

Parent-Child Activities

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You are very important!

This leaflet describes many learning games and activities you can do with your preschool or kindergarten child. These learning games should be fun. Plan to play one if your child says, "Mommy (or Daddy), I don't know what to do." Don't force your child to play or take him or her away from another activity. You don't have to set aside a certain time to teach your child. To learn, your child simply needs to be involved in the day-to-day life of your family.

Once your child is willing to try a learning game, it's important that both of you enjoy it. If you are enjoying the activity, usually your child will, too. If you are asked to play when you are too busy, suggest that you will play at a later time. But be sure to set a time to come back to the game and keep your promise. Plan to stop playing while everyone is still having a good time, before both or either of you loses interest and attention. That way, your child will want to play another day.

Children enjoy the challenge of a learning game as long as it is not too difficult. At first, choose games that are really easy for your child to do, to make sure that he or she succeeds. Help your child develop an independent attitude of "I can do it myself." Show pleasure when he or she does a good job. Children enjoy activities they can do easily and well. Encourage your child to set the pace, and gradually increase the difficulty of new tasks. You'll know when it's time to go on. Moving at your child's pace will be more comfortable and will help your child gain self-confidence. Giving your child your undivided attention for a short period of time will help improve his or her skills.

The Role of the Parent

Consistently support the behavior you ask your child to demonstrate. Be understanding about your child's feelings and behavior but do set limits when necessary.

Read to your child (sometimes on your lap) at least fifteen minutes every day. Set an example by reading yourself. Keeping books, magazines, and newspapers in your home shows your child that reading is important to you. Children who see their parents reading tend to be better readers themselves.

Enjoy trips with your child. Go for walks or to a park or playground. Plan a trip by bus, car, or train to a place that is new to your child (a lake, zoo, or large library are some ideas). Look in the paper for a free concert your family would enjoy.

Ask questions about what your child sees or does. Try to ask questions that have no right or wrong answers. In turn, be sure to answer his or her questions. If you don't know the answer, figure out ways to learn.

Talk with your child often. Mealtimes, bathtimes, bedtimes, and riding in the car or on the bus are good times to listen and talk as you share the events of the day. Start a conversation at a time and place that allows your child time to speak slowly and clearly, to learn new words and what they mean, and to put his or her thoughts into words.

Enlister your child's help in carrying out simple duties at home on a routine basis. Encourage independence to do things even if it takes more time and is not perfect. Be patient.

Supply your child with crayons, paper, blunt-tipped scissors, and other inexpensive materials to use in a constructive manner. Create a special place in your home for these materials.

U YOU are your child's first teacher. Children see themselves through your eyes. Give them a love for learning by showing that learning can be fun. Let them take the lead and together explore their interests.

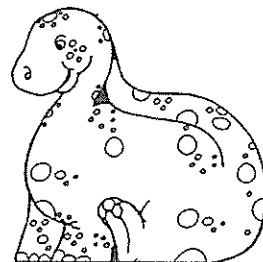
Catch your child doing something positive and praise generously.

Construct an environment in which activities are pleasurable. If it is fun, everyone wants to do it again!

Entertain or amuse your child with storybooks and writing materials wherever you are, at home or away from home.

Sing or play children's songs and nursery rhymes on records, videocassettes, or CDs. Also, help your child select TV programs with music. Use television time wisely and watch favorite TV shows with your child. Educational shows such as Sesame Street® are particularly appropriate.

Show your love and affection for your child for no reason other than being your child. Don't compare your child with others.



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Social-Emotional Activities

These activities help your child to develop skills for playing, learning, and working together with other people. They also help your child learn to feel good about himself or herself. To prepare for the different experiences that life outside the home might bring, it is important that your child feel accepted, respected, and not under pressure. You can help by interacting with your child, responding to his or her needs, and bringing out his or her natural curiosity.

The three watch words for helping your child learn good social behavior are: anticipate, anticipate, anticipate. You have to anticipate that your growing child will develop his or her own personality and will strive to become independent. Your child may go through a time of saying "No" to every request, no matter what it is. To help your child learn a better way of responding, limit your requests. When you really want him or her to do something, pick up and put your toddler where you want him or her to be. In this way you teach your child what is expected without punishing him or her for natural behavior. In the same manner, anticipate which activities are going to cause problems for your child. Spanking a child who gets cranky is not useful, especially when you could have predicted the behavior. If your child cannot deal with eating in a restaurant or visiting relatives who do not understand the exploring nature of young children, temporarily avoid such situations whenever possible or keep them short. Practice proper behavior at home before trying again. When you get good at anticipation, you will find yourself using "No" less and less, making all of your lives much more pleasant.

