



10 No-Cost, Screen-Free Activities to Play with Your Preschooler

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Most parents want to provide more for their children than their parents were able to do for them. But, have you ever noticed how kids tend to have fun with things as simple as a cardboard box? It's true.

Getting back to basics

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) report (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/129/1/e204.full>) on the importance of play explains that inexpensive toys such as blocks, balls, jump ropes and buckets are often the best kind for kids. In fact, they're more effective in allowing children to be imaginative and creative than more expensive toys that may be out of reach for many parents.



So, why not take that cardboard box and play with them? **More than any material gift, YOU are the best toy your child will ever receive!**

Not just kids' stuff

While it may be hard to relax and give yourself over to play, view this time with your child as an adventure. You are not only promoting the many benefits of play ([/English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Young-Children-Learn-A-Lot-When-They-Play.aspx](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Young-Children-Learn-A-Lot-When-They-Play.aspx)), but also getting to know your child better and strengthening the parent-child bond. For starters, your role can actually be quite minimal and the play you undertake can be almost any activity.

Here are a dozen old-school play ideas that your preschooler will adore.

Bonus: *You don't need much time or expensive lessons or toys to participate in any of the activities listed!*

- Duck, Duck, Goose:** Everyone sits in a circle. One child is "It" and goes around the circle tapping everyone on the head and saying, "Duck." At this child's discretion, he or she taps someone and calls out "Goose." At the moment, the child tapped must jump up and chase the child who was "It" around the circle of kids. If the child who was "It" makes it around the circle and sits down, then he or she is "safe." If tagged by the "Goose," then he or she is out. Either way, the Goose is now "It" and the game resumes. Eventually, only two children are left. The last child left without being tagged wins.
- London Bridge is Falling Down:** Two children form a bridge by joining hands across from each other. As everyone sings the nursery rhyme, all the children pass under the up stretched arms. When the song ends, the arms are dropped around the child passing through at the time. Then, the song changes to, "Take the key and lock him up." Those joining hands can start rocking arms back and forth. Preschoolers delight in being "locked up" and swayed to and fro.
- Limbo:** Bring a broom stick outside and ask two older children or adults hold the ends. Have the children go under the stick without touching it. If the stick is touched, then that child is out. After everyone has had a turn, the stick can be gradually lowered in increments. This can be done to music, too, if available.
- Egg Races:** Make some hard boiled eggs and bring them outside with some tablespoons. Have fun telling your preschooler where they have to walk, run, jump, etc., while balancing the egg on the spoon. This promotes balance and dexterity.

5. **Simon Says:** This is one of the most popular games for young children to play. It encourages good listening skills and focus. You are Simon. Stand facing your children and give orders, such as *"Simon says to touch your nose"* or *"Simon says to do a jumping jack."* As you call out each order, the children must do whatever you do, as long as you have said, *"Simon Says."* If you just say, *"Do this,"* whoever follows the action that you now do, is out. The last child standing wins.
6. **Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes:** You sing the tune and control the pace. Children have to touch the body part being mentioned, as it is mentioned. You can speed up the pace of the tune, and your child has to move faster and faster to keep up. It can get pretty funny as everyone tries to touch their knees and toes as fast as possible.
7. **Nature walks:** You can turn literally any walk outside into a nature walk—even a walk around the block. Observe the weather, animals, bugs, and plants. You might say, *"Look at those big clouds,"* or *"Touch this grass. It is still wet from yesterday's rain."* Preschoolers especially love exploring and are sure to have plenty of questions for you along the way!
8. **Follow the Leader:** Move all around doing different movements. Everyone has to do what you do. Simple. Great. Fun!
9. **Tag:** You can be "It" for starters. Everyone tries to catch you and tag you. If you are tagged, then that child gets to be "It." Some designated spots can be considered "safe," like all the trees, or park benches, etc. This is a great excuse to just run around!
10. **Run Around:** You can be "It" and call out things for everyone to do. For example, *"Run from this tree to that tree,"* or *"Hop on one foot from this bench to that tree."* There are endless suggestions—you will probably run out of ideas before your preschooler gets bored!

Remember

While you may find many opportunities to capitalize on "teachable moments" during these activities, the key is to do what comes naturally to you as a parent. Playing together shouldn't be a chore or something you feel pressure to do. Enjoy the time you spend with your child. It will pass all too soon!

More information

- Young Children Learn A Lot When They Play (/English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Young-Children-Learn-A-Lot-When-They-Play.aspx)
- Playing is How Toddlers Learn (/English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Playing-is-How-Toddlers-Learn.aspx)
- Sports Goals and Applications - Preschoolers (/English/ages-stages/preschool/nutrition-fitness/Pages/Sports-Goals-and-Applications-Preschoolers.aspx)
- Kids & Tech: 10 Tips for Parents in the Digital Age (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Tips-for-Parents-Digital-Age.aspx)
- The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining a Strong Parent-Child Bond: Focus on Children in Poverty (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/129/1/e204.full>) (AAP Clinical Report)

About Dr. Kowal-Connelly



Suane Kowal-Connelly, MD, FAAP is a pediatrician with 30 years group practice experience and is a voluntary faculty staff physician at Nassau University Medical Center mentoring residents. She also cares for private patients at the Long Island Federally Qualified Health Centers (LIFQHC) in Nassau County. Within the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), she sits on the Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness, the Council on School Health, and the Section on Obesity. Dr. Kowal-Connelly is a USAT (USA Triathlon) Level I Certified Coach and a USAT Youth & Jr. Coach. She is also founder of [www.HealthPoweredByYou.com](http://www.healthpoweredbyyou.com/) (<http://www.healthpoweredbyyou.com/>), where families and organizations can learn strategies for successful lifelong health and wellness and

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