



PLAYDATES
WITH YOUR
LITTLE ONE

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LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

FOREWORD

Dear Parents and Guardians

This year, our parent playdates have been a tremendous success. Many of you shared how much you enjoyed the activities and the quality time spent learning new ways to engage with your little ones. We heard your requests for more ideas and activities to do at home and are excited to bring you this extension of our playdate programme.

Each activity is designed to help your child's development in critical areas such as motor skills, language, and social-emotional growth. And don't worry, you don't need any special equipment or skills – just your time and enthusiasm.

Our goal is to help you connect with your child through play. These moments of connection are incredibly important for their development and building a strong, loving bond.

Enjoy this special time with your child, knowing that each moment you spend together is helping them grow and thrive.

Happy playing!

Janet Beyrooti

Project Manager: Preschools



CODING IN THE EARLY YEARS

Fine motor development, eye-hand coordination, pre-reading development, patterns and pattern recognition

Early Coding is based on pattern and pattern recognition. The activities below will help strengthen these skills.

1. DESIGN YOUR OWN MODEL

Using any building blocks you have, invite your child to build a model – in any shape your child likes! Encourage your child to share with you what that model's superpower is. You can ask open-ended follow-up questions about which parts of the model move and what the purpose of the model is.

2. SORTING BASED ON COLOUR

Encourage your child to sort a selection of the blocks into their different colours. The curious child might wonder about the purpose of the activity. For them, begin with a question like 'how many red blocks are there?' Help them to see that the best way to count the red blocks is to sort them first. Once the blocks are sorted, ask your child questions.

- How many red/blue/green blocks are there?
- Which pile has more blocks in it, the red or the green?
- Which pile has the most/least blocks?
- Which pile(s) has fewer blocks than the red pile?

If your child is still new to colours and counting, this is a good opportunity to learn. However, you can also remove the need for that vocabulary by asking them simply to point to the pile in question and allow them to judge based on the actual size of the pile.

Enrichment: If your child shows a particular interest in this activity, ask them to further divide by shape.



3. BUILDING A PATTERN

Once the blocks are sorted, invite your child to create a pattern. Perhaps something like two red blocks, then a blue block, and lastly a green block, all aligned next to each other, left to right. Ask them to replicate this pattern.

Enrichment: You could build a pattern of your own and then ask your child to spot the differences between the two patterns.

A note about participation

Don't be discouraged if your suggestions are not met with enthusiasm. These activities work best if your child has already shown an interest in playing with blocks at that moment. Meet your child where they are at. This might not be a good time for blocks. In that case, put this activity in your back pocket and use it another time.

Have a pegboard?

Pegboards allow your child to build a wide variety of patterns. Begin with a simple pattern such as ABAB or ABCABC. Encourage your child to replicate those patterns. As your child gains confidence, encourage them to create more complex patterns.