Routines for daily activities can be comforting to children. When you follow a routine consistently, it helps your child develop a sense of order and structure. For example, set up a morning routine for your child, so he or she knows what to do and when to do it: 1) get dressed, 2) make bed, 3) eat breakfast, 4) brush teeth. When your child accomplishes tasks and routines without being distracted, be sure to give compliments.



Today I am feeling... Everyone has good and bad days. Make a small booklet of faces: a happy face, a sad face with tears, and a face that is neither happy nor sad. Put a title on the booklet "This is how I feel today." After breakfast or some time in the morning, have your child use the faces to tell you how he or she is feeling. Share your own feelings, too! Do not criticize or judge how your child is feeling. Just listen and let your child know you understand.

Make consistent rules for behavior. Talk about the rules with your child. Make sure he or she understands what you expect. Also be very clear about the consequences if rules are not followed. For example, no dessert if you don't eat your dinner. Children feel more secure when they have clear rules that do not change from day to day.

Playtime is a child's worktime. When children learn through play, they learn to enjoy learning. Play provides the opportunity for your child to practice new skills at his or her own rate and in his or her own way. Play along when needed (for example, as a patient for the doctor, the customer at the bakery, the rider on the bus). Playtime is best when the TV is off. To help your child focus on a single activity, have some playtime where just one type of toy is available. You may have a time for playing with cars, for example, or a time for building with blocks.

Encourage your child to play with other children. Playing with other children is very important in the development of language and social skills. Invite two or three playmates close in age to your child to play in your home. Also, allow your child to visit other playmates' homes for short periods of playtime. Old cartons from the supermarket can be set up for playing grocery, bakery, or department store. Have play money, signs, toy cash registers, and so on for shopping activities. During cooperative playtime, children can express feelings.

learn to respect others by sharing toys, and also learn to make friends by getting along with other children.

Pretend play is good for helping your child's imagination. You can make a toy TV by cutting a hole in a cardboard box and painting knobs on it. Children can then put on their own "programs" with their friends as actors. Or your child can make a toy phone from materials found around the house by running a piece of string between two cardboard or plastic juice cans or two paper cups. Puppets can be bought or made from paper bags, by painting faces on wooden spoons, or from socks or mittens.

Dress-up — Any kind of dress-up play should be encouraged. Keep a box with old clothes—both men's and women's clothing—big hats, adult shoes, jewelry, costumes, and so on to use as props. Dressing up is a good rainy day activity. You can join in the drama when needed, for example, as the dentist, the pet, or the bus driver.

Help your child create his or her own "This is Me" album. Together with your child look at and talk about the family album, photographs, or special souvenirs that you have saved.

Play a game of "Who Am I." You go first and describe yourself. Then ask your child to do the same. Try to do three or four ways of describing yourself at first and increase the number of ways (name, girl, daughter, brown eyes, silly, happy) over time.

Start a daily journal by asking questions about the different things

your child has done that day and drawing pictures or writing to describe the activities. You can bind the pages together by hole-punching the paper, adding a cover page and stapling it or tying it together with yarn.



Children need to see parents model socially acceptable behavior. For example, children need to see their parents being polite, being honest, making mistakes without getting upset, and being sensitive to others' needs.

Concepts Activities

These activities will help develop your child's understanding of the concepts that are a part of everyday life. Colors, sizes, shapes, and numbers are just a few concepts you can help your child learn.

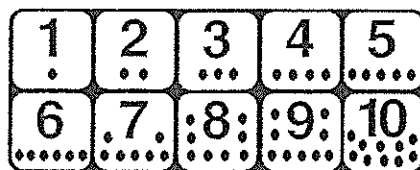
Grocery shopping is an opportunity to teach many things. Talk with your child about the way similar items are grouped in one place. For example, all the fruits are together, all the vegetables are together, all the meats, milk products, and so on. Or you can pick up a can of something and ask your child to find another just like it. Or let your child put a few things in the cart as you request them and check them off of your shopping list. Grocery shopping is a great time to just talk about all the things around you where the food comes from, how it gets to the store, what the people at the store do. Encourage your child to ask questions.

