

Fun Activities Families Can Do with Their Children



Ideas for Families with Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers

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Fun Activities Families Can Do with Their Children

During Minnesota’s Stay At Home order, families may be wondering what do throughout day with their young children. You are not alone in this new situation of working from home and caring for your young child. You may often find yourself balancing the needs of both your job responsibilities and your child’s needs at the same time!

A key to making family life work during times of change and uncertainty is to **establish structure and reasonable expectations** for yourself and your young child. You may feel stress—and your child may, too—so it is important to be kind to yourself. Give some rhythm to the day by **balancing quiet and more boisterous activities**, and help your child transition as smoothly from one activity to another. Preschool-age children (4- to 5-year-olds) might want to make a calendar of what they want to do each day or write a list in the morning of activities they want to try. This helps young children develop important thinking skills.

Choosing activities that **stretch your child’s thinking, move his or her muscles and spark the imagination** will help your child continue to develop and learn while you are home together. Remember that your child’s young mind is always developing and learning throughout each day!

This brief guide, “Fun Activities Families Can Do with Their Children,” is intended to help provide you with ideas to create fun activities and moments to share with your child. Activities in this guide are suggested for babies, toddlers and preschoolers. Babies are infants to 12 months. Toddlers are young children ages 12 months to 36 months. Preschoolers are children 3 to 5 years old.

As a parent, you can plan activities on the age of your child and his interests—sometimes these interests will change each day! Please note that these activities are suggestions and are based on approximate ages of children.

Let's Get Moving Together: Physical Activities

Take time to enjoy play outdoors at least 20 minutes each day. If it is a bit chilly, add some warm clothing to stay comfortable while playing outdoors. Below are ideas to do indoors or outdoors to help your child be active. The activities will also give you a “brain break” and keep you moving with your child!

A Note about Transitions and Routines: Smooth transitions from physical activities to less active ones are important for young children. It helps children to know an activity will be ending soon, such as “five more ball tosses” or “one more ride down the sidewalk and then we will go into the house to read a story.”

When an activity is done, **create a song to make transition fun.** You can sing the song together for every transition. It doesn't matter if you are a good singer or not. It's the experience of singing that signals a transition for your child. Your song can be really simple. You can make-up the words as you transition that describes what you are doing, such as “this is the way we pick up our toys, pick up our toys, pick up our toys... and then we go inside!”

After the playtime outdoors, you and your child might want to have a routine for going back into the house. Importantly, take jacket, sweater, boots, shoes, mittens, hats and other outdoor clothing off at the door. Before touching anything else, you and your child should thoroughly **wash your hands for at least 20 seconds.** Babies need to have their hands washed, too, when you come in from outside. You can sing the “ABC's”, “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star,” or your favorite family songs to make handwashing a fun routine.

Following the outdoor time, your child is probably thirsty. This is a good time to have a drink of water and talk together about what you did and saw outside.

NOTE TO GROWN-UPS. Be sure to child-proof your home: Lock up household cleaning, laundry, lawn care and car care products; use safety gates; and lock doors to outside and basement. Get down at your child's level and see what else he may see that could potentially be dangerous or unsafe.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers
Cuddle, talk, sing and play with your baby while feeding, dressing and bathing.	Stack and unstack plastic cups. Make a pyramid and knock them down.	Play with balls, practice running and kicking.
Lay your baby on his/her back to sleep during naps and at night.	Use covers to pans as cymbals or a plastic bowl and spoon as a drum for an impromptu parade. March around the house.	Use large muscles to move with purpose to climb, run and gallop.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers
Have Tummy Time: On your lap, place your baby on his/her tummy for very short periods of time when awake (young babies).	Use large muscles to “jump like a bunny” or “fly like a bird.”	Pick a picture of an animal out of a book or magazine and move like the animal (for example, wiggle like a worm, hop like a rabbit, and jump like a kangaroo). Pick another animal and move like that other animal.
Encourage your baby to lift his/her head by holding toys at eye level.	Toss a soft ball into a medium to large box or laundry basket.	Play the freeze game. Dance to the music. Freeze when it stops. Or give directions and the say “Freeze.” For instance, “Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle. Freeze! Jump, jump and jump. Freeze!”
Hold a toy or rattle above your baby’s head and encourage him/her to reach for it (2- to 3-month-old)	Enjoy outdoor play by running, jumping, pulling a wagon or riding a tricycle.	Provide riding toys such as a tricycle or small bicycle with training wheels.
Cuddle and touch your baby gently.	Provide balls for your toddler to kick, roll and throw.	Use a plastic liter bottle and a soft ball to “bowl.”
Give your baby something to reach for and hold onto such as your finger or a toy (3-month-old).	Provide toys your toddler can push or pull safely.	Place a rolled up old blanket on the floor as a balance beam or tight rope. Have your child walk on it. Pretend it is a bridge and stay out of the cold water all around.
Use toys that are soft, safe for infants and colorful to attract your baby's attention.	Blow bubbles and let your toddler pop them. Talk with your toddler about how he “pops them up high in the air” or “way down low on the ground.”	Play simple games where your child follows directions. Work up to three directions before they start. For example, “Put your hand on your head, turn around, and then touch the ground.” Keep it fun with silly actions. Have your child be the leader and give you directions, too!

