



EMPOWERED PARENTS

FREE
Activity
Pack





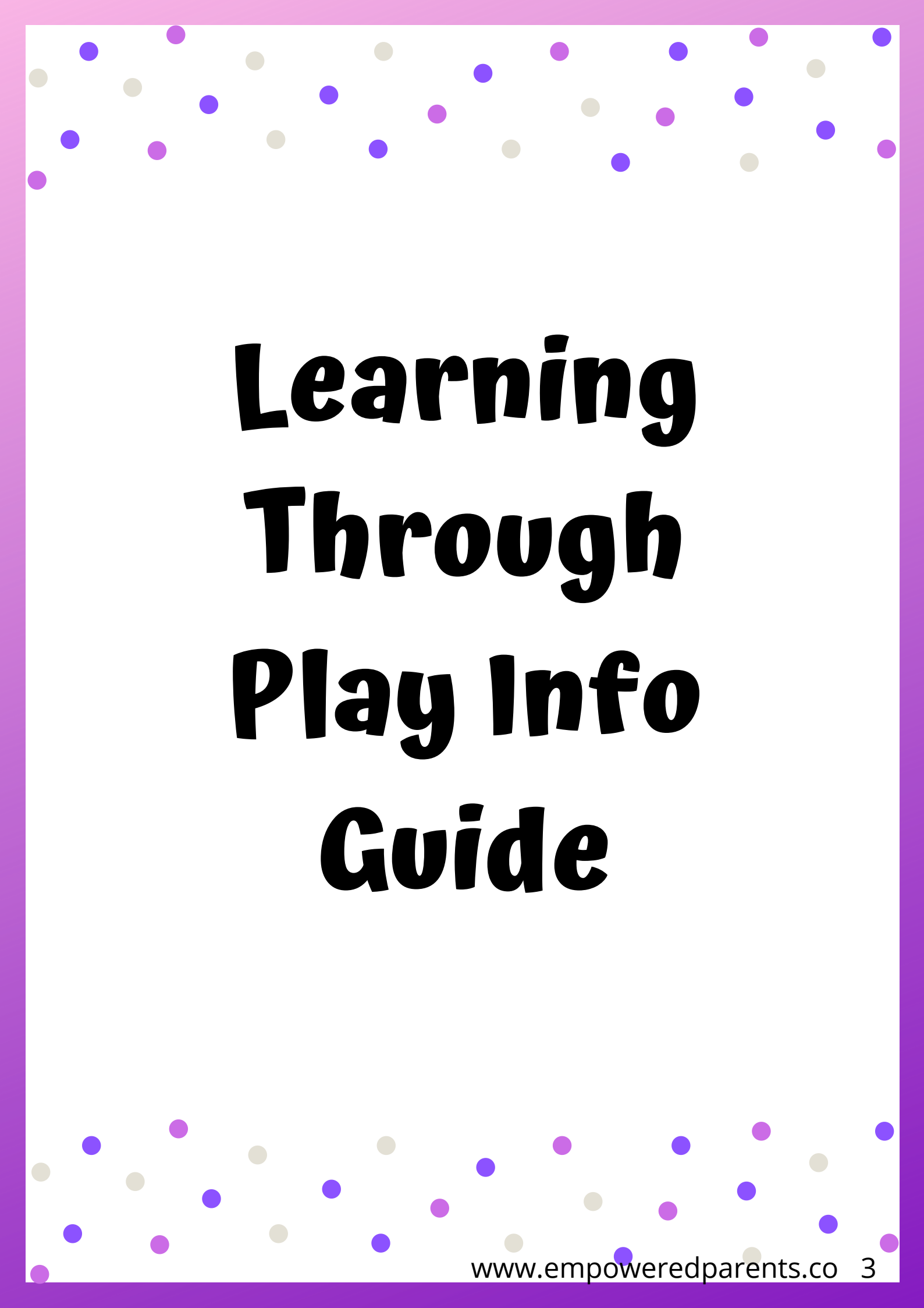
CONTENTS

Learning Through Play Info Guide

Why you should teach your preschooler
Learning through play
Early reading, writing and mathematics
5 types of educational activities

Printable Activity Pack

Short Stories
Action Songs
Counting Songs
Listening Games
Vocabulary Games
Art Activities
Music Games



Learning Through Play Info Guide

Who is this guide for?

