



2-6 YEAR-OLDS

**SUNNY
IDEAS
FOR A
RAINY
DAY**

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The Kids Are Alright

One of my favorites images in a children's book is on the opening page of *The Cat in the Hat*, by Dr. Seuss. Two forlorn children sit in wooden chairs, looking out the window on a grey and dismal day. It says,

The sun did not shine.
It was too wet to play.
So we sat in the house
All that cold, cold, wet day.

I love this for so many reasons. For one, I know the delicious mayhem that is about to ensue. Another, is that it's a given that the children want and need to be playing outside. I can still remember the feeling of my 6 year-old nose pressed against the window as I yearned to go outside when the weather wouldn't allow.

Needless to say, there have been extraordinary changes in our world since "Sally and I" were created in 1957. Children have become technologically savvy beyond some of our wildest dreams. The sheer amount of information generated and being accessed by children and adults is unprecedented. Many people, including politicians and some of our leading educators, assume that the brains of today's children, and therefore their developmental needs, have changed too. To my relief and to the relief of those of us who have worked with and observed children daily, this is not the case.

Children's bodies, along with their brains, are growing in the same basic ways at the same times they always have (see note). If this were not true, babies would be sitting up at 2 weeks, writing at 2 years and doing calculus by 10. Seem silly? Still, parents are inundated with false information. We (I'm a parent too) get nervous because we are pressured into believing that today's children need to be doing more cognitively advanced tasks, earlier and earlier.

Let's take a deep breath. Your children, my children, *the world's children*, aren't a new species of human (okay, yes, it feels like that

sometimes). Instead, they are traveling along a well-worn developmental path that can guide us if we use the information with discernment. Awareness of developmental yardsticks can help us relax into parenting. It helps us judge whether a school, classroom or activity is appropriate. Informed but not anxious, we can have the peace of mind to let our children grow and learn without pressure to plow ahead of what is nurturing, now.

It helps to remember that *the* essential relationship remains between you and your child. It's the foundation upon which everything else rests. Fundamental to that relationship are qualities: openness, safety and awareness, which lead to golden moments of joy and connection. I always want more of those. At every age.

Obviously, this book is not about encouraging pandemonium in your home a la *The Cat in the Hat*. It is about using years of accumulated knowledge of child development I've garnered as a teacher, parent of two and life coach to guide you in providing activities that are not only enjoyable, but encourage you and your child to connect, grow and learn. Rain or shine.²

Notes:






1. An article in the Harvard Education Letter, *Kids Haven't Changed: Kindergarten Has*, (Pappano, Sept./Oct. 2010) states that a national study conducted by the world renowned Gesell Institute For Human Development shows that children are still progressing along the cognitive and behavioral continuum that Gesell identified first in 1925, then in 1940 and in later studies by colleagues in 1964, 1979 and again in 2010.

2. Of course each child is unique (and this should go without saying), therefore, you are free to mix and match activities because *you know your child*.

How To Use These Books

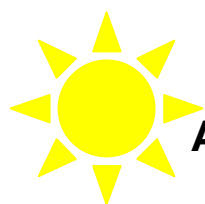
There is a *Sunny Ideas for a Rainy (or any other) Day* for each of these age groups: 2-6, 6-10, and 10-14. AND, there will be multiple installments so that you add a new age group or new activities to your collection.

What will you get?

- ♥ A few general developmental attributes of a typically developing child for each age year
- 2 activities per age
- Instructions for each activity and a list of materials (supplies are easy to find)
- A parent key for:
 - Prep/set up time (1- 4 clocks) 
 - Messy /clean up (1- 4 sponges) 
 - Level of supervision (green, yellow, red)   
 - Why do this activity (besides fun, of course) ?
 - Ideas for extending or adding on +
- Templates for activities when needed
- A list of resources for further reading

Two – Three

- ♥ They can learn 2 new words per day!
- ♥ They're mobile now and learning through their senses.
- ♥ Play happens *alongside* other children.
- ♥ Cause and effect is very interesting – filling and dumping.
- ♥ They want both comfort and independence = frustration
- ♥ Growing sense of self (see above) – “mine,” emotions/feelings.
- ♥ Follows 1 and 2 step directions.