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers
Provide a safe place for your baby to play on the floor. Babies like to try to reach for a soft toy while playing.	Provide safe areas for your toddler to walk and move around.	Jump or step across a piece of tape or rope on the floor.
Have Tummy Time: Place your baby on his/her tummy when awake and put toys nearby so that he/she can reach and grab them. (4- to 6-month-old)	Provide push toys such as a car, truck or wagon. A small box can be fun “push toy”—pretend it is a train, bus or a car.	Write your child’s name on a piece of paper. Then, have your child use his body to spell out each letter of his name. Write down other names or words to spell out each letter. Spell out the letters with your child to make it fun! You both with be laughing together!
Make different facial expressions—especially smiling at your young baby—while changing diapers or your baby’s clothes.	Toddlers can play simple fun games by following instructions. It is fun using silly actions with your young child. For example, “open your eyes really wide,” “close your eyes tight,” “cover your feet with your hands.” Make up anything fun and silly with your toddler.	Teach your child to play outdoor games like tag, follow the leader and "duck, duck, goose" with other family members. Your child can say a different color with each “duck.”
Play peek-a-boo with a scarf or a towel.	Throw a lightweight scarf or dish towel in the air and catch it.	Throw a lightweight scarf or dish towel in the air and catch it.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers
Give baby a large, safe place to move around and explore.	Set up a simple obstacle course by placing chairs or pillows around the room. Your toddler can practice crawling over or walking around the obstacle course.	Set up an obstacle course. Place chairs and pillows around the room, then practice stepping, jumping or crawling over, under and around.
Stay close by as your baby explores and moves around so he/she knows that you are near.	Get your older toddler to help with everyday tasks—it won't be perfect, but they will like to help. Sorting laundry, such as socks, is a great place to start. Your toddler may also like carrying small stacks of laundry to the right room.	Get your child involved in routine tasks like sorting laundry by color or type of clothing. Ask your child to find all the blue socks. Count them. Then roll them up into balls and toss them in to the laundry basket standing further away with each toss.
Hold your baby upright with feet on the floor, and sing and talk to him/her.	Your older toddler can practice jumping across the room or around chairs.	Use an old pillow case as a jumping bag. Place chairs for your child to jump around.

Practicing Social Skills

Learning to develop socially and how to play with others is a skill that children can begin learn at a young age. Practice skills needed to get along with children. Help your child learn new words to communicate needs and wants.