This guide is a handy outline for parents of preschoolers.

The activities in this pack as well as this info guide are a taste of my guides that I've created for parents – **Pre-Reading for Preschoolers** and **School Readiness for Preschoolers**.

It is designed for parents who care and want to be involved in their children's development.

Why you should teach your preschooler

Because your children spend most of their time with you and who better to educate them?

I always laugh at society's reluctance to acknowledge that parents are their children's best teachers. The fact that schools have been created and that people are trained to teach in them, does not mean parents no longer have a role to play. You are your child's primary teacher and you should be as trained as the school teacher is, because you only get a few years to put your child's foundations in and why waste any of that time wondering "what to do"?

If your children are attending school they are certainly learning, but that learning does not pause when they get home. Based on the fact that children up to the age of 6 learn primarily through play, their entire first few years are basically just one big learning session.

Wouldn't you prefer to know that while you're reading to your child, they are developing vocabulary, thinking skills, auditory discrimination, problem-solving skills, creativity, phonological awareness, etc?

Wouldn't it help to know that if you asked certain questions while reading, you could work on their prediction skills, their understanding of cause and effect, or their ability to make inferences?

Do you think you are just singing a nursery rhyme with them for fun? Any idea just how many skills are built while learning rhymes that will determine if they become good readers?

With the right knowledge you may choose a finger rhyme next time to work on fine motor skills, or an alliteration to work on phonological awareness.

The point is – child development and learning happens through play and you should have all the knowledge at your fingertips of what kinds of activities develop your child's skills.

Know what to do, how to do it and why you are doing it and you will never be lost for ideas again when it comes to engaging your child (even if that means leaving them in peace to play in the garden because that's equally as important as planned activities).

Learning through play

The most important activity for young children is not filling in activity sheets, sitting down to learn letters and numbers or using online programs that teach certain skills...it is **play**.

For the first few years of a child's life absolutely everything they learn happens through the medium of play.

Everything.

This happens to be a vital activity that is often overlooked and underrated and is the most important activity for learning.

It is not uncommon for a parent to tell me that after school their 4-year old has a dancing lesson, then a ball-skills class, then an art class/online learning course/pottery class, etc.

When exactly is that child supposed to play (i.e. LEARN?)

If you take one thing away from this guide, let it be this:

If your child plays, and I mean really plays, they are going to learn all the pre-writing, reading and mathematics skills they need, and when they are **READY**, they are going to cope well in formal education because of the solid grounding they have.

Children don't play enough anymore. This is causing damaging effects, especially coupled with technology and screen time. They are struggling in school and one of the main reasons is lack of play.

Your child doesn't have to follow this same path. Be different.

If you really want to teach your 3-year old to read, it's possible. I've seen children learn how to do it at a young age. However, this is always at the expense of essential skills that do not get properly developed. As a teacher, I see the gaps come up in the classroom, often years later.

To me, this is too high a price to pay, just so my child can be "ahead" when they get to school. They won't be for long.

Let your children play...they deserve it!!

Here is a breakdown of the value of play for children:



Physical Development:

- Fine-motor skills
- Gross-motor skills
- Eye-hand coordination
- Control of body
- Provides an energy release
- Practising of skills
- Self-awareness
- Encourages general health and fitness
- Improved concentration

Social Development:

- Cooperation and taking turns
- Learn to express needs
- Socially acceptable behaviour
- Following rules and being part of a team/group
- Learning to lead and follow
- Developing empathy
- Thinking of others' needs

Cognitive Development:

- Listening skills
- Communication skills and language development
- Planning
- Memory
- Visual and auditory perception
- Distinguishing between reality and fantasy
- Creative expression and thinking
- Higher-order thinking
- Knowledge
- Problem-solving

Emotional Development:

- Learning without worrying about failure
- Self-control
- Learning competence
- Expressing emotions
- Building personality
- Self-confidence and positive self-image
- Dealing with life situations by acting them out

Early Reading, Writing and Mathematics

Here is a quick look at developing reading, writing and mathematical skills.

Before children are ready to formally learn to read, write and do math/maths, they must develop a strong set of pre reading, writing and mathematical skills.

Through play-based activities, these skill sets are built over the preschool years.