Memory games are excellent to play with your child. Here is one example. First, show your child three or four objects from your purse, wallet, or pockets. Then have your child cover his or her eyes. Remove one object, and ask your child to tell you what is missing. You can gradually increase the number of objects you present and remove.

Matching games can be played with pictures in magazines, objects in stores, or even a deck of playing cards. For example, you can match two similar pictures from a pile of several different pictures — two boats, two cars, two fruits, and so on. Or you can match objects that usually go together — a shoe and sock, knife and fork, salt and pepper. Using old catalogs or magazine sections from the newspaper, you can give your child a task to find a picture and cut it out; then find another picture with something else that will go with the first picture (lady wearing a hat / picture of a coat). Have paste or glue ready for pasting the two together. Make writing your grocery list, with brand names, an activity you can do together. At the store, let your child help match the chosen items to the items on your list (add coupons if you use them).

Following directions — Give your child two simple directions, such as "Get a spoon. Put the spoon on the table." Gradually increase to three directions at a time, then four. You can use a variety of directions and do this activity outdoors as well as inside. It is even more fun for your child to follow silly directions, such as "Get a spoon. Put it on your head."

Counting games develop the idea that a number stands for a certain amount. Count with your child in daily activities (eating, dressing, etc.). Make 1, 2, and 3 meaningful by counting the number of eyes, fingers, cookies, crayons, etc. You can make up games such as "Jump two times" or "Wiggle your finger four times" or "Blink one time." Older children can make a counting carton from an empty egg carton by cutting off two sections so that ten are left. Number each section of the carton from 1 to 10. Then put 55 small objects, such as dried beans or paper clips, in a separate container. Show your child how to put one object in the section numbered "1," two in the section numbered "2," and so on. (*Hint: If the correct number of objects is placed in each section, there won't be any beans or paper clips left over.*)

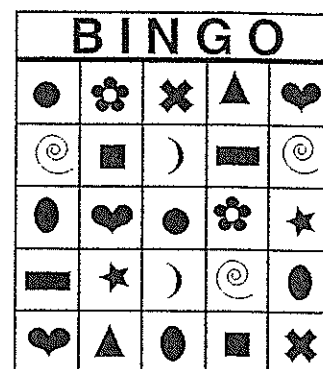


Which doesn't belong? — To play this game, show your child three or four pictures or objects and ask him or her which one doesn't belong in the group (for example, an apple, orange, car, and banana).

Body parts can be learned in many ways. You can play games naming parts of the body or use clay to make body parts. Or you can cut up large paper dolls or people in magazines for your child to put back together. There are also puzzles available to show body parts. In addition, you can have your child lie down on a large sheet of paper and draw an outline around his or her body. Let your child add clothing or facial features to the picture. Talk about the names of the body parts while your child is coloring. While taking a bath, you and your child can name body parts as they are washed.

Encourage problem solving — Young children ask "Why?" a lot. Sometimes your answer should be another open-ended question: "Why do you think?" Your child's answer to this question can help you to understand what he or she is really thinking.

Bingo and lotto games are easily made. Besides numbers, they also can be played with other concepts. Make the cards showing foods, colors, animals, the alphabet, or pictures of your family, friends, and pets.



Collections are fun and interesting to talk about. Children are naturally great collectors, so take advantage of this. Begin stone collections, leaf collections, or collections of whatever interests your child. Fill scrapbooks with pictures of animals, people, foods, flowers, football players, airplanes, cars, and so on. You can discuss why the pictures belong together.

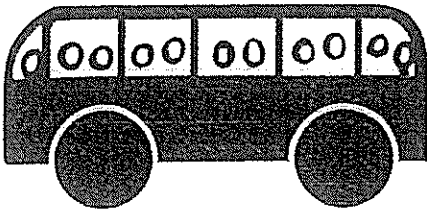
Sorting — Many items around the house can be used for sorting games. You can sort buttons by color, shape, or size into egg cartons, muffin tins, or plastic containers. Or you can go on a color hunt, finding objects throughout the house that are the same color.

Size — Put objects in order by size from smallest to largest. You can use measuring spoons, measuring cups, jar lids of various sizes, or buttons of varying sizes. Or you can draw circles or other shapes of several sizes, ranging from small to large.