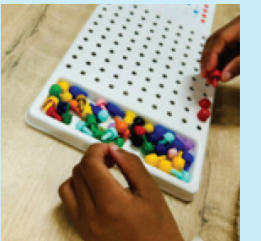
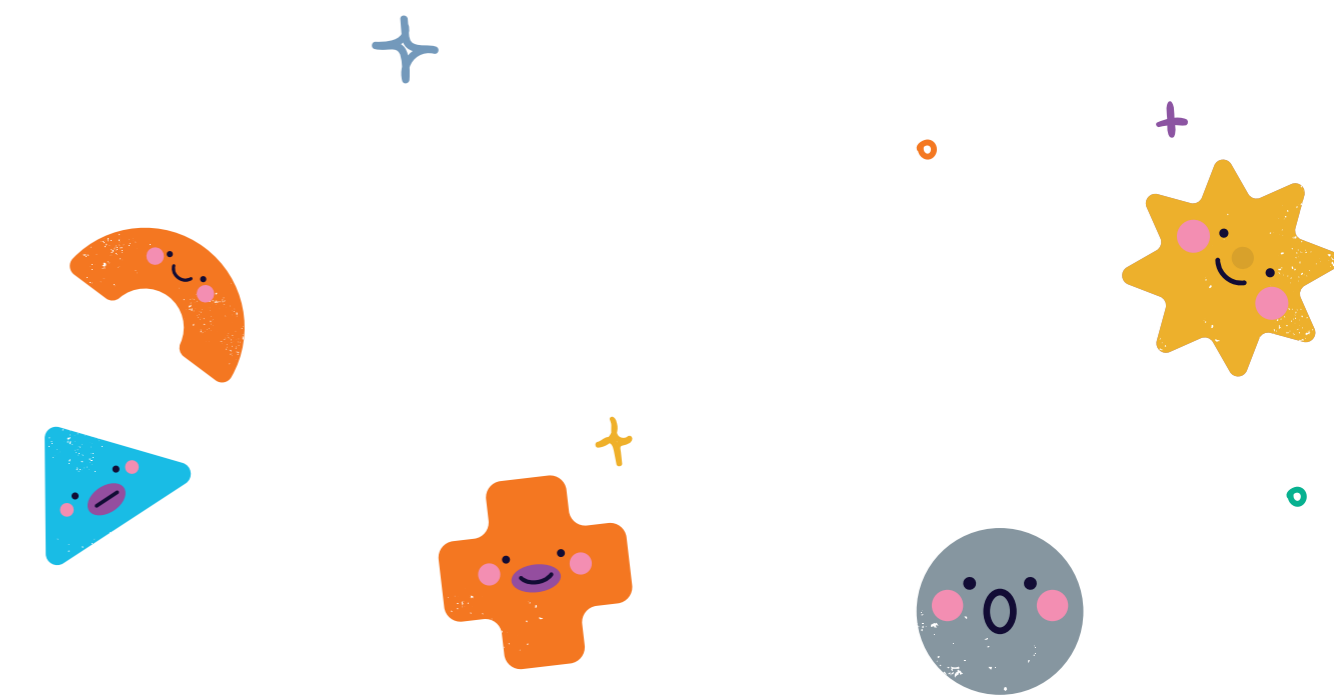


Table setting

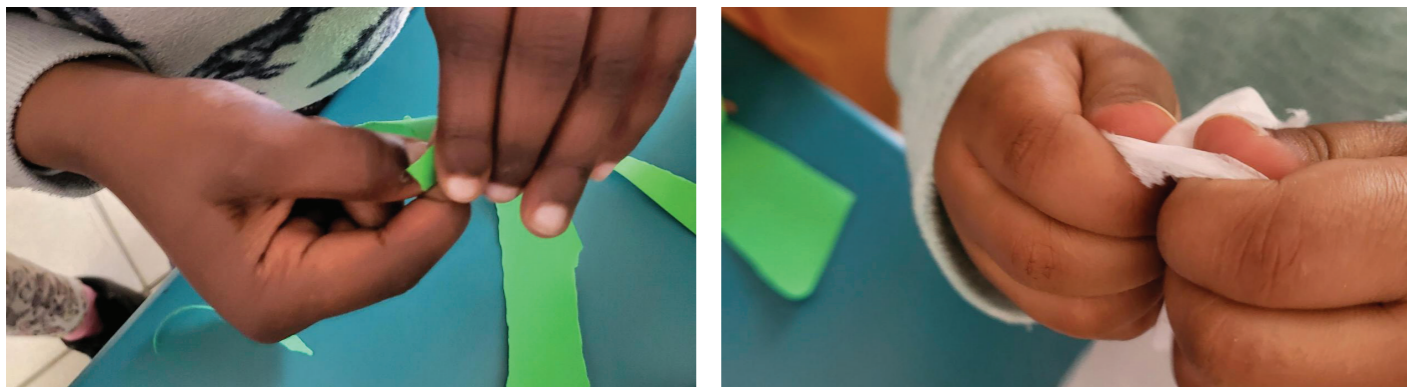
This is a form of patterning. Ask your child to set the table putting the utensils in the right place.



PAPER TEARING AND COLLAGE

Fine motor skills, eye-hand coordination, hand strength, pre-writing skills, Mathematical skills

Tearing things like paper and tissue is not only a great way to prepare interesting craft materials, but it also helps your child strengthen their hands and work on their fine motor skills. The hand position used when tearing also allows them to develop a good pencil grip.



A NOTE ON MATERIALS

Begin with what the child is able to tear easily, like tissue. You can slowly build up to tearing paper, card and even cardboard. It's important to begin with what they are able to do with ease.

