

Family Activities

Packet 4

Crash! Bang! Boom! Thud! These sounds reverberate through my 1,500 square-foot house, quickly followed by an equally thunderous, “Settle down!” bellowed by my husband. Rough-and-tumble, big-body play is a natural part of child development. Children often seek activities that engage all of their muscles in physical movement. Jumping, running, rolling, and crashing are not just an outlet to let off steam but a way for young children to learn how their bodies work.

In fact, the benefits of rough-and-tumble play go beyond physical development; it also has been linked to stronger self-regulation, the ability to assess risk, enhanced social-emotional development, a deeper understanding of verbal and non-verbal communication, and the ability to make decisions and solve complex problems (Carlson, 2018). Additionally, such play fosters creativity and problem-solving skills as children navigate and create their own games and activities.

The benefits of physical play are immeasurable, but what happens when little bodies need to move in big ways and we’re quarantined in small spaces? How do we find a balance in giving our children the movement they need without driving ourselves crazy in the process? If you have access to open spaces, use them! Large open fields, hiking trails, wooded areas, and bike paths can be great places for children to run, crawl, and climb while remaining a safe distance away from others. Find a hill for them to roll down, a tree to climb, or a space to kick a soccer ball. If you can, schedule time to get outside and into these spaces regularly.

If you are under strict shelter-in-place guidelines, finding outlets for loud and boisterous play becomes more challenging. On Monday night, after yelling “Settle down!” one too many times, my husband decided to embrace the intense need for movement our kids were displaying. Instead of heading outside, he pushed our coffee table out of the way, turned on some music, and began an impromptu dance party in our living room. We did a mix of the twist, the floss, and the worm because my husband had made a mental shift from expecting calm bodies to embracing the chaos. He read our children’s body language and gave them exactly what they needed in the moment — a physical outlet.

Here are a few other things that have helped our family meet the need for big body play while stuck in the confines of our small house:

- Jumping on the bed
- Wrestling in the backyard
- Having a pillow fight

- Playing hopscotch
- Rearranging the furniture to build forts
- Sliding down the stairs in our bean bag chairs

Finding the time, energy, and space to engage in physical activity during this time can be challenging. However, it can also be extremely rewarding to embrace the chaos and the need for big body, rough-and-tumble play. The squeals of laughter from my three-year-old as he anticipates the next tickle fight; the joy on my five-year-old's face as he masters a spin move in breakdancing; and the sense of accomplishment my eight-year-old exhibits when he climbs a new tree all remind me that not only will we get through this time of quarantine, but we will come out of it even stronger as a family. Watching them grow and develop through these physical activities has been a silver lining during this challenging period, reinforcing the importance of adapting and finding joy in the little moments.

Infants

Arts, Music and Movement: Painting

Squeeze several different colors of non-toxic, craft paint in blobs on a hard, easy-to-clean surface like a highchair tray, cookie sheet, or even in the bathtub! For easy cleanup, you can take your infant's clothes off and let them explore the paint while wearing only their diaper. Place your infant in the tub, highchair, or in front of the cookie sheet with the paint and watch them play! Keep a damp washcloth handy in case the paint gets anywhere it shouldn't.

This activity is a fantastic way for your infant to explore colors and tactile sensations. You don't need paper for this activity, but you can include some if you'd like. Since paper often rips when wet globs of paint are being explored, another option is to take a piece of paper and press it into the paint mixture after your baby is done playing to capture the resulting art. Once your infant's hands and feet are covered in paint, you can also get a fresh piece of paper and press their hands and feet onto the paper for a cute way to capture how big they are!

Kids will engage with:

- Tactile sensations
- Painting with their hands and feet
- Moving their bodies to manipulate the paint

Materials

- Non-toxic craft paint (you can also make edible infant- safe paint at home. Learn the recipe here:

This type of sensory play is excellent for developing fine motor skills and encouraging creativity from an early age. Plus, it's a fun and messy way for your baby to enjoy discovering new textures and colors in a safe environment.

Communication, Language and literacy: Animal Sounds

Kids will engage with:

- Diverse phonetic sounds
- Association with pictures of animals and sounds

Get cozy on a chair or couch with your infant and, if possible, introduce a farm animal book. Point at each animal, name what they are, and mimic the sound that the animal makes. This activity works especially well with farm animals like ducks, cows, sheep, and pigs.

For example, point to the pictures and say, “A duck says quack” or “A cow says moo,” then repeat the sounds again. If your infant is older, they may even try to make the sounds along with you!

Watch to see if your infant looks at your mouth as you make the different sounds, reaches to touch your mouth to feel the vibrations, kicks their legs, moves their body, or babbles. These reactions indicate they are responding to the sounds. Engaging in this way helps develop their listening and imitation skills, and it can be a fun bonding experience for both of you. Additionally, this activity encourages early language development and helps your infant associate sounds with specific animals, enhancing their cognitive abilities.

Early Math and Discovery: Roll and Count

Infants don't need to know their numbers yet, but that doesn't mean you can't still count for them! Depending on your infant's physical development, either set them up sitting on the floor, leaning against something or surrounded by a support pillow, or lie them on a blanket on the floor on their back. If possible, use 5-10 soft, light, squishy, and textured balls, and very gently roll them towards your baby one at a time, counting sequentially as you release each ball. After you've rolled all the balls to them, let them play, reach for, or grab them. They may try to grab one at a time, get fixated on one, or attempt to grab them all at once.