Activity: Fill and Dump



You'll need:

1. 2 buckets, boxes, baskets
2. 1 tray or larger
3. 2 sets of 12 (or so) items, one your child knows the word for, & a new item, e.g. cars & horses (or type of animal new to your child)

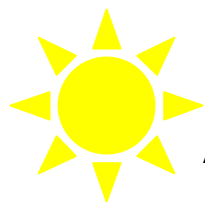
What to do:

1. Put all the items on the tray or in the big basket.
2. Set up the 2 buckets/bins far enough away so your child has to move to reach them.
3. Say something like, “Let's put all the cars in the blue bucket and all the horses in the red one.” Show.
4. As your child sorts, repeat the name of the item (s)he is holding.
5. Encourage and do some yourself. Then allow your child to dump the items back into the large basket.
6. Repeat as long as your child is interested.

? This activity builds vocabulary. Sorting is a foundational math skill. Remember to sort by only 1 attribute. Small and large motor skills are engaged.

+ Change items to add new word each time you play.

+ Reinforce /teach color words with different color buckets.



Activity: Ball Roll

You'll need:

1 light ball 4- 8-inch diameter

What to do:

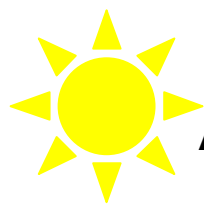
1. Sit on the floor/rug opposite your child.
2. Gently roll the ball back and forth moving backward after your child has successfully rolled the ball and easily captured your roll, twice.
3. Maintain eye contact as you roll the ball to your child and when it's caught.
4. 2 year olds get their egos bruised easily so keep the activity successful.

? This deceptively simple activity is reinforcing and deepening trust and connection between you and your child. Your child is developing muscle strength and eye/hand coordination too.

+ Use a variety of balls (1 at a time) in size and texture to encourage vocabulary.

Three - Four

- ♥ They can learn 6 new words per day!
- ♥ Exploring with their senses and gross motor activities.
- ♥ Curiosity about how things work and why – lots of questions.
- ♥ Cooperative play – sharing materials with others, take turns.
- ♥ Awareness of other people's feelings.
- ♥ Ability to tell a story and interest in telling, "what happened."
- ♥ Follows 2 and 3 step directions.



Activity: Melted Lunch Bag Collage



You'll need:

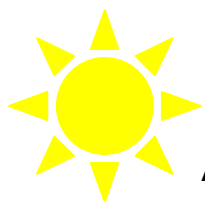
1. Plastic recycled lunch bags (transparent)
2. Leftover wrapping paper, stickers, construction paper, pages from magazines, scraps of yarn
3. Aluminum Foil (reused would be great)
4. Iron & ironing surface
5. Towels

What to do:

1. Have your child fill a plastic bag with odds and end that (s)he has cut from the supplies. This part can take some time, as there is cutting and choosing involved.
2. Place the bag between two pieces of foil on top of a towel.
3. Iron it flat.
4. Cool and peel the foil.
5. Tada! A home-laminated collage.

? In this activity your child is problem – solving by making choices for what to put in the bag. Small motor skills are developed with cutting and stuffing and closing the bag. Heat and its effect on plastic plus change in volume are scientific and mathematics concepts.

- + Make a collage based on a category – animals, plants, people, shapes, or colors. Use this as a naming (vocabulary) opportunity.
- + Discuss why the bag no longer opens.



Activity: Body Parts Dance



You'll need:

1. Music – different styles/tempos/moods
2. An open space – safe for dancing

What to do:

1. Dance freely to the music.
2. When it seems right, ask your child to do an arm dance with you and model moving your arms in all types of ways.
3. Do the same with other large parts: head, shoulders, hips, legs, feet, elbows. They love it when you do a tongue dance.
4. It doesn't matter if your child moves other parts at the same time. It will be clear if they are paying attention to the part you've suggested.

? Obviously, the point of this activity is naming and knowing parts of the body. Body awareness, with adult support as partner, lays the groundwork for positive self-image, pride in body, and motor skills. Dancing together builds non-verbal communication and connection. Exposure to different types of music brings diversity of sound, tempo, instrumentation, language and culture to your child.

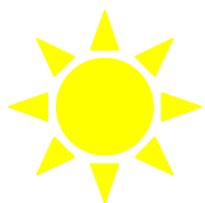
- + This is a great opportunity to add to your child's knowledge of parts of the body. It's fun and can get quite silly. Let your child call out parts too.

+ Consider gathering music that is culturally important to your friends and family and then adding from cultures that aren't represented.

+ When you're finished dancing, you can look in magazines for the parts you used and make a person out of them, or have your child tell you what parts you need as you draw a person.