Here is a look at why we don't start teaching letters and numbers early on, but rather we teach the skills (listed above) through play.

Numbers

A child may count to 100 but they are not necessarily mature enough to have any concept of what those numbers actually represent.

They learn the value of numbers in the sandpit, for example. When they fill up a cup of sand and turn it over, then fill another and turn it over next to the previous one, they are learning concepts such as two items or one more.

The more they play and discover, the more concepts they learn – they compare numbers, make patterns and experiment with sizes.

They may be able to rattle off the numbers out loud, but they are not really learning true mathematical skills. Those numbers become important when all the skills are in place and they are then able to conceptualize what the numbers actually mean.

Letters

In order for your child to recognize the sounds in letters, they need to develop their auditory processing skills through play. Nursery rhymes, poems and songs serve more of a purpose than just entertainment and fun!

Then, learning to write requires developing gross motor skills through movement and play. Fine-motor skills are then developed which enable a child to hold a pencil, control it and form letters carefully.

These pre-skills cannot be rushed and pushed aside.

The last level is being able to recognize the letters and the sounds they represent when combined and putting them together into meaningful words and sentences to be read.

5 Types of Educational Activities

The following activities are all play-based. They are the types of activities that provide structure to the preschool day (e.g. discussion, art time, story time, etc) and I have categorized them loosely into 5 types of activities.

These are the kinds of activities you can engage your children in at home to ensure they are learning. Each of these activity types develops a combination of the physical, social, cognitive and emotional skills listed above.

I have given examples of 5 activities to do in each of these categories. These are just general ideas. My Pre-Reading and School Readiness guides will look extensively at what kinds of activities should be done to develop individual cognitive and physical skills.

Creative Art

Creative art is especially good for developing cognitive skills as well as fine-motor skills, essential for learning to write.

Activity ideas:

- Finger painting
- Box construction with waste materials
- Sculpting with clay
- Drawing with wet chalk on a pavement
- Creating a collage with coloured paper



Movement Activities

Movement activities mainly develop gross-motor skills, among other skills, and are important because they must be established before fine-motor skills can be developed.

Activity ideas:

- Walking along balancing beams (logs, planks or any surface as in the picture)
- Playing hopscotch (hop on one leg, then two)
- Running and catching games
- Throwing and catching bean bags
- Climbing trees and jungle gyms



Reading and Discussions

This involves any listening or language-developing activities such as having discussions with children, asking questions, listening to stories or making up stories.

Activity ideas:

- Listening to stories or pretending to “read” stories from pictures
- Listening to audio CD stories
- Discussing a child’s drawing (and writing what the child says on the back of the picture)
- Pointing out words in the environment and what they symbolize (stop-signs, words on food items, etc)
- Making up stories at bedtime (parent tells one line, child adds the next line, etc)



Music Activities

This category involves learning rhymes, poems and songs, as well as playing with sound-forming instruments and objects. These are essential for building good listening and auditory skills – the foundations of reading.

Activity ideas:

- Making rice shakers
- Saying action rhymes that require movement
- Learning poems with simple rhyming words
- Discovering rhythm by singing and making up actions to popular children’s songs
- Clapping syllables (called sounds or beats) in names



Play

Although all the above activities are play-based, this refers more to child-directed free play. The benefits of this kind of play are equal to the benefits of all the adult-guided or suggested activities above

Some types of free play to encourage:

- Fantasy or role-play (dress up play)
- Outdoor play of any type
- Indoor quiet play such as building puzzles or playing with pegboards
- Water play and sensory play
- Competitive play (games)





Printable Activity Pack

Fun Short Stories

Build your child's listening skills and comprehension by reading them these short stories. Draw a picture of the animals after each story!

They are all written by Christina Wither and illustrated by Dannaria

Wake Up Mum

Two little bears peeped out of their cave. Winter was over and they could smell the fresh spring air. It was time to get up and play after their long sleep.

"Let's run under the trees," said Ben.

"I want to roll in the grass," said Bessie.

"We'd better ask mum," said the bears together.

Ben and Bessie went into the cave where they had slept with their mum. There she was in the far corner. Mother bear was still fast asleep. The two little bears tiptoed over to their mum and shook her gently.

"Wake up mum. The snow has melted and it is time to play," said Ben.

