

the GENIUS of
PLAY™

.....
It's more than play!



Let's Play
A Playbook for Kids of All Abilities



Dear Reader,

Welcome to "Let's Play - A Playbook for Kids of All Abilities!" Our mission is to help every child reach their fullest potential through robust, guided play experiences. By combining both guided and unstructured play, we foster the development of physical, cognitive, self-care, socio-emotional, and language skills.

Use this playbook to encourage creativity, physical exploration, self-expression, socialization, collaboration, and communication, and support math, reading, and writing readiness. Engaging in these activities with your children, students, and family members will foster skill development. Through play, children master their body functions, understand others, and express ideas and feelings. It's a powerful way to observe their learning style while bonding with them playfully. Strategic play offers opportunities tailored to a child's development. Our curated activities support your ability to focus on the children's strengths, interests, and areas needing support, providing the "just right" challenge level.

Brought to you by The Genius of Play™ in collaboration with Antonia Llull, an occupational therapist, and her MPOWERME team, along with Ellen Metrick, a human factors specialist with UL Solutions. Each activity includes step-by-step instructions, alternatives, schedule boosters, challenge boosters, and play benefits.

For more play ideas and expert advice, visit www.TheGeniusofPlay.org and follow [@GeniusofPlay](#) on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). Enjoy the Playbook and have fun!

Enjoy the Playbook!

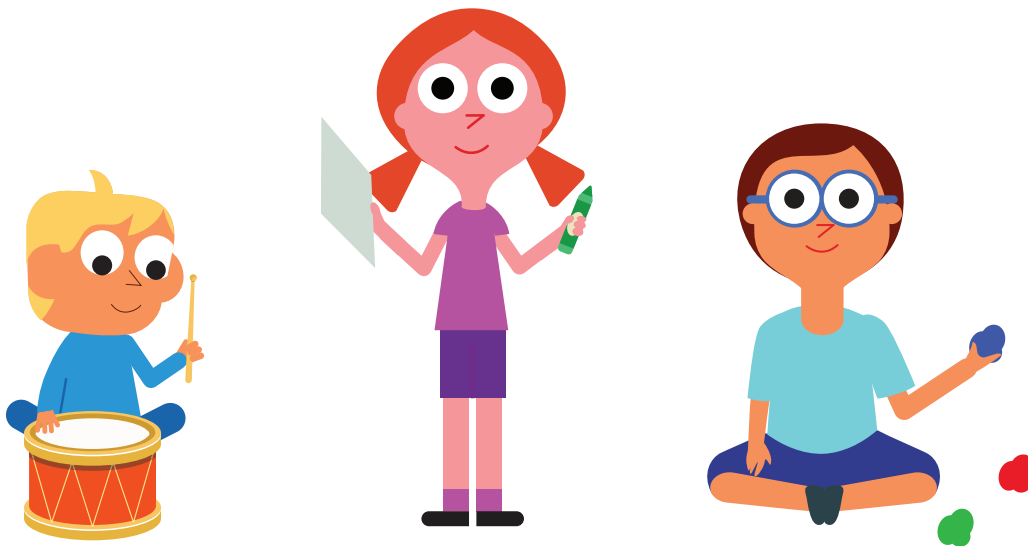
The Genius of Play Team

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TAPE TRACK

Using masking tape, make two parallel lines to create a roadway on the floor. Have children crawl along as they push a small toy car within the lines of the tape to drive to the end of the road. Make a car wash at the end with sudsy water, or a play garage so there is a reward for getting to the destination.

Note: Do not use tape on wood floor. It will pull up the polyurethane and stain.

Step by Step FUN

Activity Alternatives

- For children who use a wheelchair or need to complete the activity sitting down:
 - Make a small track on a table or wheelchair tray to help encourage crossing midline and hand transferring.
 - Make the road wide to give children plenty of space to stay on the road.
 - Make the road a simple, short, straight distance to the destination.

Schedule Boosters

Have time to turn this into a longer activity outdoors?

- Use a large tarp to create masking tape roads or railways to cover longer distances over grass or sand to further support development of gross motor skills through interaction with the environment and rich sensory experiences.