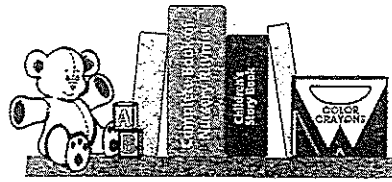
Language Activities

Your child learns language by talking about the objects and activities that he or she encounters every day. Talk about everyday events as they are happening, paying attention to the same object, activity, or topic as your child. Use simple, clear, precise words and phrases when telling your child something or giving directions. Set up situations where the topic, situation, or expected verbal response is familiar and predictable to your child. For example, when preparing breakfast, say "First we get a bowl, then we get the cereal. Next we _____." Let your child fill in the blank. Use appropriate language so your child can model what you say. Children learn from their parents about speaking with others and taking turns in a conversation. These activities will help your child develop his or her language skills.

Taking trips — Take your child to various places to help him or her learn about the world. The grocery store, park, library, and zoo are good beginnings. Gradually add to your list of places (e.g., children's museum, shopping mall, community play groups) and lengthen the amount of time you spend there. Talk about what you see — the smells, sounds, people who work there, and jobs the workers do. Or take your child for walks around your neighborhood, taking time to talk about what you both see. Talk about the mailboxes, the different buildings, the fire hydrants, the kinds and colors of flowers, the people you see, and all of the everyday things that often go unnoticed.



Keep a small bag packed and take it with you whenever you leave the house. Handy items are paper, crayons, markers, a favorite toy, and especially books. Mother Goose is a wonderful choice. It appeals to most children and includes jingles, nonsense, and wisdom that cannot be surpassed.



Books — Visit your public library often. Find picture books that provide giggles and grins as well as thoughts and ideas. Start with material that is of special interest to your child and make reading aloud a normal part of your day. Let your child open the book and turn the pages. Name common objects in pictures from newspapers, magazines, or books. Take turns naming objects or what people in the pictures are doing. Name the types and colors of clothing worn by people in the pictures. Read short stories to your child, and look at the pictures together. Keep books on low shelves or in small baskets so that your child can pick up a book and read or just look at the pictures. Encourage your child to tell the stories back to you, but don't drill with questions. Make a bedtime story a ritual and keep it enjoyable. Playful text and silly rhymes or pictures are almost always a hit!

The secrets of reading aloud — Slow down so your child has time to form images and mentally put them together. Act out parts of the text — SHOUT, whisper, be firm, angry, shy, funny — right along with the story. Remember you are sharing ideas, not just words. Find a voice that fits a particular character by raising or lowering your voice, making it squeaky or scary. Always use this new voice to read the character's part.

Provide books in English and in your family's home language. Let your child see himself or herself in books. Choose some books about families like yours and people from your cultural and ethnic group.

Story time — Make up a story with your child as one of the characters. Stop the story at an exciting point and say, "To be continued." Start the story at that point the next time you do story-telling. Eventually encourage your child to add to this story with an imaginary (or real) episode. You can use puppets, dolls, and other toys as story props to add interest. At times, write down an episode your child makes up. For extra fun, you or your child can draw pictures to go with the story.

Also, read nursery rhymes, nursery songs, and finger plays to your child. After these are repeated several times, your child may be able to recite part or all of them. Children love such repetition. Once your child knows the rhyme or song the correct way, alter it to make it surprising or funny. For example, now the cow will oink and the pig will meow. Then let your child make the changes.

Word and alphabet games can be made up on the spur of the moment. Sing the alphabet song as you go up and down stairs or push your child on a swing. Ask your child, "How many animals can you think of?" Or say "I see something you are wearing that is red and starts with the letter R, or the sound /r/," and ask your child to guess what it is. Rhyming-word games are also fun. Ask your child to find an object that has a similar-sounding name, for example to 'mat.' He or she may find a hat, cat, or bat. It is OK for your child to make up rhyming words that are not real words. What's important is that your child understands rhyming. Dr. Seuss books are a good resource for rhyming fun. Or you can ask your child to find an object that begins with a sound, for example, /b/. He or she may find a bed, bottle, or bag. Have your child pick a letter of the alphabet (maybe the first letter in his or her name), give the sound, and cut out as many pictures as he or she can find in old magazines or catalogs that begin with that letter (sound).

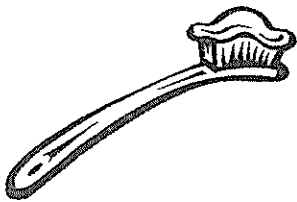
Develop awareness of the written word — Show your child how reading and writing are important in daily life. Point out the print around you and how it serves a purpose, from the stop sign on the corner to the big sign over the fast food restaurant. Make sure that your child has writing materials and places to write. Put writing materials (paper, pencils, crayons, markers, chalk) in an open box on a low shelf so that your child can reach them easily. Talk with your child about his or her writing. Remember that scribbles are the first step and should be encouraged (in the right places).