NOTE TO GROWN-UPS. Watch your baby to learn his signals—does your baby cry when hungry, rub eyes when tired or look away when he/she wants to do something different? Babies can communicate their needs to us—even when we are getting social with them! Pay attention to how your baby reacts to new situations and people, and try to do things that help him/her feel comfortable and happy. Continue with routines—which are a good way to help your baby, toddler or preschooler feel safe and secure.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers
<p>Play games or sing songs where your baby can copy your sounds and body movement. Sing favorite songs over and over again. The routine of sharing favorite songs is reassuring to your baby.</p>	<p>Play games or sing songs where your toddler can copy your sounds and body movement. Sing favorite songs over and over again. Toddlers enjoy repetition.</p>	<p>Act out a well-known story like Goldilocks and The Three Bears. Gather stuffed toy animals, bowls and spoons, three chairs and towels or blankets for the bed. You and your child can be the narrator or you can narrate and your child can act it out. Or set up some chairs and act out the song The Wheels on the Bus.</p>
<p>Read books or tell stories to your baby using a quiet voice. Point to the words and pictures in a book as you read.</p>	<p>Read books or tell stories to your toddler using a quiet voice. Point to the words and pictures in a book as you read.</p>	<p>Read to or tell stories to your child often. Connect activities in the book to real life experiences. You might say, "Remember when we did ____? That was kind of like what they are doing in the story."</p>
<p>Play hiding games by hiding a stuffed animal toy under a blanket or cloth. Look for the toy together. Show surprise and delight when you find the toy. Add a flashlight for more fun with older babies.</p>	<p>Play hiding games by hiding a toy under a blanket or cloth or hiding a stuffed animal toy somewhere in the house and helping your toddler find it. Add a flashlight for more fun.</p>	<p>Play games like "I Spy." Identify an object in the room. Describe it to your child one hint at a time until your child guesses. Say something like, "I spy something that is round. Red. Hot. On the stove." It's the pan of spaghetti cooking. Or play the game "I'm thinking of an animal. It's got four legs, a long neck and is yellow with brown spots. What is it?" A giraffe.</p>

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers
<p>Look at family photos together. Look at pictures of other babies. Talk about what you see in the pictures with your baby.</p>	<p>Look at family photos. Name the people and talk about what was taking place at the time. Young children enjoy looking at photos of themselves and pictures of other children.</p>	<p>Look at family photos and talk about the activities and family members in the photos. Older preschool children may enjoy taking photos of family members and talking about what the person was doing in the photo.</p>
<p>Your older baby will enjoy rolling a ball back and forth. Talk about what you are doing as you are playing a sharing activity together.</p>	<p>Take turns rolling a car or ball back and forth. Talk about what you are doing as you are playing a sharing activity together.</p>	<p>Encourage lots of pretend play. This is especially fun for your preschooler to do with family members. During pretend play, switch roles, let your child pretend to be the parent and you be the child. Or pretend to go to the pizza or coffee shop. Your child can be the wait staff and “write” down your order or the cook.</p>
<p>Talk to your baby or ask questions, (preferably face-to-face) and wait for a response as though you were in a conversation. The response may be a gurgle, legs kicking, or a laugh. Repeat this with your baby several times if your baby is interested in maintaining the responses.</p>	<p>Play active games with your toddler, such as taking turns jumping off a curb, kicking a ball or blowing bubbles. Taking turns is essential to good social skills.</p>	<p>Play a card game of Go Fish, Old Maid or Concentration. Simple board games, like Candyland, are fun for preschoolers. Games help preschool-age children learn to take turns.</p>

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers
<p>Play games like “my turn, your turn” with a ball or toy. This even works when you are putting on your baby’s socks or shoes. Having fun together builds a long-term positive relationship with your child.</p>	<p>Play make believe with your toddler’s stuffed animals. Tell a simple story with the animals or toys. Take turns telling a story. Even a young toddler can share in this by telling a story, too, even if you don’t understand the words he is trying to say. It is fun to play make-believe with your toddler and builds early communication and language skills.</p>	<p>Make up stories together where your child determines what happens next. You can offer suggestions like, “do they go to the park, the beach or a movie next?” Make up stories about toys or stuffed animals that you have placed or hidden around the house.</p>
<p>Be available, responsive and gentle with your baby.</p>	<p>Be available and responsive to your toddler. Learn to read his clues throughout the day.</p>	<p>Play a word game where you ask, “what might happen next?” if you bring a snowball in the house or you build a tower taller than you?</p>
<p>Help your baby calm himself by giving a pacifier or offering a favorite blanket or soft object.</p>	<p>Be consistent with what your toddler can and cannot do. Praise your toddler with what he is learning to do and how he is a helper, such as helping with dusting or sweeping.</p>	<p>Go on scavenger hunts together. Find three (or more) things that are bumpy. Next time find things that are smooth. Or find geometric shapes like circles, squares and rectangles that are in everyday items.</p>

Learning to Become Independent

There are numerous web resources for children and their families across the country. Sometimes preschoolers can access these resources if you have access to broadband and Wi-Fi in your communities. Many child development and medical experts recommend less than two hours per day for preschool age children. It is important that any media that your child watches is a *quality* program or website. As with any activity, it is important to provide a balance of the use of media with other activities.