Have limited space and/or time?

- Use a large cookie sheet to use nonmagnetic and/or magnetic characters to “walk” on the track, to use smaller vehicles, and/or to have a contained and shortened road.
- Work on a vertical surface (i.e., a dry erase board) to boost the challenge to upper body stability and coordination, as well as eye muscle development (ocular motor).

Challenge Boosters

- Add angles and turns in the road (e.g., under the table, around the chair) to encourage visual processing and coordinated movement.
- Extend the road to the next room(s).
- Use only one strip of masking tape so the child must use heightened precision to drive on the line.

SUPPLIES:

- Roll of masking tape
- Small toy car
- Large tarp*
- Large cookie sheet*
- Dry erase board*

*To be used with Challenge Boosters



Benefits of Play

Bilateral coordination: When children crawl, they use reciprocal leg and arm movements – moving arms and legs at the same time, but in opposite directions. This helps strengthen the connections in their brain to ensure it communicates and uses both sides of their body in a controlled and organized way.

Weight shifting: As children crawl along with their car, they are shifting their weight in the same fashion they need for walking.

Eye-hand coordination and eye-movement: When children follow the paths, they build the connection between what their arms and hands need to do based on what they see. This includes increasing their precision with reaching, placing, tracing, aiming, following a trajectory, and estimating distances.

SURPRISE BOX

Cut a hole in a cardboard box large enough to allow a child to easily reach inside and retrieve objects. The hole can be on the top or side of the box. Make sure the edges are smooth, so children don't get scraped or cut. Place objects inside. Have children take turns reaching inside the box and identifying objects by touch. Alternately say an object and have the child find it by feel.

Step by Step FUN

Activity Alternatives

- **For children who have attention difficulties and/or fine motor, sensory processing difficulties:** Lessen the number of objects you place in the box, so they only have a couple to feel and identify. Gradually increase the number as attention span and frustration levels permit.
- **For children who are working on language:**
 - Discuss the attributes of the objects (colors, size, shape).
 - Tell a story using the objects that have been retrieved from the box.
 - Ask questions (e.g., what shape is it, what color is it, how does it feel).

Schedule Boosters

Take this to the bath:

- Easily modify this activity by using fun non-floating (water safe) toys covered with bath bubbles. Hide toys underneath the bubbles so they are not visible to your child. Then have the child feel and find a toy followed by identifying the toy while still under the bubbles.

Take this on the go:

- Take this game to the car by using a canvas tote/reusable grocery bag filled with various toys/objects. Instruct your child to reach into the bag without looking and find a specific object using only their sense of touch.
- This game could also be taken to waiting rooms, doctors' appointments, sibling sports events and anywhere when your child needs to sit and be occupied.

SUPPLIES:

- Shoebox with a lid or other small cardboard box
- Tape
- Small uniquely shaped or textured objects (e.g., plastic letters, small animals, utensils, crayon, hair scrunchie, barrette)
- Bubble bath*
- Canvas tote and/or reusable grocery bag*

*To be used with Schedule Boosters



Challenge Boosters

- Use easily distinguishable 3D shapes/objects such as numbers 0-9, capital letters, as well as familiar hand sized toys. Place only 2-3 different choices into the container and/or bath at once for your child to identify or find by feel.
- Use a higher number of different objects that are more similar in size, shape, and texture. Alternate between identifying and finding.
- Start by collecting duplicates of each object (e.g., two pencils, two erasers, cotton swabs, buttons). Place one of each pair in the box. Then, point to an object and have the child reach in and find its match by feel.

Benefits of Play

- **Sensory processing:** The box can have a finite number and a robust variety of objects to help children gradually manage more diverse types of input and make sense of it. This has a direct effect on their ability to focus and attend to one stimulus when subjected to multiple sensory stimuli.
- **Descriptive language development:** Basic concepts such as location (in/out) and number (more/less) can be exemplified during play. This helps build pre-reading and early math skills and increases vocabulary by helping kids describe what they're feeling.