Self-Help Activities

These activities will help your child become more independent and begin to learn the skills needed to take care of some of his or her own needs.

Small steps and practice — If you want to teach tying shoe laces, begin with a long, narrow scarf and help your child tie and untie it as the child wraps it around his or her waist. Making loops with larger materials helps in transferring that skill to the narrow laces found in shoes. It is also useful to give your child an adult sweater with larger buttons to practice buttoning or an adult's shoes to practice lacing skills. Dressing and undressing dolls or puppets gives practice for buttoning, zipping, or tying.

Talk with your child about when and how to **wash hands**: before preparing food or eating, after using the toilet, or after messy activities. Provide a step stool so your child can reach the faucets of the bathroom sink easily and independently. Give a 5-step rule: wet hands, soap and scrub, wash front and back of hands, rinse, and dry off. Make up another 5-step rule for **brushing teeth**.



Motivation — Children learn to dress and undress by themselves as they become better able to handle buttons, zippers, snaps, and belts. Praise your child as each task is accomplished. When you give directions, give an incentive. ("After you put your shoes on, you can choose the cereal you want for breakfast.")

Teach your child orderliness by insisting that toys be picked up before bedtime. After playtime, set aside time for your child to put toys away and clean up the play area. Picking up toys should be a regular responsibility not to be ignored during visits by cousins or friends. Children in school are expected to pick up after themselves, so this skill is a good one to teach and practice early.

Room clean-up is just as necessary as toy clean-up. Set aside a regular time for straightening up bedrooms and putting toys, clothes, and shoes back where they belong. Have a hamper, basket, or bag available for dirty clothes. This skill helps your child learn to take care of the things that belong to him or her.

When laundry time comes, your child can be a good helper who dumps out the dirty clothes, sorts the white clothes from the colored clothes, sorts the clean laundry according to the person it belongs to, or matches socks by color and size.

Teach your child his or her phone number. Start off with only three digits. Add one more number at a time until your child knows all seven. When that occurs, allow your child to dial the number. Explain what the busy signal means. If you have an answering machine, allow your child to record the message using good telephone etiquette. Your child can help to retrieve the messages after you have been away from home. (*Hint:* Full name and home address are other important information every child should know.)

During mealtimes, set out small portions that will result in easy and independent use of silverware. A small butter knife works wonders for spreading margarine or butter, and small pitchers help small hands to pour milk or juice without accidents. Have your child help prepare a meal by doing small chores such as bringing you the potatoes to bake or a particular pot or pan from the cabinet.

Give your child chores to do, but be sure that the child is capable of performing the chores that you expect. Keep the number of chores small. Allow your child to choose the chore he or she would like to do. Do not expect it to be perfect. Allow enough time for your child to complete the tasks. Gradually increase the number of chores as your child learns to get them done on time and with little forgetting or being frustrated.

Tell your child when it is time to set the table or feed a pet, especially if the child cannot tell time. Use reminder lists with photo clues. Your child can have a special pencil to check off the chores as they are done. Hugs, kisses, stickers, or special time to play a game with Mom or Dad are great rewards.

When your child is given a new chore, be sure to show him or her how to do the job several times, and if necessary in small steps, before you expect it to be done independently. Sometimes trying something new requires a lot of your support and encouragement. Praise your child by saying, "I knew you could do this job!"

Working together gives the family a sense of "togetherness." Make your home a place where everyone works together to get chores done and everyone has chores to do. Your child gains self confidence to explore new situations. For example, young



children feel important when setting the table with silverware, glasses, and napkins or when serving portions of food. At the same time, your child needs to feel accepted, respected, and not under pressure. A self-confident child is usually more productive at school.

Danger signals — Your child needs to know how to avoid dangers (for example, not to turn on the gas on the stove) and to respond to warning words ("Don't run into the street"). Your child should respond quickly to tones in your voice that signal danger. Your child also should know how to call 911 and when that would be appropriate.

Motor Activities

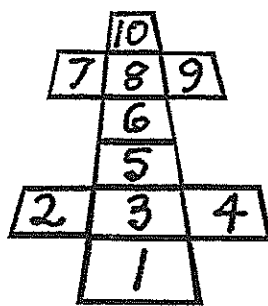
These activities will help your child develop his or her large muscle, small muscle, and eye-hand coordination skills.