1. CREATING MATERIALS

Using whatever you have on hand (e.g. magazines, coloured paper, old invoices, newspapers, tissues, etc.) invite your child to tear paper into a variety of sizes. You could invite them to do the following:

- What is the smallest piece you can make?
- What is the biggest piece you can make?
- How many pages can you tear at once?
- Which paper is the smoothest/roughest?

If you are using magazines and newspapers, invite them to tear out only certain parts of the paper. For example, 'can you tear out only his hand?' or 'can you tear out that blue piece?'

This is an excellent opportunity to practise colours and size with your little one.

Extension: Ask them to sort the torn papers by size and/or colour.

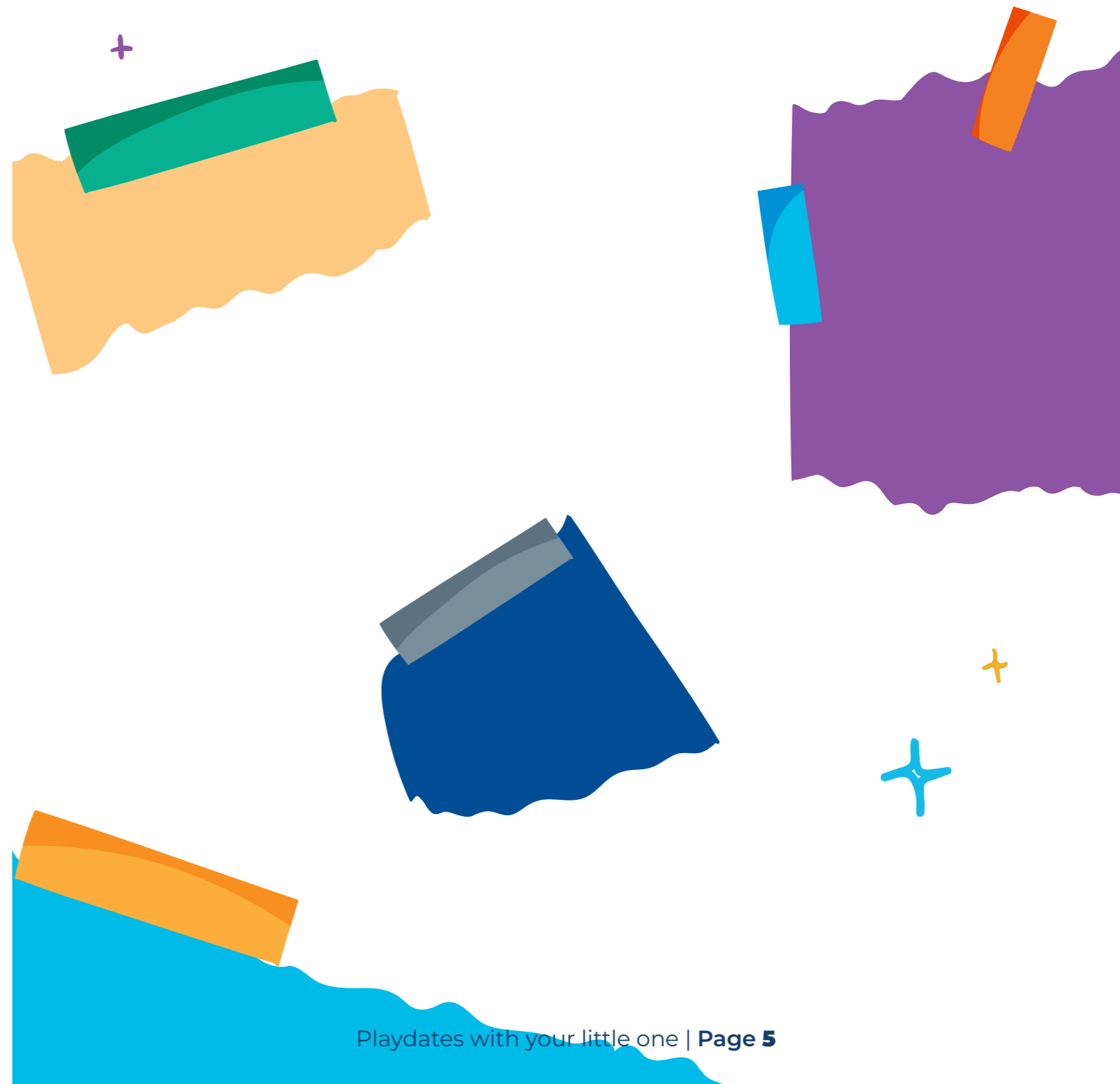
2. CREATING ART

Using any glue you have on hand, encourage your child to design a collage. Allow their creativity free reign, but do ask them open-ended questions about their collage and then ask follow up questions. For example, if you point to a person and ask who they are, ask follow-up questions like what they are doing or what their connection is to other items/people in the collage.

