



Indoor Play Ideas: Fun Ways for Families to Connect

Whether your family needs to isolate after a positive COVID test (</English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/How-to-Talk-to-Your-Child-about-Their-Positive-COVID-19-Test.aspx>), or storms cancel outdoor plans, being stuck at home can create some serious cabin fever. To help cope, focus on positive points that are in your control. A big upside of more indoor family time: more chances to connect with each another through simple play.

Here are some easy ways to deepen your connection with your kids through different kinds of play. At the same time, these activities can build on their learning and development.



Work & play side-by-side

Imitating grown-ups and chipping in at home builds a sense of independence and responsibility. Involve kids as you clean, prepare meals, and make shopping lists! As you enlist kids to help in the actual cooking (</English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Cooking-With-Your-Children.aspx>) of meals, also gather some of their play food and kitchen-themed toys at the table. They can explore these while you're at the stove. Even empty pasta or cereal boxes or oatmeal and spice containers can be fun. The conversation and just being present with one another while you play (and work!) side-by-side is what's most important here.

Some questions to ask them while your kids are pretend playing in the kitchen:

- What are you making?
- What will you call your creation?
- How do you think it will taste? Can you describe the flavors to me?

Also try to get in the habit of narrating your everyday activities. ("Now I have to mince the onion into tiny pieces.") Kids pick up new vocabulary as they hear you use words in context.

Pretend with friends

A great way to check in on your child's emotional health and well-being is to use dolls, stuffed animals and puppets. For example, if your child is going to school virtually, suggest during playtime they pretend to send their favorite doll or stuffed animal to school. Listen carefully to their narrative to uncover any underlying concerns or challenges they may be facing in real life.

Some questions to ask:

- What does [doll's name] find hard at school? What's easy? What's frustrating?
- Pretend the doll is crying and say: "Hmm ... I wonder why the doll might be sad?"
- Pretend the doll is laughing and say: "Hmm ... I wonder why the baby might be laughing?"

Get creative with arts & crafts

ing and art projects can help reduce stress, for parents and children. Work together on a drawing or craft , taking turns adding elements. This helps build flexibility and collaborative thinking. The outcome isn't important; it's about the quality time, the memory-making and the engaging social interaction.

Some points to consider:

[Back to Top](#)

- **Brainstorm together.** Brainstorming ideas, testing them out, and taking steps to finish a project are skills that will help children throughout their lives. Model brainstorming by pretending to not know what to do next (e.g., what color or material to choose) and saying, "Hmm, I think we're stuck. What can we try?"
- **Share & imagine.** The pandemic has limited children's contact with far-flung relatives and friends. Encourage kids to make a drawing to mail to a grandparent or loved one. As they're drawing, talk about the recipient and some of their favorite things. Wonder aloud how that person might be feeling this time of year. This can help kids practice understanding another person's point of view and emotions.

Sort, build & explore

Children learn and grow when they explore the physical world. Their minds learn best when they interact and play with parents, siblings, caregivers and others. Help build gross and fine motor skills by placing pieces just out of reach and having kids pull them near. Make observations as you play together. Joint attention—caregivers and kids looking at objects while playing and talking—helps with social thinking and language.

As kids play, draw attention to their senses. Ask:

- What colors do you see?
- [*Clap two pieces together.*] Ooh—listen to that! Can you make that sound?
- Which looks/feels/sounds better to you, this or that?

Remember

Play time with siblings and grown-ups help kids build brain connections, develop their emotional skills, and strengthen their relationships. During this time when many children are not able to see teachers, friends and other caregivers, the chance to play with adults and siblings in their own home can provide an important connection.

It may not always be easy for families to carve out time to play. But the more you practice and enjoy it, the more it becomes part of your parenting tool chest.

More information

- The Power of Play: How Fun and Games Help Children Thrive (/English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Caution-Children-at-Play.aspx)
- Simple Ways to Entertain and Boost Your Baby's Development at Home (/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Simple-Ways-to-Boost-Your-Babys-Development-at-Home.aspx)
- Selecting Appropriate Toys for Young Children in the Digital Era (<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/143/1/e20183348>)(AAP Policy Statement)
- Melissa & Doug: What We Believe (<https://www.melissaanddoug.com/what-we-believe.html>)

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