Mother bear did not even move. She grunted and rolled over to carry on sleeping.

"What can we do?" asked Bessie. "We need our mother to wake up and take us into the forest to have some fun."

The two little bears sat outside the cave and tried to think of a way to wake up their mum.

"I know, let's get some tickly spiders and see if they will wake up our mother," said Ben.

The two bears went to find some tickly spiders. Bessie was feeling a bit scared of the spiders but Ben collected them on a big leaf. He took them to where his mum was lying.

The spiders walked off the leaf and across mother bear's back. Mother bear giggled in her sleep, but she did not wake up.

"I think we should ask a noisy cuckoo," said Bessie.

The bears went out to the trees near the cave. Sitting in the tree was a cuckoo.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo," sang the bird.

The two bears asked the cuckoo to follow them back to the cave and call out to their mom.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo," sang the bird but mom just rolled over and carried on sleeping.

The two little bears did not know what to do. They had tried tickling, making a loud noise and calling out to mum.

"I know," said Ben. "What about something she likes to eat?"

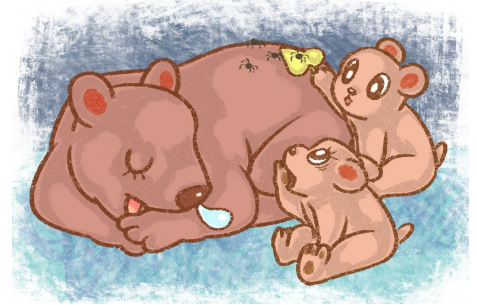
"Honey!" said the bears together.

Off they ran to a beehive. They talked politely to the bees and the bees gave them some honey. They ran back to the cave and tiptoed in to see if their mum would smell the honey. Mum's big brown bear nose began to twitch. Then her nose began to wiggle and she opened one eye. The baby bears took a few steps backwards.

Mother bear opened both her eyes and blinked. The baby bears took a few more steps back. Now they were up at the opening of the cave. Mother bear sat up and gave a big sniff.

"I smell honey," she said.

Mother bear was awake at last. Ben and Bessie were so happy. The little bears took a few more steps out of the cave and happily mother bear followed them. At last they had found the best way to wake up mum! Three happy bears skipped into the forest to enjoy the spring and have fun together.



The Mighty Meeting

It was a hot, sunny day in Africa. Elephant was walking down the path on his way to his favourite water hole. He was looking forward to the cool water and a mud bath.

Lion was also walking along the path. Lion was on his way to the grassy plains. He was going to lie down and wait for his lunch.



Elephant turned the corner and lifted his trunk in the air. He smelt the water at the water hole. Lion turned into the same corner. He was getting closer to his favourite hunting spot.

Suddenly the two animals met in the middle of the path.

“Out of my way,” roared the lion.

“Out of my way,” trumpeted the elephant.

“Make way for the king of the jungle,” growled the lion.

“Certainly not! Where shall I go?” answered the elephant.

The path was blocked. The two strong animals stood facing each other. The elephant would not move. The lion would not move.

Other animals began to walk along the path. Some were standing behind the elephant and others behind the lion. Lion and elephant just stared at each other and refused to move.

A monkey came running past. He greeted the other animals. Then he reached the lion and the elephant. He looked at the fierce lion. He looked at the enormous elephant.

The monkey started to chuckle. He ran off into the jungle to get some ‘monkey vine’ that hung from the trees. He rushed back to the lion and the elephant.

“I know how to solve your problem,” said the monkey.

All the animals behind the elephant and the lion wanted to get a look at what was going on.

They saw the monkey arrive with a long piece of monkey vine. He tied one end around the elephant and the other around the lion. He stood on an anthill nearby and shouted!

“Friends, we are going to have a tug of war. When I say ‘heave’ then it is time for the lion and the elephant to pull the monkey vine!”

“May the best animal win,” shouted the monkey.

Elephant was very strong and pulled hard at the rope. Lion dug his extra sharp claws into the path and pulled hard too.

Suddenly there was a clap of thunder! The animals looked up into the sky. They saw huge dark rain clouds. A storm was on its way.

Then lion felt the first drops of rain. He let go of the monkey vine and ran off into the bushes.

“My mane, my beautiful mane. I combed it as smooth as silk this morning!” he cried.