A NOTE ABOUT INDEPENDENCE AND FREE EXPRESSION

This is a great opportunity to boost your child's confidence in their own abilities. Allow your child to take the lead when creating their collage. Let them determine where each piece will be glued down.

What they have created might look like a mishmash, but your child is very proud of what they have created. Praise them for their efforts and show curiosity. It's not about the product so much as it is about the process to get to the finished product. They learn so much during the process and this is invaluable.



LAUNDRY DAY AND FANTASY PLAY

Develops core muscles, develop strong pencil grip, pattern and pattern recognition, pre-proprioception, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination

1. HANGING LAUNDRY

Set up a small washing line (at head height for safety) between two sturdy chairs or other items of furniture that are well-secured. Provide your child with a basket of washing to hang up on the line. Using pegs will help them strengthen their pencil grip.

You can use wet or dry washing. If you decide to use wet washing, you can talk to them about how the clothing will dry out more quickly in the sunshine or with a breeze. Science can be introduced in small increments.

Once the laundry is dry, encourage your child to take down the laundry and place it back in the laundry basket.

Enrichment: If you have given your child a number of socks to hang up, ask them to sort the socks into pairs.

2. FANTASY PLAY

Encourage your child to place the laundry basket (if they are able to safely carry it) in a sunny spot in front of a mirror and invite them to begin trying on the clothes. Old and unused clothes work best for this, such as men's shirts, dresses and ties. To the basket, add items like old watches, hats and other items that might be fun for your child to play with.

This is an ideal opportunity for your child to practise their fine motor skills as they do up buttons and other closures.



3. MUSIC PLAY

With longer, thinner items like scarves, you can encourage your child to dance with the scarves to classical music. If they're a little older, you could tie a scarf to a thin dowel rod and allow your child to play with it as they would a flag. This is an excellent opportunity to develop gross motor skills, hand-eye coordination, crossing the midline, creative thinking and imagination, listening skills, rhythm and movement, and phonological awareness.

A NOTE ON CREATIVITY

This exercise gives your child the freedom and space to be creative. When they are ready to write while at primary school, they will find creative writing much easier having spent their childhood engaged in creative pursuits. The child can think creatively, speak creatively and later write creatively.

Extension: Introduce other props into the basket of fantasy items. Things like pots and pans, blankets and other unused household items can stimulate a child's creativity.



COOKING

Cause and effect, sensory play

RICE

Let your child stand on a stool at the kitchen sink. Help them to put some rice into a plastic bowl. Fill the bowl with water and let your child wash the rice. Depending on their age, they might be strong enough to tip the rice into a sieve or colander to drain it. Repeat this until the water runs clear. This is a fantastic form of sensory play.

While they watch, cook the rice in your preferred manner. While the rice is cooking, invite them to help you prepare the other ingredients. Here adapt whatever works best for your family. You might opt for a simple rice salad. Your child can use child-friendly knives to chop tomatoes and cucumber.

Once the rice is cooked, place it out of reach to cool. This is an ideal opportunity to teach safety in the kitchen. Once the rice has cooled somewhat, invite your child to play with a small amount of it. Ask them what the difference is between the rice before it was cooked and now after it was cooked.