Hide and Seek is an age-old game that develops awareness of one's body in space. To hide, your child has to figure out a space where his or her body will fit. Count slowly to ten while your child hides and then go find him or her. Take turns once your child also can count to ten.

Ball activities are naturally motivating. Help your child learn to roll, catch, throw, and bounce balls of different sizes. You can use sponge rubber balls in the house without fear of breaking objects. Large beach balls or blown-up balloons are soft, safe, and inexpensive. Kicking the ball is also fun, especially outside.

Beanbags are great for playing "toss and catch." Use a box, wastebasket, or any empty container as a target for your child to throw into. You can also cut holes in a large piece of cardboard or an old box for targets. Start by throwing from a short distance, and increase the distance gradually.

Jump rope is another favorite. Have your child learn to jump rope by standing next to a rope on the ground and then jumping over it. Gradually increase the difficulty by raising the rope to a higher level. Then encourage your child to run a short distance and jump over the rope, keeping it still. Once your child can jump over the steady rope, begin to swing the rope gently back and forth. Finally, turn the rope a full turn over your child's head and continue turning slowly.



Hopscotch helps develop your child's jumping, hopping, and throwing skills. Draw a simple hopscotch pattern with chalk on the sidewalk or driveway. Encourage hopscotch games of all kinds — the more, the better. (*Hint:* Young children may not be able to hop accurately. Don't put too much emphasis on the rules. Just let your child enjoy hopping as part of the game.)

Bikes, wagons, trikes, and scooters are fun and help build leg muscles and coordination. Be sure that your child can reach the pedals comfortably or that the size of the wagon or scooter is right for your child's height.

Obstacle courses, indoor or outdoor, are another fun way to build motor skills. You can create an obstacle course by having your child crawl under chairs and tables, jump over low objects, and walk on crooked lines or between objects. Use your imagination, and the challenge of changing the course will be fun for you, too. You can vary this game by playing Follow the Leader — you and your child take turns being the first through the obstacle course. Or write a treasure hunt note to your child and hide it under a pillow, in the dresser, or tape it to the mirror in the bathroom. Use pictures before your child learns to read. Make the hunt fun and use familiar obstacle activities that can be done in your home.

Balancing games can be as simple as walking along a sidewalk crack, along a line on your kitchen floor, or on an imaginary line. Gradually, you can change the game by walking on a slightly raised surface or by walking sideways or backwards. Children like to balance on a curb or a very low fence.

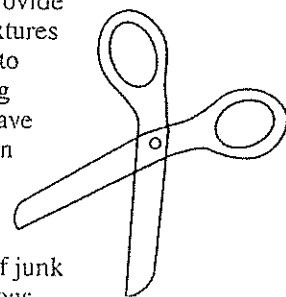
Build with blocks of all sizes, shapes, and textures.

Finger activities that use the fingers and hand, thumb and first finger, or wrist help children in their development. You can have your child string necklaces or bracelets out of Cheerios®, Froot Loops®, macaroni, or other objects with holes. Other useful materials are clay, clothespins for making puppets, pegboards, windup toys, and a yo-yo. (*Hint:* a wooden yo-yo is easier to use than a plastic one.)

Soap painting — Mix a small amount of water with mild powdered laundry soap (not detergent) until it forms a stiff consistency. Your child can finger paint with this soap mixture on colored paper, for a three-dimensional effect. An added advantage is easy clean-up!

Cutting — Provide a variety of textures for your child to practice tearing and cutting. Have your child learn cutting by first snipping the paper.

Keep a stack of junk mail, old catalogs and greeting cards, or magazine sections from the newspaper as a resource. You can have your child cut out shapes or pictures of favorite animals, foods, or objects that begin with letters of the alphabet and paste them on individual sheets of paper. (*Hint:* Give your child a blunt-tipped scissors that is a comfortable size for small fingers.)



Printing — There are many kinds of printing. For example, you can cut raw potatoes in half, cut a design in each half, and dip them in washable paint to print. Or you can print with other inexpensive materials found around the house, such as blocks, forks, spools, and sponges.

You also can form shapes and letters in a sandbox, make them out of paper or clay, or print them with markers, crayons, or pencils. Be sure to show your child basic shapes (circle, square, etc.) and capital as well as lowercase letters (A, a). If your child is interested, teach him or her how to print his or her first name.