Lion ran to hide under an Acacia Tortillas, the umbrella thorn tree.

“I win,” cried elephant, as he stood in the rain. Elephant’s thick skin was like a raincoat. He was not worried about getting wet.

Monkey hopped about with delight. He wanted elephant to win.

Suddenly all the animals heard a mighty roar! “No, rain stopped play, there is no contest.”

Lion did not want the animals to think he had lost. No contest meant there was no winner.

Elephant nodded his head and walked down the path. He did not care if he got wet and he was looking forward to getting muddy too.

Five Rats and a Funny Top Hat

Samson, the big black cat, lay across the mat fast asleep. He was a very big, fat cat. Samson looked as if he was asleep, but he really had one eye open all the time.

Samson's one eye was looking right at the hole in the wall where a family of rats lived. One, two, three, four and five little rats. Five little frightened rats were peeping out from behind the hole in the wall. The five rats wanted to get away from the big, black cat.



Samson yawned and stretched and turned over to sleep a bit longer. The rats were quivering with excitement. Now was their chance to escape.

One rat tiptoed out to cross the room. He started to run towards the door. Suddenly the door opened! In walked a tall man wearing a top hat. The man threw the top hat onto a chair but it missed the chair and fell on the floor.

Samson jumped up and hissed. The rat ran back to his hole with the other rats. The chance to escape had gone.

Slowly Samson went back to sleep. The rats looked at the cat and then they noticed the top hat lying on the floor and it gave them an idea.

The rats nodded to each other as they made a plan. They would hide under the hat and see if they could sneak past the big, black cat. Carefully, one by one, they wriggled under the hat and waited.

The rats heard Samson snoring. They thought they would start to walk towards the door under the shelter of the hat. Slowly the hat slid across the floor. The cat did not wake up. The rats reached the door. It was open just enough for them to slip out and go on down the road.

The hat, with the rats, went out of the door.

At the same time Samson woke up. His greedy eyes saw the hat moving across the steps and out of the door. He jumped up and started to walk towards the door. The rats knew they would have to start to run.

The cat was getting closer and the rats could see no escape.

Behind them was the cat and in front of them was the road and it led to a duck pond. Oh, what should they do?

Whoosh, a sudden gust of wind blew down the road. It tipped the hat over and the rats fell inside. They hung on tightly.

What would happen now?

The hat blew down the road and into the pond.

The rats peeped over the edge. They saw that they were floating on the pond. Now the hat was a boat!

Samson looked at the rats floating on the pond. He was very angry. He could not swim.

The rats had escaped in their funny top hat. The little rats laughed at the cat.

Samson

hissed and went home.

The Spotty Grey Kitten

Grady was a little, grey kitten. He had a white spot on his back and a black spot on his nose. Grady lived with his mum and two sisters on a farm.

Grady's sisters were white with black spots. Both of his sisters were very good. Grady was the naughty one. He was always getting into trouble.

Grady was very adventurous. He wanted to explore the farm.

One day he went out into the farmyard to see what was in the big wide world.

Grady said to himself, "I am not afraid of anything!"

Suddenly a big monster roared out of the garage and sent Grady spinning into the bushes. He did not know what had roared past. He picked himself up and decided it was time to go home. Grady looked left and he looked right, but there was nowhere that looked like home. He was lost.

'Oh dear,' Grady thought. 'Now what shall I do?'

He walked across a field and suddenly he stopped! There in front of him was a furry, white animal with spots on its back. Grady thought it must be one of his sisters.

Grady ran up to the furry, spotted animal.

"Can you take me home?" asked Grady.

"No," said the furry animal. "You do not belong in my home.

"Look at you, you do not have big ears and you do not hop like me," said the furry animal.

Grady realized he did not belong with this animal.

Grady ran to the farmyard where he saw another spotty animal. It was a bit bigger than Grady, but it had spots on its back. Grady ran up to the spotty animal.

"Can I come home with you? You look just like me with all those spots," said Grady.

The big animal grunted and jumped into a mud puddle.

"I have mud spots on my back. Come and roll in the mud if you want mud spots," said the muddy spotty animal.

"No thanks," said Grady. He did not want to get muddy. Grady ran away again.

Grady was getting worried. He was hungry too.