Watching video or using websites specifically designed for young children may be an activity that you will want to do with your child and share ideas and conversations while you are using media. There are several interesting child-friendly websites that provide virtual tours. Travel to some of these websites with your child:

The [San Diego Zoo](#) has a website with images of zoo animals, videos, games and activities.

A website from Canada provides a [tour of farms](#) with pigs and cows, apple orchards, and eggs.

Watch live webcam of [what lives under water](#), such as whales, at the aquarium.

Minnesota’s [live eagle cam](#). The parents are sitting on three eggs.

Below you’ll find suggestions that do not rely on media.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers
Give your baby soft toys, such as dolls or stuffed animals, to pretend to take care of by holding, feeding, rocking or singing.	Give your toddler soft toys, such as dolls or stuffed animals, to pretend to take care of by holding, feeding, rocking or singing.	Engage in dramatic or imaginative play with dolls, hats, action figures, or other make-believe props.
Let your older baby use large crayons or washable, non-toxic markers for scribbling and drawing. Be sure to be close by your baby.	Let your toddler use large crayons or washable, non-toxic markers for scribbling and drawing.	Provide writing materials, such as paper (newspaper, junk mail or cardboard works too), pencils, crayons and markers. Let your child draw, write notes or copy words.
Let your baby look at board or plastic books by himself.	Let your toddler look at books by himself.	Let your child look at books by himself. Preschoolers like to “pretend” they are reading the story. Have your child “read” or tell a story to his stuffed animals.
Let your baby turn the pages when looking at a book together and take turns naming items in the pictures.	Have you toddler draw (or scribble) a picture to send to a family member or friend.	Encourage writing for a reason such as a note to a friend, make a list of things to do or pretending to take an order at a restaurant. Write notes to those your family is unable to visit.
Place soft toys on the crib surface next to your child’s feet. Your child can kick the toys and they will move. Share the enjoyment of “cause and effect” (your baby move his feet and legs and the toys move) with your baby.	Play dough is a great sensory experience for your child. Watch how your child plays (such as tearing off pieces of play dough, rolling in a ball). Provide containers for your toddler to drop the play dough pieces in.	Make homemade play dough together (recipes are available online). When the play dough is ready, provide various blunt kitchen tools for your preschooler to use with the play dough.

Routine Activities: Knowing What to Expect

Routines are activities that follow a predictable order, are consistent, and give structure to your child's life. An enormous amount of learning can take place when your child is involved in daily routines such as bathing, feeding/eating, diaper changing and playing together - things that you do with your young child every day.

Learning takes place as your child is actively engaged through the different parts of a daily routine.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers
<p>Establish routines for your baby (although, these are flexible!), such as regular bedtime and naps, and feeding on demand.</p> <p>Routines help babies to feel secure and begin to know what to expect.</p>	<p>Your toddler can help set the table or carry the silverware to the sink to help clean up after a meal. Your toddler may enjoy a clean-up song each time.</p>	<p>Encourage your child to help you set the table (count each item as you put it on the table) and carry the dishes to the sink to help clean up after a meal.</p>
<p>Your older baby can start holding on to a spoon or use a spoon to help feed himself. Older babies enjoy sitting at the table with the family.</p>	<p>Have your toddler practice using a spoon or fork during mealtimes.</p>	<p>Practice using a spoon or fork during mealtimes. Your older preschooler can use a table knife to put butter or peanut butter on sandwiches.</p>
<p>Establish regular routines for your baby, like bathing, Be sure to check the water temperature and always be supervising your child.</p>	<p>Play in the bathtub is fun for your toddler. Be sure to check the water temperature and always be supervising your child.</p>	<p>Play in the bathtub or sink (be ready for some dripping) with different sized containers to pour and scoop. Be sure to supervise your child around water.</p>
<p>Pay attention to what your baby likes and doesn't like so that you can figure out what your baby needs and how to make him/her happy. There are parts of the day that your baby will communicate different needs.</p>	<p>Have your toddler pick out his shirt for the day. Ask, "do you want to wear the red shirt or the blue?"</p>	<p>When you're getting your child dressed, choose a shirt with a pattern. "Read" the pattern to your child. Look for patterns throughout the day. For example, I found another pattern on this napkin. The stripes are red, blue, and red, blue."</p>

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers
Talk gently with your baby as you dress or change your baby. For example, tell your baby you are putting on his socks and then his shoes.	As your child is getting dressed, talk about the colors and designs in his clothing.	Encourage your preschooler to match items that look alike, such as toys, stuffed animals, shoes, socks, or fruit.
Watch how your baby is discovering his/her body—looking at hands, sucking on feet, and arching back and trying to roll.	Older toddlers can begin to dress themselves with your help, if needed. Start with something easy, like boots or a sweater.	Encourage your preschooler to dress himself. Practice zipping up jackets or sweaters. Show your preschooler how to put on his boots or shoes, and have him practice this before going outside.