Snack 'N' Social

Special Notes/Precautions:

- Serve only under adult supervision.
- Review any food allergies.
- Avoid food choking hazards, i.e., soft/hard candies and nuts.
- Only share the mix with children who can easily chew and swallow food.

Step by Step FUN

Make a homemade trail mix: Give each child one ingredient and a scoop or measuring cup. Take turns measuring a set amount (e.g., 1 cup) of their ingredients and pouring it into the large bowl. Once all ingredients are in the bowl, have them take turns stirring the mix and then scooping and pouring a serving of the trail mix into their individual bowl. During the activity, be clear and specific with instructions and encourage children to describe each ingredient as they scoop, pour, and mix. Enjoy!

Activity Alternative

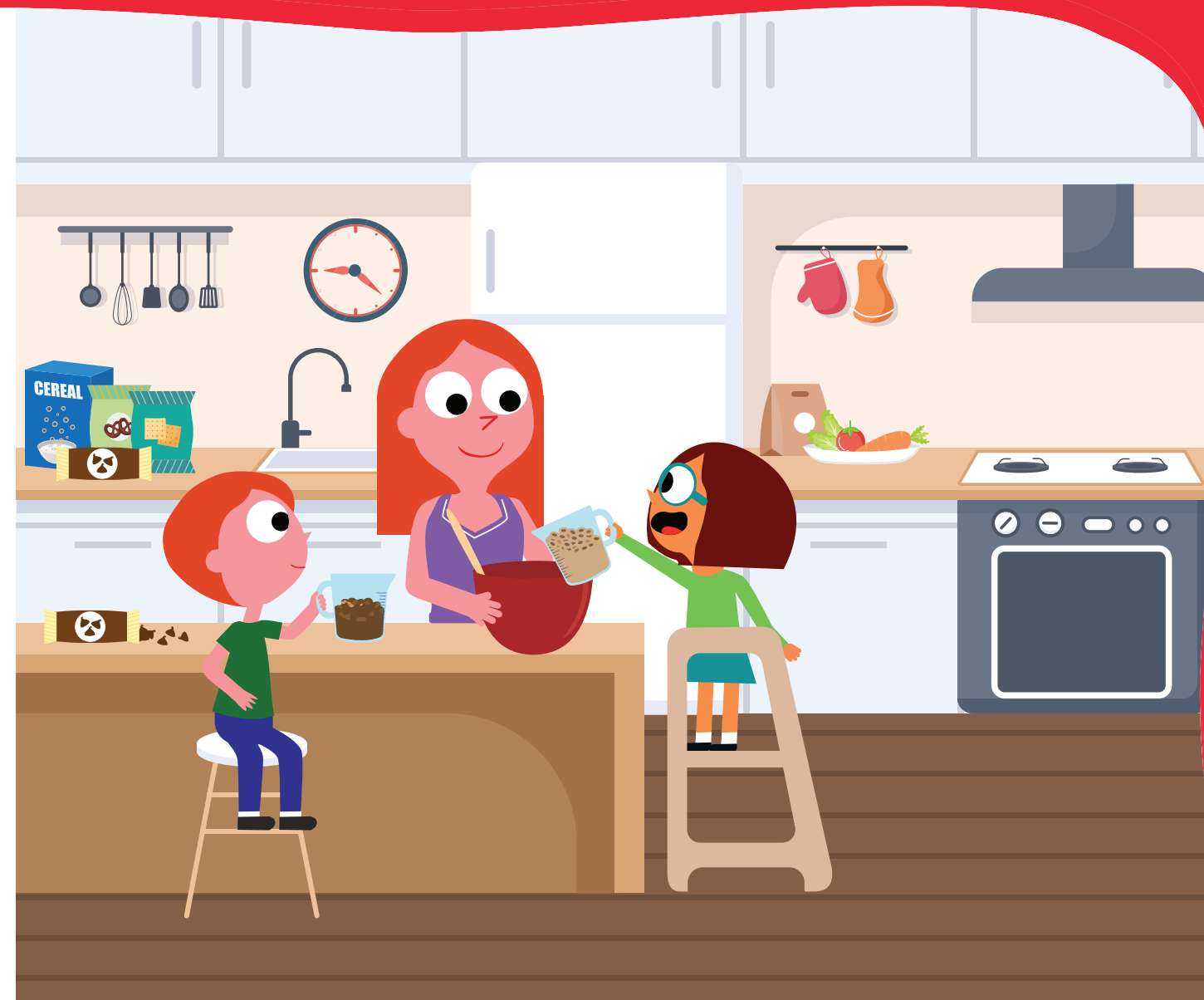
- **For children working on language:** Discuss the food items in the mix – describe sweet, salty, crunchy, chewy, soft, etc.