Four – Five

- ♥ Active, on the go, busy, collisions common.
- ♥ Pretend play is imaginative and sustained.
- ♥ Interested in how things move & work – transportation, digestion, and elimination.
- ♥ Ideas for problem solving are unusual & creative.
- ♥ Cooperative play – some will collaborate (build off others' ideas).
- ♥ Follows multi-step directions.
- ♥ Rhyming, beginning sounds, alphabet recognition, number recognition 1 - 5.
- ♥ Understands basic sequence of events.
- ♥ Nightmares common.



Activity: Bring a Book to Life



You'll need:

The first time you do this, you may need to gather the stuffed animals/dolls that can represent characters on your own. After you do it once, your child will know what to do and can be part of the decision- making.

1. A picture book with a story you both know and love.

See book suggestions below “What to do.”

2. Stuffed animals and dolls

What to do:

1. Read through the story and decide what stuffed animals/dolls are needed.
2. Read the story and have your child move the animals/dolls along with the story. You can be characters too.

Book ideas: *The Grouchy Ladybug* (Carle), *The Wonderful Book* (Gore), *Katie Loves the Kittens* (Himmelman), *Ananzi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti* (McDermott), *The Little Red Hen* (Galdone), *Brown Bear Brown Bear What Do You See?* (Carle).

? The story you choose will dictate vocabulary exposure and “message.”

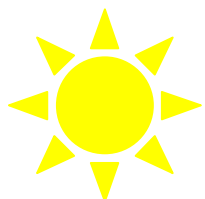
? Deciding which dolls and animals to use and then gathering them for characters (including problem-solving for substitutions) are excellent planning, memory and reasoning activities.

? Acting out the words of the story requires receptive language skills, including aural comprehension. When acting out the story, your child is taking on the roles of the characters, which seeds empathy and understanding through feeling the emotions and performing actions from another’s perspective.

+ If your child wants to repeat this activity with the same book consider making a setting for the story, e.g. draw a barn or make one out of blocks.

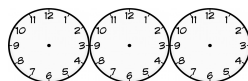
+ Ask questions about the story, about the general sequence, or what happened first, and/or last.

+ Move like the characters in the story, e.g. “if you were a bear, how would you move?”



Activity: Vehicle Detective

Find the matching vehicle



You'll need:

1. Photos of real vehicles – 2 copies of each
2. Template on pg.17
3. Highlighter marker
4. Clipboard
5. Pencil
6. Magnifying glass and/or other “detective” props

What to do:

This activity can be done two different ways: A: in two parts using photographs, B: all at once using pictures from the Internet. 4 - 5's joy in actively learning makes the preparation worthwhile. Playing detective (plus props) is irresistible to most children.

A:

1. On a walk with your child, photograph as many different vehicles as you can.
2. Print 2 copies each of 4 photos.
3. Have your child cut them out.
4. Glue 1 of each pair on the attached template.
5. When your child is doing something else, tape the duplicate 4 photos around the room/rooms of your home ingeniously, but not hidden.
6. Put the template on the clipboard. Give her/him the magnifying glass.
7. Explain what a detective does and then tell your child (s)he will be trying to find the matching pictures *somewhere* in your home. And when found, circle it.
8. When your child returns to you, discuss where it was found and what it's called.
9. Write either, in highlighter, next to the photo.

B:

1. Find, and print duplicate photos/pictures on the Internet.
2. Follow steps 2-9.

? Plan A gives your child and you an adventure outside in the community where your child can identify vehicles and meet people. Do this on your way somewhere else (if you have time). Interaction with the community builds social skills, awareness of their world and promotes confidence.

? In steps 3 - 5, your child is using small motor skills (cutting and gluing).

? Matching is a foundational cognitive skill. This activity also builds vocabulary, expressive language, motor planning, and independence.

+ You can use pictures of anything your child is interested in e.g. animals, flowers, people, facial expressions, family members, clothing, letters, numbers, etc.

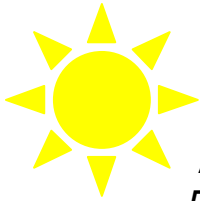
+ If your child is ready, have him/her trace one, some, or all of the letters you've written in highlighter.

+ If your child is motivated and can form letters fairly easily, you can forgo the highlighter and write out the vehicles names on separate paper for your child to copy onto her/his detective sheet.