Then Grady saw another spotted animal. This animal had a loud voice.

"Ruff, ruff," said the voice. "Can I help you?"

Grady just nodded. He felt himself being lifted up and carried away. A spotty dog had found Grady.

He scratched at the front door. A little girl opened the door. She jumped up and down.

She was so happy to see the spotty dog and the kitten.

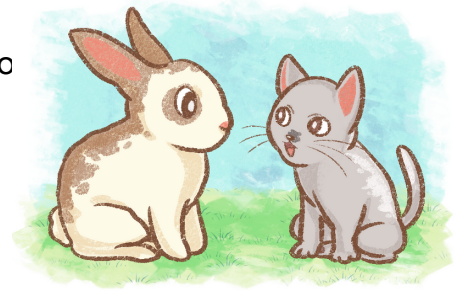
She took Grady right back to his mother. She was lying in a basket in the kitchen.

Grady saw his mum and his two sisters. Grady listened to their soft purring.

"Purr, purr," said the other kittens. They were happy too.

Grady was put back in his basket. He felt happy as he snuggled up with his family. He was safe now and he was going to get some milk for his supper.

Purr, purr, purr!



Action Rhymes

Build your child's gross motor and auditory skills with these fun action rhymes!

Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear

Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Turn around.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Touch the ground.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Tie your shoes.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
That will do.

Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Go upstairs.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Say your prayers.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Turn out the light.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Say good night.

Hop a Little

Hop a little, Jump a little
One, Two, Three:
Run a little, skip a little
Tap on knee:
Bend a little, stretch a little,
Nod your head:
Yawn a little, sleep a little,
In your bed.

Open, Shut Them

Open, shut them (separate hands and put together again)
Open, shut them (separate hands and put together again)
Give a little clap (clap hands twice)
Open, shut them (separate hands and put together again)
Open, shut them (separate hands and put together again)
Put them in your lap (tap hands twice on lap)

Miss Polly Had a Dolly

Miss Polly had a dolly,
Who was sick, sick, sick, (Cradle baby in arms)
So she called for the doctor,
To be quick, quick, quick. (Hold phone to ear)
The doctor came,
With his bag and his hat, (Point to bag and hat)
And he knocked at the door,
With a rat-a-tat-tat. (Pretend to knock in air)
He looked at the dolly,
And he shook his head, (Shake head)
He said "Miss Polly,
Put her straight to bed." (Hands on hips and nod head)
He wrote out a paper,
For a pill, pill, pill, (Write on hand with finger)
"I'll be back in the morning,
With the bill, bill, bill." (Wave goodbye)

The Elephant Goes

The elephant goes
Like this, like that.
(Walk on all fours, moving slowly, like an elephant)
He's terribly big,
(Stand up, reach high with arms)
And he's terribly fat.
(Arms out to sides, to show how fat elephant is)
He has no fingers, (Make fist)
He has no toes, (Wiggle toes)
But goodness gracious,
What a nose! (Make a trunk with arm)

Counting Songs

Counting rhymes are a fun way to teach your children to count forwards and backwards and can help build their developing number concept.

Some of these teach rote counting forwards or backwards (e.g. reciting from one to 10) and some teach number concept (e.g. there were 5, one fell off, now there are 4).

Ten Green Bottles

Ten green bottles
Hanging on the wall
Ten green bottles
Hanging on the wall
And if one green bottle
Should accidentally fall
There'll be nine green bottles
Hanging on the wall

Repeat till none left:

One green bottle
Hanging on the wall
One green bottle
Hanging on the wall
If that one green bottle
Should accidentally fall
There'll be no green bottles
Hanging on the wall

Five Little Snowmen

Five little snowmen standing in a line
One, Two, Three, Four, Five
So fine
Melt in the sunshine with a sigh
We'll see you next year
Bye Bye!

Four little snowmen standing in a line
One, Two, Three, Four
So fine
Melt in the sunshine with a sigh
We'll see you next year
Bye Bye!

Repeat until none left:
One little snowman standing in a line
So fine
Melt in the sunshine with a sigh
We'll see you next year
Bye Bye!

Five Little Speckled Frogs

Five little speckled frogs
Sat on a speckled log
Eating some most delicious bugs.
YUM! YUM!
One jumped into the pool,
Where it was nice and cool,
Then there were four speckled frogs!
GLUB! GLUB!