Challenge Boosters

- Work on higher level eye-hand coordination and control by pouring the food items directly from their original packaging into the measuring cups.
- Create and print/write a recipe for the mix. For non-readers, create a step-by-step picture/visual recipe to follow.
- Dip pretzels or fruit slices in tempered chocolate before using them the mix.
- Encourage children to talk about their favorite snacks and meals – use this conversation to plan for the next recipe, considering everyone's favorites.

SUPPLIES:

- A variety of your favorite food mix-in items, i.e., dry cereal, raisins, chocolate chips, dried apple chips, small crackers, pretzels
- One large bowl and a measuring cup or spoon for each ingredient
- Small individual bowls (one for each child) or other storage containers



Benefits of Play

- **Following directions** is a fundamental skill needed in everyday life and school. Using modeling during this activity is powerful!
- **Cooperative play** is a goal-oriented/purposeful activity in which children work together and take turns to complete the task.
- **Executive functioning** includes the ability to plan, organize materials, control impulsivity, and problem solve – following simple to more complex recipes is a fantastic way to foster this skill.

Get Your Beat On

When using instruments: Say a word aloud and tap/shake your instrument as you say each syllable. Then encourage your child or student to repeat it along with you. Try different words and then sing nursery rhymes, tapping the instrument for each syllable. Use songs and words that are familiar to the children to draw them in, keep it relevant to them, and maximize their ability to recognize and recall it at various times.

When using just your hands and feet: Model a beat created by clapping hands and stomping your feet in a pattern of movement. Do this on a hard floor surface with shoes on or off to create different sensory experiences and sounds.

Step by Step FUN

Activity Alternatives

- Complete these activities standing or sitting.
- Use an instrument that works with just one hand.

Challenge Boosters

- Model a beat created by stomping your feet as you tap/shake the instrument in your hand. Encourage your child to imitate you or to create a stomping pattern along with tapping their instruments for you to imitate.
- Hold duplicate instruments in both hands and/or use an instrument best activated with two hands while stomping out a beat or singing a song.