Five – Six

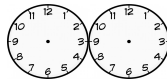
- ♥ Persists in long term projects and can return to an activity after being interrupted.
- ♥ Plays collaboratively now (builds off of others' ideas).
- ♥ Can learn 6-9 new words per day!
- ♥ Can tell a story with important events and details using complex sentences.
- ♥ Has the concept of "word" separated from another "word."
- ♥ Can work with numbers 1-10, e.g. which is less 5 or 6? What number comes before 8? And, addition to make 10.
- ♥ Needs permission from adults, asks "Can I?"
- ♥ Compares objects for similarities and differences (people too).
- ♥ Can recognize the "unit" (e.g. blue, orange) of a repeating pattern.

- ♥ Skips, walks backwards + more complex activities (bike, swim)
- ♥ Clear “handedness.”
- ♥ Pride and self-esteem from learning new skills.
- ♥ Can use clear language to express feelings and causes.
- ♥ Thrives on repetition, consistency and guidelines.



Activity: Block Recipes

Build a structure based on a recipe



You'll need:

1. Large piece of paper (approx. 24x32) from a roll, or chart pad
2. A fairly large assortment of building blocks made of wood or foam
3. Markers
3. Sticky notes
4. Camera

What to do:

Prep:

1. Choose 6 different blocks that vary in shape and size.
2. Write “Recipe” across the top of the paper.
3. Trace each block onto the large paper leaving space for a sticky note to the left of each.
4. Write one number from 1-9 on each of 4 or 5 stickies.

With your child:

5. Place recipe onto the floor or on a wall so your child can reach all of it easily.
6. Ask your child to match the blocks to their outlines. Decide what you'll call each one, e.g. large rectangle, smallest cylinder, bridge, cone, etc.
7. Now put 1 sticky (with number on it) beside 4 or 5 of the block shapes.
8. Tell your child that both of you are going to make a building

using the number of blocks the recipe says. Like cooking, but instead of making a cake you are building something.

10. Let your child “read” the recipe and go back and forth getting the “ingredients”, checking for number and shape accuracy. **

*** By now, you’ll probably have to remind your child to gather all the blocks before starting to build. And, it will be tempting for him/her to add more blocks (not on the recipe). The learning is deeper if you insist that (s)he wait until the building is built by following the recipe and then add anything after that.*

10. Now discuss what you’ll build. Build it.
11. Take a picture of the recipe and your child with the building.
12. Play with your creation, or come back later.

? Matching, counting, checking for accuracy, recognizing and naming numerals, shapes and size are all math skills. Working memory is also exercised. Fitting blocks together develops spatial skills.

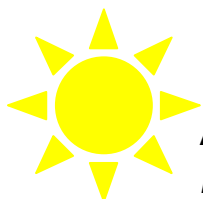
? Discussing what to build with a partner develops social skills and imagination.

? Requiring adherence to the recipe builds problem-solving skills (creativity) and gives practice with self-regulation and following directions. Allowing additions later rewards patience and encourages creativity.

+ Change the numbers. Rotate block combinations. Add different shapes to the chart.

+ Ask your child to dictate the story of the building, or make up a story about what happens in it. If your child is inclined, he/she can write some of it. Put several stories together into a “Block Recipe Book” with the photos you took.

+ Have your child create the recipe.



Activity: Cotton Ball Olympics *Blow everyone away!*



You'll need:

1. Cotton balls
2. Plastic bendy straws
3. A smooth table, counter top or floor. Table is best.
4. A plastic tablecloth will help – its smooth and... saliva happens
5. Containers, boxes, cups of different width openings

What to do:

1. You will try and blow your cotton ball into the box, bin, or cup.
2. You can count how few blows it takes, or make it a race for who gets there first. Or you can take turns blowing the same cotton ball. Or you can go for the challenge of the smallest opening.
3. Rules are: you must stay on one side of the table.

? Blowing activities, in general, are great for developing strong breathing, mouth muscle coordination and keeping ear passages clear. As laboring moms and yogis know, deep exhales can calm the nervous system. This is useful at any age.

