

Schooling With a Toddler or Preschooler

Some things to keep in mind when choosing an activity...

- Strive not only to entertain but to nurture the toddler's growth and development.
- Allow special toys and materials to be brought out ONLY when it is school time.
- Create "lesson plans" for the toddler, too!
- Define space where activities are conducted; be consistent about this use of space (sitting up at the table, in a kiddie pool, etc.)
- Some of the suggested activities use items that may be a choking hazard IF the child is still putting things in his/her mouth. When in doubt, don't use.

One last word...

PARENTS know their children best. Some of these activities may work for a particular child, others may spell disaster. Pick and choose those that will appeal to his/her level of development and activity level.

Ideas and activities to entertain and educate:

Sort, Stack and Make a Line!

- Use unusual containers such as egg cartons, ice cube trays, muffin pans or a balance scale.
 - Checkers
 - Chess pieces
 - Dominoes
 - Buttons
 - Nuts and bolts
 - Shells
 - Colored pom poms
 - Little plastic animals
 - Pasta (these can be dyed, but plain is fine too)
 - Math linking and cubes (multi-sided links, not unifix)
 - Math manipulatives (counting bears, Cuisenaire rods, pattern blocks)
 - Stacking cups or containers of different sizes
 - Plastic or cardboard coins
 - Piggy bank (or cylindrical can w/ plastic cover)
- Create 3" X 5" or larger colored index cards, with numbers 1-10+ written on them and a corresponding number of circle stickers or dots.; child can match up objects to circles.

Art Fun!

Some projects in K12 Art lessons are also inviting to a toddler/preschooler. Let him/her join the fun, where possible!

- Painting with water on cardboard, or if outside, on the sidewalk or house
- Stickers - roll of 3000+ from the discount store, or free ones that come in mail. Draw a shape and have child fill it in w/ stickers (the smaller the stickers, the longer it will take!)
- Washable markers, crayons, and BIG sheets of paper
- "Collage in a bag" interesting pages w/ pictures torn out of a magazine and a glue stick (these could have a theme, such as healthy foods, animals, flowers, families, etc.)
- Magazine picture pages and scissors (supervise this closely!)
- Fingerpaint
 - Shaving cream-smells great, and cleans your table, but only for kids who are old enough to NOT rub their hands in eyes or eat it
 - Chocolate pudding painting inside a kiddie pool

Things to String

Use yarn with tape wrapped around the end to make a hard point or chenille stems (pipe cleaners) with tape around the end of the sharp point.

- Colored straws cut into pieces (a preschooler can even do the cutting!)
- Pasta (dyed or plain) different shapes
- Froot Loops or Cheerios
- Large beads
- Spools (you can still get the old-fashioned wooden ones in craft stores)

Squish and Squash

Homemade dough is cheaper, non-toxic and more fun!

- Have a variety of tools; a thick dowel makes a good rolling pin
- Plastic cookie cutters in many shapes-alphabet letters, shapes, etc.
- Keep a plastic place mat with the playdough supplies to keep your table top clean and define the workspace.

Sample Recipe:

- 1/2 cup salt
- 1 cup flour
- 1 tablespoon cream of tartar
- 1 tablespoon oil
- 1 cup water
- Optional – food coloring
 - An adult can combine ingredients in a saucepan. Heat gently, stirring all the time. When the dough has a good consistency, take it off the heat and allow to cool completely.

From Here to There...

There are a million entertaining variations in what you move and how you move it! Look for new combinations!

- Oval soap holder w/suction cups and eye dropper or "pipette": Fill an unbreakable cup or bowl w/ water. Show your child how to use the eyedropper to fill up each and every little suction cup on one side with one (and only one) drop of water!
- Two unbreakable bowls, a spoon or ladle, and items to "transfer":
 - Cotton balls or Styrofoam packing peanuts
 - Rice or beans
 - Any dry material or liquid
- Same as above, using tongs
- Same as above, using plastic tweezers
- Same as above, using sponge-child transfers water from one container to next by soaking and squeezing
- Turkey baster and two buckets, one full of water, set inside the kiddie pool or low plastic bin

Just Like My Mommy/Daddy...

"Daily Living" -Children love to imitate grown-up tasks

- Hanging clothes out to dry!
 - Stretch a line of cord between two chairs or make a foldable play clothesline by running cord across a laundry drying rack
 - Have doll clothes, mini-clothespins and a little laundry basket.
- Doing the Dishes!
 - Let them stand on a stool up at the sink and "wash" plastic play dishes or do this in a low bin on the floor
 - Add a little dish soap for bubbles
 - Use an egg beater to make MORE bubbles
- Wash the windows!
 - Provide a small spritzer type bottle w/ water in it and a small rag
 - Your windows won't be pretty, but it will keep him/her busy!
- Use the hose to water the flowers

Read Me a Story!

Books with tapes or CDs can make anytime be story time!

- Purchase children's books/magazines, borrow from library, or make your own
- Have grandparents or siblings read and record. Don't forget to ring a bell when the page is turned.
- Have child use headphones so not to disturb students
- Add small dolls, action figures, props to act out story

Putting It Back Together

Puzzles

- Purchase or make your own-2-4 pieces
- Cut out the front of the box of favorite cereals. Cut into 2 pieces and let you toddler reassemble. Cut into 3 or 4 pieces when you need a more challenging activity!
- Use 5x7 or larger photos of family members or pets. Mount on sturdy cardboard. Make a simple puzzle from each.