Benefits of Play

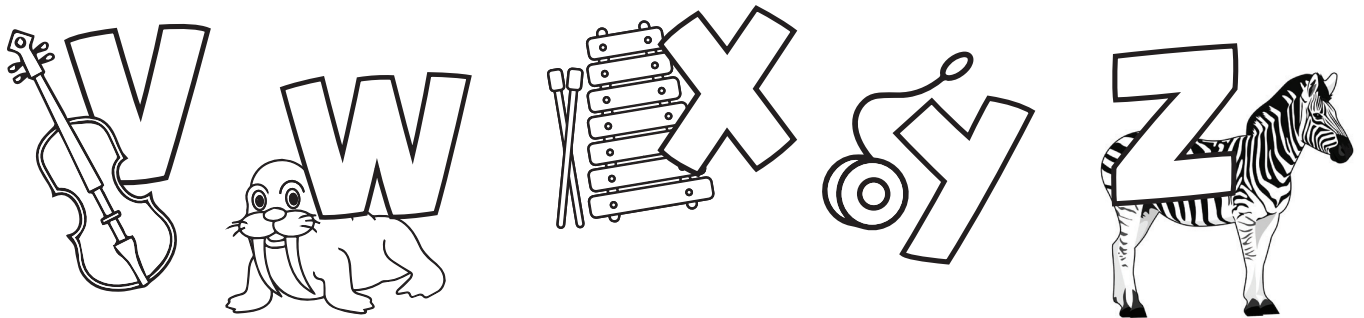
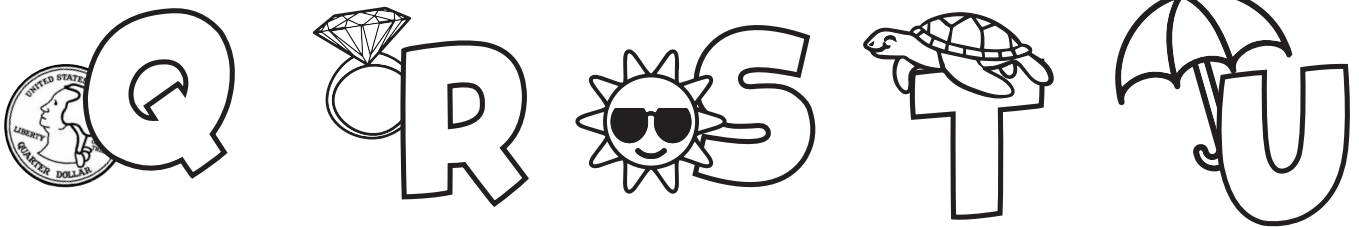
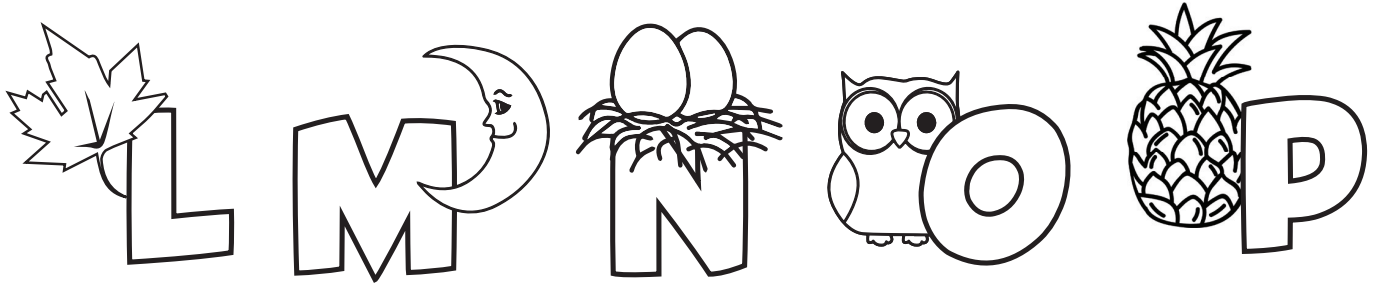
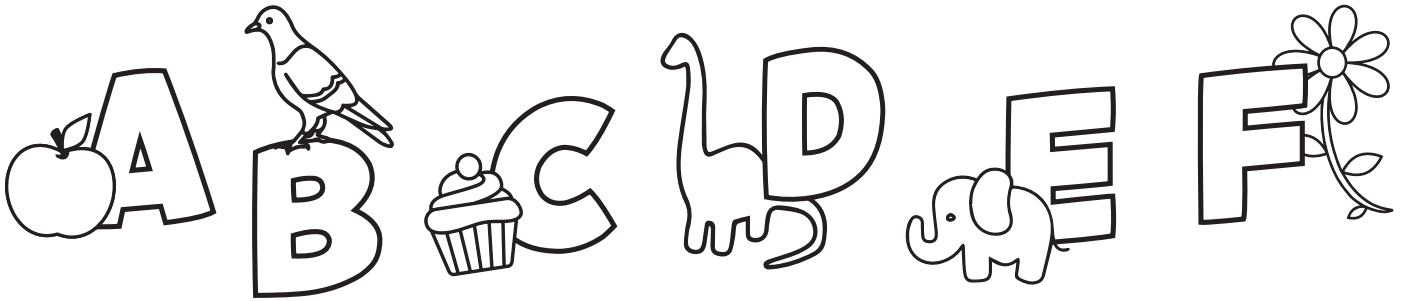
- **Encourage phonological awareness** when you break up words into syllables. Syllables are the building blocks of words. Separating syllables helps children decode words, improve their reading skills, and learn how to pronounce difficult words.
- **Cognitive organization is developed** as children learn to organize the information and respond.
- **Strengthen whole body coordination** through patterned, rhythmical whole-body movement.

