

Everyday Play = Everyday Learning

Playtime lets your child build language and logical thinking skills while she uses her imagination and has fun! Try these ways to help her learn while she plays.

Block creations

What will your little one build? A house? A boat? An igloo? Whatever she decides, she will make important discoveries and practice STEM skills as she stacks her blocks.

For example, she'll see that short, wide buildings are usually sturdier than tall, narrow ones. And she'll notice how different shapes work: a block won't stay on the point of a triangle, and a cylinder will roll unless it's standing up.

Encourage your child to use math language when talking about her building. You might say, "I like how your blue *rectangle* is *below* the yellow *square*. Where will you put that red *triangle*?" When she replies using names of shapes and phrases like *on top of* or *next to*, she's practicing her math vocabulary.

You might notice that your youngster's creations resemble actual things that she has seen. For instance, a visit to a farm might inspire her to build a barn for her toy animals. When she does this, she's making connections between play and real life.

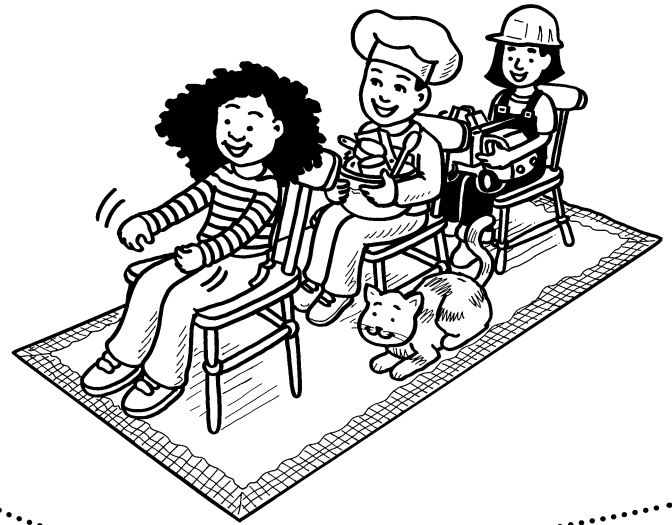
In my kitchen



A toy kitchen is a great place to practice all kinds of skills. Let your child decorate large cardboard boxes to make a stove and refrigerator—he could draw knobs, handles, and burners.

Have him make "food" out of clay (a red ball for a tomato, a brown square for

bread). He'll be visualizing what objects look like and thinking through how to recreate them. Also, help him collect empty food packages so he can see familiar words as he plays (*juice*, *cheese*). He might "cook" with safe kitchen utensils like wooden spoons and plastic bowls. Use new words to build his vocabulary. *Examples*: "Here's a *whisk* for your eggs." "Let's serve the *gravy* with this *ladle*."



Also, give your youngster a pad of paper and a pencil, and suggest that he take "orders" from friends or family members. As they order, he can draw pictures or write letters or words that he knows. Then, it's time for him to fix everyone's meals!

Homemade puzzles

Jigsaw puzzles help your child think logically and plan ahead as she decides where each piece goes. Here's how she can use old magazines to create her own puzzles.

First, ask her to find full-page magazine photos that she likes. Help her tear them out and glue them onto thin pieces of cardboard. (*Idea*: The front and back panels from cereal boxes work well.) Together, cut each puzzle into pieces. Your youngster might want to make square pieces or give them curvy edges. Store the pieces for each puzzle in separate zipper bags so they're ready for your youngster to put together and take apart over and over again.

Tip: Suggest that your little one turn her own art into jigsaw puzzles. When she draws pictures, have her glue them onto cardboard and cut them apart into puzzle pieces.