Four little speckled frogs...
Three little speckled frogs...

Repeat until there are none left:
One little speckled frog
Sat on a speckled log
Eating some most delicious bugs.
YUM! YUM!
He jumped into the pool,
Where it was nice and cool,
Then there were no speckled frogs!

Ten Little Fingers

Ten little fingers, ten little toes,
Two little ears and one little nose
Two little eyes that shine so bright
And one little mouth to kiss mother goodnight.

Ten little fingers, ten little toes,
Two little ears and one little nose
Two little eyes that shine so bright
And one little mouth to kiss mother goodnight.

Listening Games

Listening is one of the most important skills you can teach your child and is easy to develop with simple games and activities.

Broken Telephone

This game can be played around the dinner table or anytime when at least 3 members of your family are present.

Start with single words if your child is very young and slowly move up to phrases, then entire sentences as your child becomes more competent at listening.

- Make up a word or sentence and whisper it into your child's ear, who must whisper it to your husband or the next family member, who continues passing the message around the table.
- The last person to hear the message says it out loud.

This usually ends in laughter as the phrases often change and the message is broken.

In time, your child will be able to listen to detail better and convey accurate messages. Vary the sentences by using alliterations (e.g. my tiny teddy is talking) and rhyming sentences (e.g. do you have a blue shoe?). Also, change the order of who-whispers-to-who and allow your child to make up messages as well.

Simon Says

This classic game is excellent for making your child pay attention and listen to instructions.

- Call out instructions by saying, for example, "Simon Says put your hands on your shoulders".
- When you give an example that doesn't begin with "Simon Says", such as "Jump three times", your child must not do it.

Children love this game and often giggle their way through it. It takes a lot of concentration to not move and first listen to whether they should perform the action or not.

I Went to the Zoo and I Saw a...

This game is more advanced than the previous ones and involves listening as well as memorizing.

- Choosing any animal names, start the game by saying "I went to the zoo and I saw a monkey". Your child then responds with "I went to the zoo and I saw a monkey and a lion".
- You respond with "I went to the zoo and I saw a monkey, a lion and a tortoise".
- Each time you or your child has a turn, you must repeat the animals that have already been listed, in sequence, then add a new one. You may not repeat an animal.

At first, this may be tricky, but with time you will be amazed at how many animals your child can remember. This game is actually easier with more people because it is easier to associate words with different people than 10 words from the same person. So be sure to get the siblings, parents and grandparents involved.

After practising this a few times, my 6-year-olds were often able to remember all the words from an entire class of 20 to 25 children.

This game can be varied with any list e.g. I went to the shop and I bought a..." or "In my fruit salad there is a..."

Vocabulary Games

Vocabulary and skill in language are so important during the early years as they are the basis of a child's intellectual development. Here are some fun games to increase their vocabulary.

Categories

This game teaches children new words as well as their meaning, context and the relationship between words.

- Choose a category - fruit, kitchen, the zoo, music, clothes, etc.
- Make a long string of words that belong in the category by taking turns adding a word each
- Each word may only be said once. If you repeat a word, choose a word that doesn't belong or simply run out of ideas, choose a new category and start again
- Stay motivated by writing down the record of how many words in a category and try to beat it

This game is great for teaching children to understand the context of words and how they relate to each other. Words do not live in isolation but work together. Children may have a good vocabulary of general words but are also able to start developing some theme-specific words that are more unusual in everyday language.

What Am I?

This game is about finding the words to explain something. It will expand your child's vocabulary of adjectives and verbs.

- Your child closes her eyes and you hide any object from the room behind your back
- You must describe the object while your child guesses what it is
- Use riddle phrases such as *I am long, I am shiny, I am used to eat with, I hold liquids, What am I?* (a spoon)
- Give as many clues as you need to until she guesses the object
- When your child guesses correctly, it is then her turn to hide an object behind her back and describe it

The reason you should go first is to model how to use descriptive phrases without giving away what the object is. The younger your child, the simpler and more obvious the clues will be that she uses but as she gets older she will learn how to be more cryptic.

Which One Doesn't Fit?

In a previous game, children made a long list of words in a particular category. Try this game where you now present a list of words and your child has to think of the context of the words and pick out the word that doesn't fit.