- Use your toddler's own art work to construct a simple puzzle.
- Birthday or holiday cards can be recycled to become toddler puzzles, too!
- Store individual puzzles in ziplock bags.
- Make a series of "dinner puzzles" out of paper plates. Draw or glue pictures of 3 or 4 foods on each. Cut paper plates into equal wedges. Have your toddler "serve" dinner by assembling a plate.

Rice Play!

Use a plastic dishpan to contain a pound or two of dry rice or cornmeal. This may keep your child busy for hours

- Set the dishpan on the floor inside the plastic pool or on a plastic sheet or shower curtain
- Provide many stacking cups, empty plastic medicine bottles, milk jug lids, funnels, spoons, ladles, etc.
- Hide small toys (animals, Barbie accessories) under the rice that he must dig through and find.
- Same as above, but hide metal objects and give him a magnet
- Put in dump trucks and bulldozers, cars
- Include a small brush and pan set for sweeping up spills

It's Quite an Attraction!

Magnets are source of fun and curiosity for young children! Make a "Magnet Kit" for your toddler's amazement.

- Include several shapes of magnets in the Magnet Kit and a variety of objects that attract and don't attract. Let your child experiment. Vary what objects are included in the kit, so your child has new experiments to conduct.
- Make a Fishing Game. Make cardboard fish and attach paper clips. Construct a pole with a dowel, a string and a magnet "hook." Put the fish in the "pond" on the floor and have fun!

Boxes, blankets, balls, and other stuff you already have:

Save a big box or two for your child to sit in, put stuffed animals in, etc.

- Make a box and tube "ball chute"
 - Take a medium-sized corrugated box and cut holes through from one side to the other, big enough to fit a mailing tube through. Make a couple of these. Your toddler will love putting the ball in the top of the tube and watching it magically appear out of one of the tube bottoms!
- Tie a cord through a hole on the end of an empty shoe box. Your toddler will enjoy setting objects inside and pulling it around.
- Make a low "balance beam" by taping several strips of tape around some old thick phone books or catalogs and lining them up. Or space them slightly apart and your older child can step from one to another.
- Throw a blanket over the top of a couple of chairs or a card table!
- Give your child a small flashlight to see when he sits inside a big box or under the blanket "fort"
- Hang a beach ball from the ceiling, just low enough for toddler to bat with hands
- Same as above, but tie a waffle ball, and make a bat from a foam "noodle" float
- Make "Big Blocks" out of ½ gallon milk cartons-rinse thoroughly and cover with contact paper. Or just tape the ends flat and don't bother with the covering. An older sibling can entertain the toddler for awhile by building a 4-5 block tower and letting toddler knock it down.
- Create a ramp with a large block or book. Then gather toys and show how the toys roll or slide down the ramp.
- Sort the socks. Collect several pairs of colorful infant socks that she's outgrown to match up or just play with. Toddlers love to try to put these on and take them off themselves. If your child has enjoyed this activity on several occasions, give a surprise one morning and include some "big people" socks. A great use for those socks that seem to have lost their mates! While a young toddler may enjoy just tossing the socks in the air, an older preschooler will sort the socks into pairs, piles by color or line then up according to size.
- Feed the birds. Have your child help you prepare a snack for the birds. Place the food where your child can safely watch from indoors. While it's not likely that your child will sit for an extended time watching the bird feeder, it will be an exciting moment when he sees a bird stopping by for a bite to eat!

Games siblings can play with babies or toddlers

Birth to Six Months

- Funny Faces - babies as young as one month will imitate facial expressions. Have your older child sit facing the baby, make silly faces and wait for baby to copy. The baby's funny expressions will delight a toddler or preschooler.

- Rattling Around - Show your older child how to gently shake a colorful rattle about 8 inches away from baby's face. This is the distance at which newborns can best focus. As the baby follows the rattle with her eyes, she is learning to associate the object with the sound it makes. And, big brother or sister will feel important because he can make the baby do something interesting

Six to Twelve Months

- Peek-a-Boo - At this wonderful age, babies begin to learn that objects and people exist even when they can't see them. The game of peekaboo offers reassurance, surprise and plenty of giggles. You can take this old game further than just hiding your face in your hands though. The big kid can hide a small toy under baby's blankie and then pop it out, for instance. Again, the older child will feel a real sense of accomplishment because he can entertain the baby.
- Fill and Spill - Have your older child fill a pot, empty box or lightweight container with soft or plastic blocks. Then, have your older kid show the baby how to dump it out. Repeat ;) Your preschooler will delight in making a mess and your little one will be honing her hand coordination.

Twelve Months to Two Years

- Where are you? Even older toddlers still enjoy a game of Peek-a-Boo - Teach older sibling to put hands on face and say "Child's name, where are you?" and let the toddler pull his hands away from his face. Toddlers like to have control over the game, putting the older child's hands on his face and then pulling them away.
- Read to Me - Preschoolers love to "read" their favorite picture books, and babies enjoy sitting and looking at pictures. Invite your older sib to tell the story of her favorite book and point to the pages while baby watches.
- Earthquake - Save up single serving cereal boxes for this simple stacking game. Tape the tops shut and let the kids take turns stacking the boxes one on top of the other and see how many can be piled up before they all fall down. Your older child can practice counting the boxes as they are stacked up.