SUPPLIES:

- Musical instruments that you can shake or tap (like maracas, bells, and cymbals)
- A list of multisyllabic words (like the children's names or their favorite colors)
- Nursery rhymes (like London Bridge and Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star)
- Just your hand and feet!

My ABC's

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SUPPLIES:

- Clear contact paper
- Painter's tape
- Variety of items (pieces of wrapping or colored construction paper, ribbon, felt, bows, leaves)
- Portable lap desk/tray table (to be used with Schedule Boosters)

Sticky Fingers

This is a fun way to make window sensory art! Tape a piece of clear contact paper onto the window with the sticky side away from the glass (facing out) and have fun collecting or making assorted items and sticking them to the paper.

Step by Step FUN

Activity Alternatives

- **For children who have decreased hand/finger strength:** Support gains in strength by having them crumple and/or rip pieces of colored paper prior to placing them.
- **For children working on language:** Discuss the objects placed on the contact paper and talk about similarities and differences between the objects used.

Schedule Booster

Take this on the go: Use a portable tray table and easily bring this activity to waiting rooms, doctor's appointments, sibling sport events, or anywhere your child needs to sit and be occupied.

Challenge Boosters

- Turn this activity into a throwing game by placing the sticky paper onto a wall or safe vertical surface (remember to use painters' tape to prevent damage). Crumple construction paper into balls and toss them at the sticky target.
- Increase whole body strength and balance by squatting to retrieve the object. Stand on a wobbly surface (i.e., large pillow, couch cushion, bean bag) while bending down to retrieve the items from the floor before placing them on the sticky surface.

Benefits of Play

Core strengthening: A strong core is necessary for stability, posture, and movement.

Hand strengthening: Strengthen these muscles while crumpling and tearing the paper.

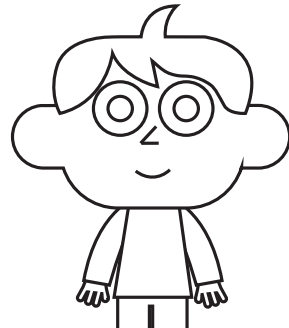
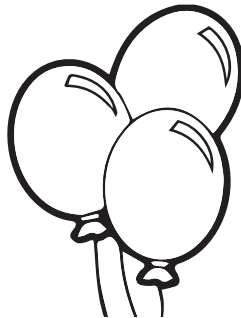
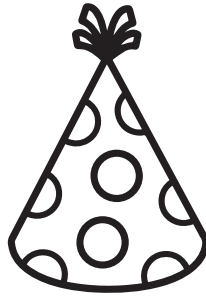
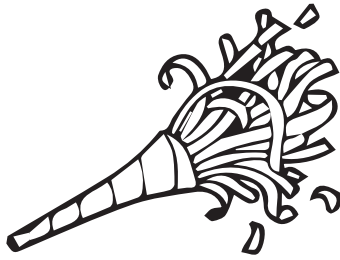
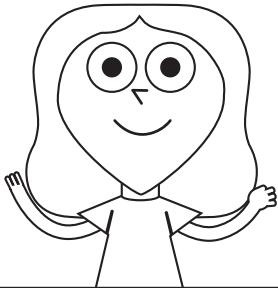
Sensory processing: Challenge boosters promote processing of touch, movement, and body position sensory input.

Birthday Party

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Scavenger Hunt

color it when you see it



SUPPLIES:

- Play drums
- Homemade improvisations, i.e., pots, buckets, cardboard boxes with wooden spoons

Drum Role Play

Play a simple rhythm and have the child repeat that same rhythm. Gradually increase the challenge with longer, more complex rhythms. Then switch roles and have the child play a rhythm for you to repeat. Or sing a familiar song while you both tap to the beat.

Step by Step FUN

Activity Alternative

- **For children who struggle with holding the sticks:** Build up the bottom of the stick with foam or a towel rolled and taped to it; use any object that may be easier to hold (i.e., paper towel roll); or encourage use of their hands directly on the drums.