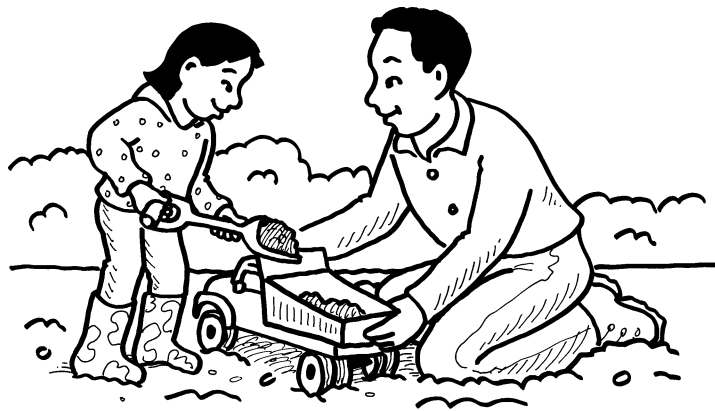
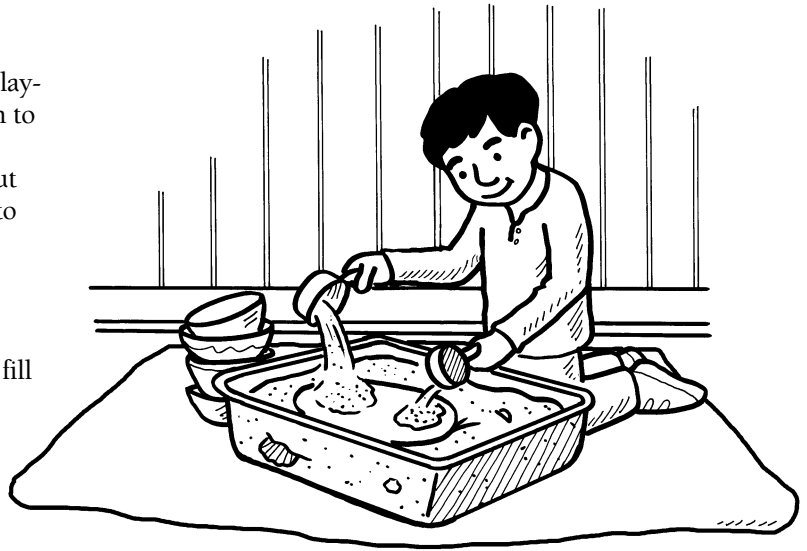
Sand play

Your youngster can boost math and science skills by playing with sand. Here's an easy homemade sandbox for him to enjoy anytime.

Find a deep plastic tub, and have your child fill it about halfway with sand. You might also add interesting items to hide and dig up, such as marbles and seashells. Together, gather cups, bowls, and spoons in a variety of sizes and place them on top.

As your youngster plays, he could practice comparing amounts and making estimates. For instance, ask him to fill a 1-cup measure and a $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup measure with sand. Which one holds more? (He can pour them out onto a plastic plate to compare.) Or have him estimate how many spoonfuls of sand will fit in a plastic egg—and then count them to find out.

Tip: Keep mess to a minimum by placing the box on a sheet if he's playing indoors.



At work

After getting her hair cut or walking past a construction site, your child might act out what she saw workers doing. You can ask questions to help her remember events in order. (“What did the hair stylist do first?” “After the driver scooped the dirt, what happened next?”)

Also, help your youngster gather items that will stimulate her imagination. For instance, she can use a large bowl and empty bottles to “wash” her dolls’ hair, and brushes and accessories to style it afterward. Or let her use a shovel outside to put rocks or soil in toy dump trucks.

Idea: Read books to your child about different jobs (park ranger, house painter) to give her new scenarios to act out.

Tips for playtime

Playing independently can increase your child’s attention span and encourage problem solving. Try these suggestions:

- When it comes to playtime, less is more. Limit the number of toys that are out at a time, since too many choices may overwhelm your child. One idea is to rotate toys—store things he hasn’t played with recently in boxes in the basement or attic. Later, take those out, and put others away.
- Sometimes, the most creative “toys” don’t cost a thing. For example, suggest that your youngster push chairs together to create a vehicle—ask

her what it could be (fire truck, school bus, subway train). A large cardboard box might be a spaceship, a submarine, or a castle. Or she can turn a towel into a surfboard or a cape.

- Build background knowledge to add depth to your child’s playtime. If he likes to play with musical instruments, attend a high school band concert or see a community orchestra. If he enjoys toy airplanes, try to visit an airport to watch planes take off. Talk about the sounds they make and how they gain speed on the runway before they take off.



Early Years