes, you may want to keep the pictures loose and separate, so they can be mixed and matched for different sequencing of events.

5 Read or tell the Personalized Story

Use the pictures to read or tell the story to each other.



Why

This activity aims to

- Break down the sequence of a child's routine and prompt conversation about possible challenges. This supports emotional expression and helps to develop language about feelings.
- Help build vocabulary during the creation of the Personalized Story and its ongoing use.
- Support children's narrative skills. Personalized Stories allow for storytelling—an effective way to help support early literacy skills.
- Develop creativity through imagining a topic for the story and drawing pictures to explore the topic.

Once completed, children will gain confidence and fulfillment in creating something new.

How

Create a Personalized Story together. Explore different pictures and work together to choose, colour, and arrange pictures.

When reading the story, talk about different aspects of it and ask open-ended questions. For example, if the story was about "Getting ready for Bed," you might ask, "What's your favourite part of getting ready for bed?" "What's the hardest part?"

Stories can be explored and reviewed by flipping through or pointing to the pictures. Ask for descriptive information as you share with each other.

Some other ways of interacting could be to

- Talk about what is in the pictures
- Practice counting pages or objects
- Create rhymes based on the photos
- Make up a song together inspired by the pictures, topics, or words

Read a book with your child about challenging routines or other ideas that connect with this theme. Suggestions are:

- *The Kissing Hand*, by Audrey Penn
- *Froggy Gets Dressed*, by Jonathan London

Where

Personalized Stories can be created at home, in a library, classroom, or community centre.

When

A Personalized Story can be read anytime. They are portable and can be used as needed. Personalized Stories can be especially useful right before a routine occurs, to help prepare your child for the routine or afterward, to reflect on their experiences.

Reference

Hotson, D. Adapted from Vancouver Public Library Workshop-
Parent's Time Out: Familiar Routines and New Experiences.

Retrieved from <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>





Reuse, Recycle, and Create

What

One way to support creativity and exploration with children is to keep things simple!

1 Create the Environment

- On a table or flat surface, place a variety of recyclable items such as plastic bottles, paper, and cardboard tubes or boxes.
- Ask your child to help you collect materials like tape, glue sticks, string, and scissors.

2 Explore

- Encourage your child to get started!
- Ask, "I wonder what we could do with all of this?"

Why

This activity encourages children to plan and construct new creations and problem solve while making or creating a design or sculpture.

Through this experience, children will learn

- How their actions may affect nature and the planet
- Abstract and critical thinking skills, creativity, and innovation
- Language development and communication

Once completed, children will gain confidence and fulfillment in creating something new.

How

Provide an opportunity for your child to explore the items with their senses. Children will manipulate the different items and begin to explore, evaluate and inquire. Some suggested items could be egg cartons, empty milk bottles, cardboard boxes, tins (omit cans as they can be sharp and unsafe), plastic containers, old CDs, or gift wrapping papers or bows.

Add miscellaneous pieces of toys, plastic caps, plastic straws, plastic or foam mesh, or pieces of Styrofoam. Encourage the child to explain what they are making and how they are making it. If your child asks for help, try to ask open-ended questions to encourage them to find solutions on their own. For example, "I hear you saying you are having trouble keeping the tower up. What other items could you use to hold it up?"



Depending on the interest of the child, you might place images of animals, structures, or objects that they could try to replicate using recycled items. Ask questions about recycling — like what items can be recycled, how items are recycled, and what recyclable items can be reused for. This will enhance a child’s knowledge of social responsibility with respect to their own or other communities and the world.

Read a book with your child about recycling or other ideas that connect with the activity. Here is a suggestion:

- *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires

Where

This experience can be completed on a flat surface: ideally at a table, indoors or outdoors.

When

This activity can occur at any time of the day, and best explored individually or in small groups.