Some Time to Relax: Quiet Activities

Similar to grown-ups in children’s lives, it is important to balance your young child’s activities with quiet activities with times of more active play. Times of rest and relaxation can be a time that helps your child’s brain develop further. Be sure to have regular times of rest and relaxation each day. This is especially important during uncertain times in a child’s life.

Even during quiet times or when your young child is relaxing you have the opportunity to build your child’s oral language skills by talking together. Really having a conversation with your child, asking them to tell a story, recounting what they did that day, asking your child to plan their next activity, etc. This may be one of the most significant things you can do along with reading books to help your child grow and learn.

Note to Grown-ups. With any activity it is important to following your children’s clues. Notice if they seem to be getting tired. Even babies communicate what they want or if they get tired of any activity. When your baby gets tired, he may look away from the book or your face and rub his eyes. This may be a clue to you to stop the activity and give your baby or child a rest.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers
<p>While cuddling with your baby and using a quiet voice, talk about the pictures in a book or read the book with your baby. Cuddling always makes this special.</p>	<p>After a period of being busy or active play, read a book with your toddler on your lap. It's also relaxing to just talk about the pictures together or have your toddler tell the story. Be sure you're using a quiet voice.</p>	<p>After a period of being busy or active play, read a book with your preschooler on your lap or on a pillow next to you. It's also relaxing to just talk about the pictures together or have your preschooler tell the story. Be sure you're using a quiet voice.</p>
<p>Very gently stroke your baby's back, legs, arm and tummy to encourage them to relax. Follow your baby's cues about their preferences for touch. Singing a quiet song may make this time even more relaxing.</p>	<p>Some toddlers may enjoy having their back, arms or legs rubbed. Follow your toddler's cues about their preferences for touch at that time. Singing a quiet song may make this time even more relaxing.</p>	<p>Teach your preschooler some gentle stretches or basic yoga moves, especially deep breathing. Yoga has been shown to help some children relax.</p>
<p>Older babies may enjoy sitting on your lap and "drawing" on a piece of paper, newspaper, back or envelop or paper plate with a crayon. Talk quietly about what your child is doing, such as the color she is using and the designs she is making while coloring.</p>	<p>Set up a table with a quiet art activity, such as drawing or gluing. Provide paper or a white board, markers, crayons, pencils or chalk. Provide paper scraps or tissues for gluing on paper plates, newspaper or any unneeded papers.</p>	<p>Set up a table with quiet art activities, such as drawing or gluing. Provide paper or a white board, markers, crayons, or chalk. Provide paper scraps or tissues for gluing on paper plates, newspaper or any unneeded papers.</p>
<p>Take your baby for a quiet walk. Enjoy pointing out what you see and hear, sing a quiet song or just enjoy the quiet time and physical movement.</p>	<p>Take your toddler for a quiet walk. Enjoy pointing out what you see and hear, perhaps birds or dogs, sing a quiet song or just enjoy the quiet time and physical movement. Be sure to answer any questions your toddler has about what they see.</p>	<p>Take your preschooler for a quiet walk. Enjoy pointing out what you see and hear; ask your preschooler what they see and hear. Or just enjoy the quiet time and physical movement. Be sure to answer any questions your preschooler has about what they see.</p>

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers
Create a routine and ensure a regular naptime. Allow your baby to play quietly in the crib, if your child enjoys time to relax and play quietly.	Create a quiet, special place for your toddler, such as a tent or cave, where they can relax and play quietly.	Create a quiet, special place for your preschooler, such as a tent or cave, where they can relax and play quietly. Use old sheets, curtains, or rugs to create the space. Preschoolers could select their quiet toy.

Final Note to Grown-ups

More ideas for families are on the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) website in the [Parent Guides](#) located on the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress web pages (bottom of the page).

[Learn more](#) about your child’s development and find other ideas on the Help Me Grow website.

We hope you have fun together even during uncertain times! We wish you good health and safety to you and your family.