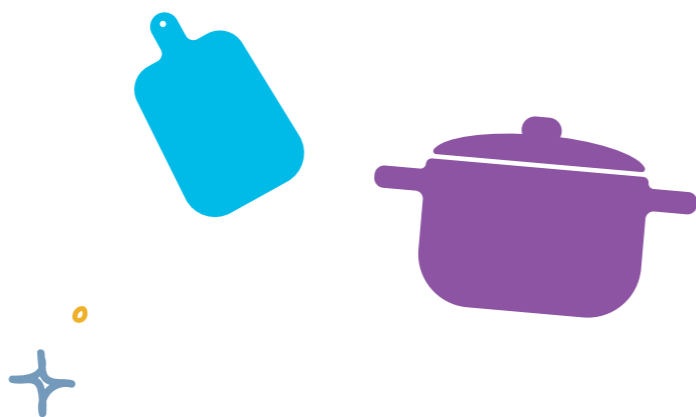
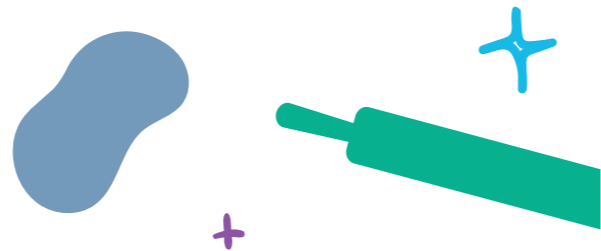
You could adapt a [rice salad recipe](#) like this one so that it best fits your family's needs.

PLAYDOUGH

- 1 cup oats
- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup water
- A drop or two of food colouring

Mix the ingredients together until they form a smooth dough.

Invite your child to create and play with the playdough. While playdough-specific tools can be fun, you can use a variety of kitchen tools instead.



STORY BOX AND SOUNDS

Storytelling, problem-solving, rhythm, phonological awareness

1. STORY BOX

Choose a storybook and then fill a box with items inspired by your chosen story. For example, if you are telling the story of Little Red Riding Hood, you might choose items like something fluffy to represent the wolf, a red piece of fabric to represent the cape, a muffin to represent the contents of Red's basket, etc. Try to include items that engage all the senses, particularly touch, sound and smell. When telling the story, use the box to create sound effects (e.g. by knocking on it)

By doing this you make the story tactile and concrete which fully engages your child in the experience.

Once you have told the story once, invite your child to use the props to retell the story.

Extension: You can play with sequence and pattern by experimenting with the story and changing the ending once you've told it in full once.

Wooden spoons and puppets

If you have spare wooden spoons, these can be decorated to make excellent puppets that tell the story.

2. DRUMMING

Set up a variety of items such as boxes and a colander. Using wooden or plastic spoons, invite your child to drum out the syllables of their name. They can also drum the syllables of other words.

Extension: Compare the different sounds that are made when drumming on and using different materials.

Extension: Play a variety of songs – some with fast beats and others with slow beats. Invite your child to dance to the music, bang on their 'drums' or even waving pieces of fabric around while they dance.



SENSORY BOTTLE AND A TENT

Teaching your child **resilience and emotional regulation** is essential for their development. The two activities that follow will be challenging for children and they will have a chance to demonstrate grit by persevering with the tasks.

Hand-eye coordination, prewriting skills, fine motor development, crossing the midline, language development, resilience and emotional regulation, cause and effect, gross motor development, pre-proprioception

1. SENSORY BOTTLE

Fill a clear plastic bottle with water and a metal paperclip. Give your child a fridge magnet and ask them to move the paperclip from the bottom of the bottle to the top. You do not need to use a strong magnet for this. In fact, a weak magnet provides children with more opportunities to develop resilience. They will learn that the best way to move the paperclip is by doing it slowly and steadily.