Challenge Boosters

- Beat to the rhythm of songs to help kids learn to actively listen.
 - Sing along with songs to encourage language.
- Encourage following directions, i.e., “Beat loud,” “Tap softly,” “Play fast,” “Go slow.” These directions foster learning to follow verbal directions, concepts, and opposites.
- Have children play the drums to represent how they feel. Demonstrate soft-slow tapping if feeling “sad,” a fast-loud tapping to reflect “excited.” Create different tapping rhythms to represent different feelings with your child (non-verbally).
- Encourage children to tap along with the syllables or letters as they say or spell words.
- Play with two or more children taking turns playing/copying a rhythm. This type of turn taking introduces the underlying components of conversations (listening, timing, and replying).

Benefits of Play

- **Sparks vocalizations** and verbalizations timed to the beat of their drumming.
- **Encourages expression** of self without the requirement of words.
- **Develops coordination** using rhythm and timing as children keep the beat of a song or imitate a tapping pattern using the drums.
- **Develops manual skills**, foundational for supporting early writing, when using “sticks.”

My Numbers 1-10

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1

ONE

2

TWO

3

THREE

4

FOUR

5

FIVE

6

SIX

7

SEVEN

8

EIGHT

9

NINE

10

TEN

BIG ART

Big Art means big movement – use your whole body to draw on large paper.

Tape the paper down on the floor and let the kids draw big designs. Encourage them to reach, stretch, and change their body into various positions as they draw. Sitting criss-cross and/or in a V with legs to the side, as well as in positions like side lying, belly time, kneeling, and on all-fours increases the whole-body impact of this activity.

Step by Step FUN

Activity Alternatives

- **For children with limited mobility and/or decreased strength and endurance:** Take your paper to the table and complete the Big Art from a seated position in a supportive chair.
- **For children who have fine motor difficulties:** Use jumbo-sized crayons, chalk, or use finger paints rather than standard crayons or markers.
- **For children working on functional utensil grasp:** Use a shortened writing tool like a golf pencil, broken crayon/chalk for the activity – this promotes using three fingers while they draw.
- **For children working on language:** Discuss the art (ex: the color/size/shape, reason that image was chosen) or tell a story involving the picture.

Schedule Boosters

- **Liven up your bath time routine** by using bath crayons to trace their hand and/or water toys on a tiled wall or use the tile wall as the canvas for your child's creative Big Art design. Make sure to stay seated for safety in the tub!
- **Go outdoors!** Bring chalk and spray bottles with you and incorporate water play. Make designs on your fence or sidewalk with chalk or use a spray bottle to make water designs (these are temporary and fun!).

SUPPLIES:

- Large paper
- Tape
- Washable markers, crayons, or chalk
- Spray bottle*
- Bath crayons*

*Used with Schedule Boosters



Challenge Boosters

- Move your art up the wall or easel and complete the drawing/tracing on a vertical surface to target upper body and lower body muscles in a different way.
- Channel your inner Michelangelo by taping your paper underneath a table and laying beneath it while completing your Big Art on your back to work different muscle groups.

Benefits of Play

- **Core strengthening:** A strong core is necessary for stability, posture, and movement.
- **Upper body and hand strengthening:** Strengthen these muscles while bearing weight in various positions to draw.
- **Encourages creativity:** Children can express themselves, exhibit how they interpret their world, and reveal how they feel through art.
- **Sensory processing:** While creating Big Art, senses such as touch, movement, and body position are developed and honed.

Step By Step Sculpture

SUPPLIES:

- Sculpting or modeling clay
- Paper or plastic plate, cookie sheet, or tray
- Non-skid surface for under the plate, cookie sheet, or tray

This is a perfect opportunity for more than one child! At a table, place a plate in front of each child and the mound of sculpting clay placed on their dominant or weaker side, based on their needs. (Placing it on the weaker side will encourage more use of it. Provide step-by-step verbal instructions to sculpt a smiley face (keep this a surprise)).