- Choose a category (without saying it out loud)
- Say a list of 4 or 5 words, all belonging to the category, except one word which should not belong to that category
- Your child must spot the word that doesn't belong

This is not as easy as the previous games because it requires another level of thought. Because you are not telling your child what the category is, he has to first listen to all the words and find a common relationship between all but one of them. Make the game more difficult when your child is ready for a challenge.

Here is the difference between an easy round and an advanced round:

- Apple, peach, banana, fish (fruits - fish is the odd word)
- Book, sock, bed, plate, pillow (things found in a bedroom - plate is the odd word)

Art Activities

Art is an integral part of every young child's life and important for healthy development. Children are naturally drawn to creative expression. Real art focuses on the process, not on the end product. Here are some REAL art ideas:

1. Straw Painting

Straw painting can be done by splattering paint or blowing paint.

Simply pick up some paint in a straw and splatter it onto the paper or put a drop of paint onto paper and blow through the straw to make the paint spread out. Either way, the effect is quite cool.

2. Finger Painting

Finger paint can be bought or made at home with simple ingredients. Offer your child large pieces of paper and let them go wild with the paint, with no directions.

This is a great tactile experience and will work those finger muscles.

3. Leaf Printing

Choose a variety of leaves with different shapes from the park or garden. Paint the leaves with a large paintbrush and then print them onto a white paper.

It takes a lot of coordination to hold the leaves and carefully turn them over to print them. Again, let your child decide how many leaves to use, what colours to use, and how to print them.

Remember to chat about the pattern the veins of the leaves make.

4. Potato Printing

This is one of my favourites!

If you have some potatoes that are starting to get soft, cut them in half and cut some simple patterns into them or leave them in their natural oval shape. Then, dip the potatoes in a tray of paint and print them onto paper. Easy peasy.

5. Nature Collage

Making a nature collage is fun because you get to go on a walk in the park or garden and collect all kinds of natural materials - leaves, twigs, grass, flowers etc.

All your child needs is some glue and he can create an awesome nature collage.

Music Games

Music is a wonderful activity for parents to engage in with a child. Did you know that it develops your child physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally?

Musical Statues

Musical statues is an excellent game for developing auditory discrimination. Children have to listen carefully for the difference between sound and silence and they engage their whole body during the game.

You can play musical statues alone with your child or with family members or friends. This game is great for developing control of the body and strengthening it while “freezing” in mid-air.

- Play music on a cd player or cell phone
- While the music is playing, everyone dances around the room
- Stop the music every now and then and everyone must freeze in the exact position they were dancing in when the music stopped
- If you move, you are “out”. For young children it is lots of fun to just keep freezing without anyone going “out”

Hide and Listen

This game is about hearing volume and making the correct associations (loud means close and soft means far).

- Blindfold your child and hide any instrument (such as a tambourine) somewhere in the room where you are playing
- Tell your child what instrument she must find
- Your child then searches for the instrument while you play music in the background
- Explain that when the music gets softer she is going further from the instrument and when it gets louder she is getting closer to it

Pass the Parcel

This game is an old favourite, traditionally played at birthday parties. Play it at home and you will get your kids moving and listening carefully. The best part is that children will be crossing the midline each time they pass the parcel along.

It can be played in two (passing back and forth), but if 3 or more play, then children will be crossing the midline - an important motor skill - as they pass from their left to their right and vice versa.

- Wrap any object (or small gifts if it is a birthday party) into many layers of newspaper or wrapping paper. Make the layers easy to remove.
- Play music on a cd player or cell phone
- The parcel gets passed in a clockwise direction (teach your child this word while you're at it!)
- When the music stops, the person holding the parcel can remove one layer of wrapping
- When the music continues, the parcel keeps being passed around, until the music stops again and another layer is removed
- The person who removes the final layer to reveal the parcel is the winner
- Change direction for each new round (clockwise to anti-clockwise)
- Make sure the parcel is received with both hands and passed to the next person with both hands (to ensure crossing the midline)

A final note:

I hope you've enjoyed reading about the value of play and getting some new ideas to try out with your kids!

If you would like to find out more about how you can develop your child's skills through play, [click here to see my guides for parents.](#)

Enjoy!

Tanja Mcilroy

Empowered Parents

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