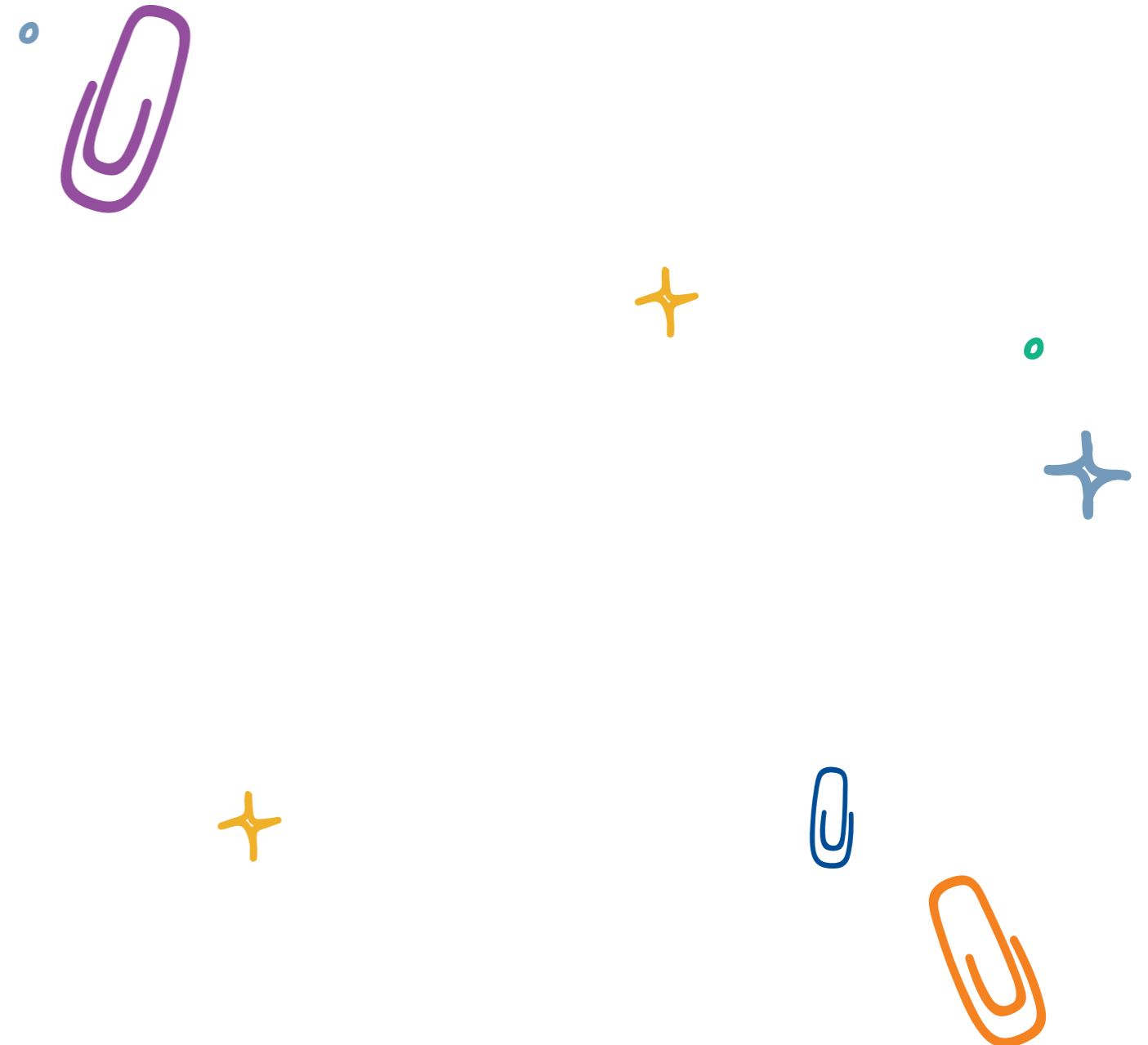
<p>A note on choosing magnets</p>	<p>In order to get the difficulty right with this activity, parents are encouraged to try it out for themselves with a range of fridge magnets so they can provide their child with one that is challenging while still being possible.</p>
<p>A note on a parent's role</p>	<p>Keep your comments limited to encouragement only. Encourage your child to persevere but allow them the space to experiment and see how they can make the exercise work.</p>
<p>A note on safety</p>	<p>As with all play that involves small parts, it is essential that this exercise is closely supervised by an adult.</p>



2. BUILDING A TENT

Building blanket tents is a happy memory for many of us. In this exercise, it is the child that takes the lead. Start this activity with a conversation about building a tent in the house using what is available. Ask your child how this can be done. They might ask for blankets, chairs, coffee tables, sheets, a broom or mop, etc. While keeping an eye on potential safety concerns, encourage your child to build a tent. They might ask for help. Before providing that help encourage them to try it themselves. Just be near at hand because your child will be exploring their limits and accidents can happen. Your child might experience frustration when blankets slip off furniture or other challenges occur. Encourage them to persevere through these challenges. A parent can be there to prevent a chair from toppling, for example, but it can be the child who works out how to move it safely.

Once the tent is complete, bring fairy lights or a torch into the tent and read a book with your child in their newly constructed tent. You might even decide to have a picnic in your new tent!