Sample instructions:

1. "Tear a piece off of the clay and roll it into a ball the size of a quarter."
2. "Place the ball in the middle of the plate."
3. "Gently press on the ball to flatten it slightly so it stays in place."
4. "Take a piece of clay, half the size of the first ball, and roll it into a ball."
5. "Make another ball the same size as the small ball."
6. "Place both small balls above the big ball on the plate."
7. "Place three fingers from your left hand next to the left ball."
8. "Move the small ball to the other side of your fingers and put it on the plate."
9. "Gently press on the ball to flatten it slightly so it stays in place."
10. "Place three fingers from your right hand next to the right ball."
11. "Move the small ball to the other side of your fingers and put it on the plate."
12. "Gently press on the ball to flatten it slightly so it stays in place."
13. "Take a large piece of clay and roll it into a snake the length of your index finger."
14. "Place that snake under the large ball on the plate."
15. "Curve each end of the snake up."

Step by Step FUN

Activity Alternatives

- **Reduce sensory and fine motor challenges** by providing a specific amount of modeling clay for each step.
- **Tell them what they will be sculpting** and/or provide them with a model to distinguish being told vs. being shown what the end product will be.
- **Simplify the project** by creating objects with fewer steps, like a circle, to accommodate varying skill levels.
- **Tap their right or left hand or side**, when discriminating between right and left is necessary, if your child does not yet know their right from left.



Challenge Boosters

- Create different objects, such as animals, to add variety and complexity.
- Incorporate a time constraint by setting a timer for completing each step. Gradually reduce the time allowed for each subsequent step to enhance the challenge.

Benefits of Play

- **Enhances receptive language skills** by focusing your child's attention on and comprehension of verbal instructions.
- **Develops fundamental skills** in following verbal directions, essential for everyday life and academic success.
- **Fine motor and hand awareness skills** are developed and enhanced through the manipulation of the sculpting clay.
- **Right-left discrimination** is developed as they follow the instructions to use their left vs. right hand or place items on the left or right side.

Act It Out

Read the book aloud and act it out, assigning each child a role. Set the scene, discuss the sequence, position everyone, and call "Action!" Encourage action using words and movements.

Step by Step FUN

Activity Alternatives

- **Simplify storyline:** Break down the story into smaller segments. Act out shorter books or those with recurring phrases.
- **Visual storyboard:** Create a visual timeline for the story to aid understanding.
- **Incorporate sensory elements:** Enhance engagement with textured props, scents, sounds, and lighting changes.
- **For children who need speech-language support or with limited speech:**
 - **Encourage non-verbal communication:** Foster the use of gestures, facial expressions, props, and a communication device in addition to words and sounds.
- **For children with mobility limitations:**
 - **Provide accessible props** and adapt scenes for comfortable enactment from any position.
 - **Encourage expression** through facial, vocal, or prop-related movements.

Schedule Booster: Enact familiar stories during routine car rides.

Challenge Boosters

- Add creative expression by acting out alternative endings or new scenes.
- "Get in Character" by dressing up/using more complex props. Provide materials they use to create costumes/props to further elevate the challenge.
- Create a storybook collage. Children draw or place stickers/pictures to represent key scenes in the story on separate pieces of paper and arrange the pieces to create a visual representation.

SUPPLIES:

- Favorite children's book
- Paper, markers, themed stickers, pictures cut-outs*

*Use with Activity Alternatives and Challenge Boosters



Benefits of Play

- **Cognitive development:** Helps children address detail, process tasks, and execute in sequential order – critical skills for learning and follow through on daily routines.
- **Emotional/self-expression and empathy:** Acting out scenes allows the child to understand and manage their feelings while stepping into the shoes of various characters.
- **Bonding/relationships:** Collaborative activities strengthen bonds with family and peers.
- **Imagination and creativity:** Encourages the child to create and explore new scenarios.
- **Language development and communication:** Enhances vocabulary, active listening, and verbal turn-taking. Provides the opportunity for playmates to practice taking turns in conversation.
- **Physical development:** Movement and coordination involved in acting facilitates motor skills.



The Genius of Play | An initiative of The Toy Association
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