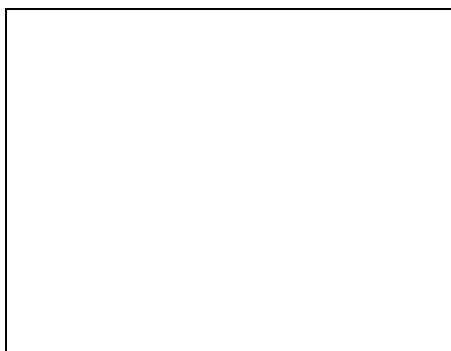
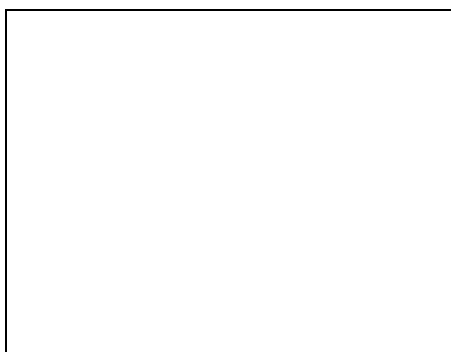
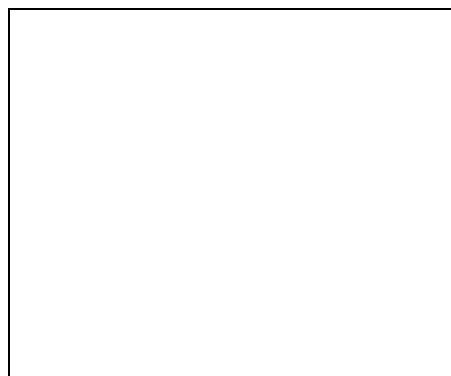
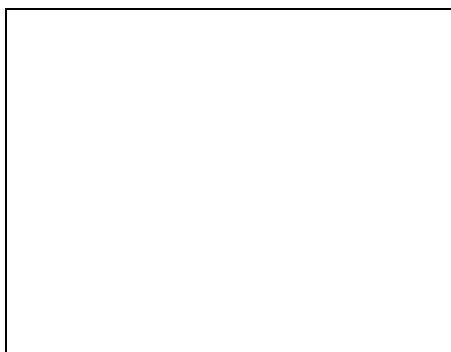
+ Make a cotton ball obstacle course using recycled materials; toilet paper tubes, empty tape rolls, etc.

+ Make a racetrack for the cotton balls.

+ Play cotton ball farm and try to get scattered cotton ball sheep into the barn before a wolf comes.

+ Switch to ping pong balls.

Vehicle Detective Template



RESOURCES

Websites for Child Development

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/childdevelopmenttracker/one/index.html>

<http://parents.lego.com/en-us/childdevelopment/cd%200-2yrs.aspx>

<http://childdevelopmentinfo.com/>

www.gesellinstitute.org

Good Books for Parents to Read

The Essential Partnership: How Parents and Children Can Meet the Emotional Needs of Infancy and Childhood by Stanley Greenspan

Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? By Beverly Daniel Tatum PhD.

---Explanation of the development of racial identity.

Mind in the Making by Ellen Galinsky

---7 essential skills children need.

A Whole New Mind by Daniel Pink

---21st century skills according to Pink.

Yardsticks by Chip Wood

Articles

“The Growing Backlash Against Over Parenting” by Nancy Gibbs

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1940697,00.html>

“Learning Through Play” by David Elkind PhD.

<http://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/articles/valueofplay/learningthroughplay.html>

“Don’t! The Secret of Self-Control” by Jonah Lehrer

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/05/18/090518fa_fact_lehrer

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The information in this book is culled from years of experience in the classroom, from readings (see Resources), attending conferences and working in collaboration with inventive, interesting and extraordinary teachers. I cannot name them all, but a few contributed so much to my understanding of children, child development, teaching and creating curriculum that I must name them.

So thank you to:

Karen Biddulph, Director of the Mead School, whose faith in me, friendship, and consistent guidance in the social and emotional development of children, taught me more than I can say.

Joy Lenters, teacher extraordinaire, whose years as my teaching partner (and friend) inspired me to quest for depth and meaning in curriculum and is still inspiring me outside of the classroom.

Barbara Allen, who taught me “Make Ten” and so much about mathematics and about the brain.

Marcia Zimmerman, who thought up the original “Block Recipes” (See *Sunny Ideas* for 2-6 year-olds) and whose compelling and inventive activities supported the learning of so many Pre-K and Kindergarten students over the years.

Chris Mutolo, for his passion for reaching every child, and for showing me the how to communicate more clearly with children, especially when giving instructions.

Unfortunately, I can’t identify where some of the activities in this book come from. I think people have been making explosions from vinegar and baking soda for a very long time. I don’t remember the first time I did this. It is the same with using rubber bands to make prints and mixing colors to match skin tones. I’m guessing that a teacher from childhood must have shown me these, and more. So thank you.