CREATING PUZZLES

Collaborative learning is a gift for little ones as it allows them to learn while practising their social skills.

Language development, hand-eye coordination, problem-solving, Mathematical development, learning about the world, fine motor development

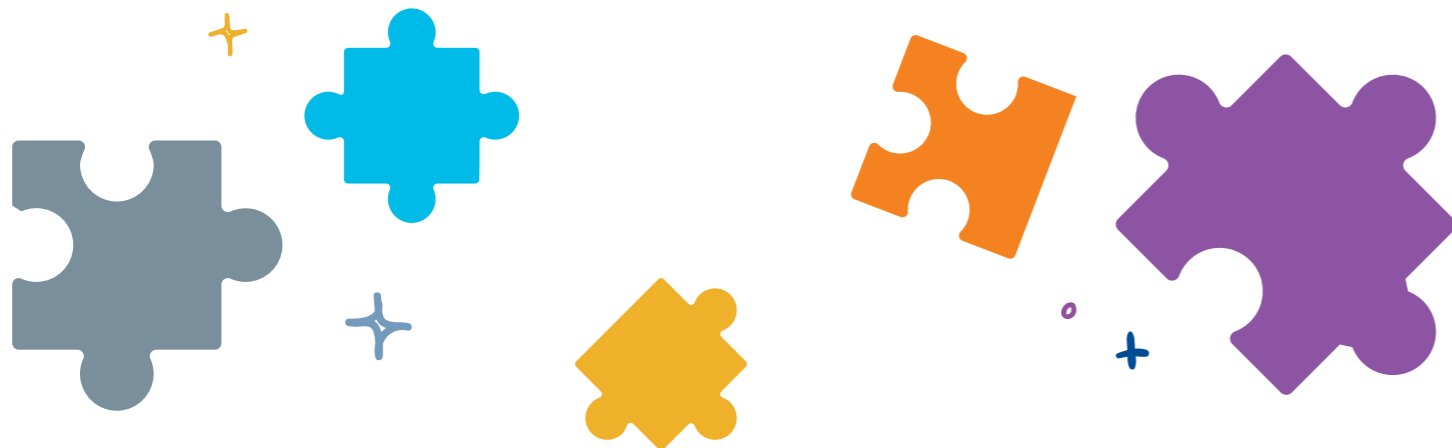
Begin with something that your child likes. For example, if your child really enjoys cars, buy a car magazine or find pictures of cars online and print them out. Ask your child to choose a picture and then cut it out for them. If your child is old enough, give them a pair of child-safe scissors and ask them to cut the picture in half. Then they need to put the two pieces together. Once they've done that, ask them to cut each half in half again (making quarters). Ask them to put the puzzle together again. You could ask them to count how many pieces there are now. You can repeat this exercise until you reach a number of pieces that is challenging but still doable for your child.

Building a story

With each round of putting the pieces back together, help your child build a story around the image. If it is an image of a car, ask what colour the car is, where the car is going, to whom the car belongs, etc. Be sure to keep your questions open-ended to allow for maximum creativity on the part of your child.

Colouring in

This exercise can be done with pictures that a child colours in as well.



PAINTING

Encouraging artistic development allows your child to blossom creatively.

Hand-eye coordination, pre-writing development, eye tracking, gross motor development, language development, learning about the world, social and emotional development, cause and effect

1. MAKING PAINT

If you mix flour, water and food colouring together to a smooth consistency, you can create your own paint. This paint is washable on surfaces like paving, tiles and sealed cement floors.

You can take this a step further by telling your child how to make a paintbrush. Take a twig and tie leaves to the end of it using an elastic band or a piece of string. This is an excellent opportunity for them to develop their creative thinking, problem-solving and fine motor skills, but depending on their age, they might struggle with this step.

Alternatively, items like earbuds work well as paintbrushes.

Give your child a large piece of paper or newspaper and encourage them to experiment with the paint.

Once they have finished painting, ask them questions about their painting. Keep the questions open-ended to encourage your child's free expression. If they have drawn a figure, ask them who it is, what they are doing, etc.

Large paper

The reason for giving your child a large piece of paper is because this will encourage them to cross the midline while they are painting.

Painting with mud

Mud is a fantastic medium for creative play of this kind and in the world of a child, mud never goes out of fashion. This is best done outdoors though. It makes a lovely activity in the garden or in a local park.

Painting with water or chalk

If you have access to cement paving or coloured paper, these serve as an excellent backdrops for painting with water. Alternatively, you could wet chalk and draw around bodies lying down on the pavement. You can then draw on clothing and features using chalk.

LET'S GO SHOPPING

Fine motor development, phonological awareness, problem-solving, storytelling, incidental reading, hand-eye coordination

1. PREPARING A SHOPPING LIST

Collect magazine or newspaper inserts advertising the specials at the shop that you usually frequent.

Hand your child a black koki and ask them to circle the three things that you need to buy that week. Encourage your child to talk through their choices with you. You might say, 'we need bread, milk and cheese' and then you can ask your child to find those items in the flyer. You can ask them to choose more items or fewer. You can also give your child guidelines about only looking on a particular page as well. This is a moment for collaborative work with a parent or guardian.

Under close supervision, give your child a pair of child-sized scissors and ask them to cut out the items that they have circled. They can then glue these cutouts to a piece of paper. Encourage them to glue their pieces down from left to right, starting at the top of the page. This is their shopping list.

2. GOING SHOPPING

Take your child shopping and talk them through finding their items and placing them in the cart. You can also ask for their help with unloading the trolley at the till and packing items into bags and placing them back in the cart. You can also talk them through your shopping for the day and the items that you select for the family. A grocery store provides many opportunities for open-ended questions.

A note on age

This is perhaps an activity better suited to a one-on-one shop with a slightly older child. That being said, with support, a younger child could cope with this activity as well.



WEATHER CHART

Data collection and analysis, prediction, learning about the world, sense of belonging, resilience, fine motor development, eye-hand coordination

1. TRACKING THE WEATHER

Stick up a calendar you already have or one you have printed (free calendar here) on your fridge at your child's height. It's best to use an A3-sized monthly calendar.

Have a small pencil bag of kokis within easy reach of the fridge. At a time that works for you (morning or evening), ask your child to look out the window and describe the weather. Initially, they might need a little help with the vocabulary for this: cloudy, sunny, raining, hot, cold, etc. Each day track the temperature and the cloud cover and/or precipitation.

Discussions of the weather provide ample opportunity for open-ended questions, such as asking what they should wear if it is raining and what does the wind feel like.

2. WORKING WITH DATA

At the end of the month, provide your child with blocks or stackable tokens of some kind that represent each of the types of weather you had that month. Then ask them to count the number of sunny days, for example, and stack that number of blocks on top of each other. Do the same for cloudy days and rainy days. If you place these stacks of blocks next to each other, your child has built a bar graph representing the weather that month.



HAND-EYE COORDINATION

Hand-eye coordination, pencil grip, proprioception, language development, crossing the midline, tracking, cause and effect

1. TOOTHPICK ACTIVITY

Clean out an empty spice bottle that has those little holes in the top. A plastic one is safer, but glass can also work under supervision. Provide your child with some toothpicks and ask them to put the toothpicks into the spice bottle through the holes on top. This is an excellent way to build up better hand-eye coordination.

2. STICKY TAPE AND BALLS

Take sticky tape or masking tape and double it up into a loop with the sticky side facing out. Attach these loops to the fridge or a cupboard door. Scatter them from very close to the ground to as high as your child can reach. Encourage your child to stick light plastic balls to the loops of tape. If you don't have balls like this, you can adapt this so that your child sticks torn pieces of paper to the loops of tape. Talk about where your child is stretching. Use language like 'up', 'down', 'left', 'right', etc.

3. TRACKING EXERCISE

Screw a medium-sized hook to the ceiling above an open area in your home. Attach a piece of string or fishing gut to the hook and then tie the other end to a tennis ball or a similarly sized ball. The best way to do this is to pierce the tennis ball and thread the string through, then tie a knot. This can be tricky. Items like a hammer, nail, and needle might make it a bit easier.

Have the string long enough that when your child is lying on their back beneath the hook, they are able to reach the ball. Encourage your child to hit the ball gently and then watch it move around. Initially they can move their heads to track the ball, but they can move on to tracking it with just their eyes.

A note on safety

The toothpick exercise should be done under supervision. The tracking exercise has the potential to knock things off shelves, for example. Test the system out yourself first to ascertain the 'reach' of the ball.