Kids will engage with:

- Rolling balls and reaching for them
- Hearing numbers

This activity helps introduce your infant to the concept of counting and enhances their fine motor skills as they reach for and grasp the balls. Additionally, the varied textures of the balls stimulate their sense of touch, contributing to their sensory development.

Others and I: Peek – A- Boo

Kids will engage with:

- Connecting with their family member
- Surprise and delight

Peek-a-boo is a classic game that promotes healthy social-emotional development for your baby while also making them laugh! If your baby is sitting in a highchair or seat, this is a great position to play peek-a-boo if they are not eating. If your infant cannot sit up yet, you can play with them as they lay on their back on a soft surface.

Cover your face with your hands to hide it, and when you uncover your face, say “Peek!” or “Peek-A-Boo!” and “I see you!” to surprise and delight your infant. You can also try going behind them and surprising them by quickly poking your head around the side. Make silly voices as you play to see what makes them giggle. This game helps to connect with your infant and aids in developing spatial awareness and object permanence. Additionally, peek-a-boo encourages early social skills and can be a wonderful bonding activity, reinforcing your baby's sense of security and joy.

Physical Development and Healthy Habits: Tracking a ball

To start, lay your child down on the floor and sit in front of them. Once you have their attention, roll a ball slowly from one of your hands to the other within their range of vision. If you don't have a ball, you can use any rollable or wheeled object you have at home, such as an apple, a cup, or a ball of paper. Doing this will help your child learn more about the objects in the world around them and how they behave.

Kids will engage with:

- Moving parts of the body
- Tracking movement

Continue this motion as long as your child follows the object with their eyes; stop when they avert their gaze. After a few minutes, try rolling a new object to see if they'll track it. As you continue with the motion, your child may try to reach for the object and play with it themselves. Let them play with it, and you may even try rolling it back and forth between the two of you.

Allow infants to track or play with the balls for as long as the activity keeps their interest. Once you've finished with the activity, let your child know that you're going to move on to something else, and put the rolling object or objects away. This activity not only aids in visual tracking and motor skills development but also fosters curiosity and exploration in your child.

Toddlers

Arts, Music and Movement: Musical Instrument time

Kids will engage with:

- Listening to music
- Responding to the music they hear
- Exploring musical instruments
- Playing and moving with the beat

Start by providing musical instruments for children to play. This could be an age-appropriate instrument you have around the house, like a xylophone or drum, or something that you make! Then, put on some music, perhaps one of your child's favorite songs, and let them know that you're going to be playing along with the music.

As your child starts to manipulate the instruments and move to the music, watch for them to shift from one foot to the other in time with the beat. They may also play the instrument along with the beat, or in their own rhythm! Encourage your child by imitating their actions and talking about what they're doing (e.g., "Up goes one foot, then down. Up goes the other foot, then down. You're rocking and balancing on one foot, then the other, Grace!"). You can also join in by saying, "I'm going to play the next part!" or "Can I take a turn with my instrument?"

As children begin to lose interest in the activity, let them know that you will play along to one more song before transitioning to the next activity. Informing them about what comes next helps to maintain a smooth flow and keeps them engaged. This musical play not only enhances their sense of rhythm and coordination but also encourages creative expression and interactive fun.

Communication, Language and Literacy: Three little Pigs

Start by telling the story of The Three Little Pigs. You can either read a book you have on hand or narrate the story yourself! Pause periodically to ask questions to engage the children. For example: "What noises do pigs make?"; "How would the wolf knock on the door?"; "Can you run like the little pigs running away from the wolf?" Encouraging your child to engage with the story helps develop their imagination and storytelling skills. It's important to accept all child responses and mimic their sounds and actions. If they say the pigs would dance away, then go ahead and dance with your child. It's also fine if children move around during the story.

Kids will engage with:

- Enjoying language
- Interactive storytelling
- Learning sounds

Try doing this with other well-known stories as well. Sometimes your child may just want to listen to a familiar and beloved story, but other times it's fun to engage in pretend play with the story, thinking about interacting with the characters and the narrative. To transition to the next activity, invite children to make the sound of an animal or move like one to the next part of the day. This interactive storytelling not only enhances their comprehension and listening skills but also makes the learning process enjoyable and dynamic.

Early Math and Discovery: Kid Chef

Kids will engage with:

- Filling containers
- Nesting or stacking objects
- Using language to describe characteristics of objects

Materials

- Plastic bowls in at least three sizes
- A set of nesting cups or box (toys fit inside one another in graduated order, provide your toddler with three or four nesting items to start with)
- A set or collection of one of the following: soft blocks, beanbags , sensory balls, snap-lock beads , plastic or wooden spoons , plastic spatulas measuring cups or spoons
- Pots and pans
- Empty food, condiment or spice containers
- Containers to store items

Choose a low cabinet in your kitchen where you can see your child as you prepare meals, but one that is far enough away from kitchen appliances and your workspace to keep them safe. Replace the cabinet contents with some child-friendly materials. If applicable, remove the child-safety lock on the chosen cabinet. If there is no extra cabinet space in your kitchen, simply fill a plastic storage tub and place it on your kitchen floor.

Show your toddler the new space when you have time to play together. Watch as your child dumps out, explores, fills, and fits together the toys and other materials, so you can support their play and learning. If your child begins filling a container with materials, find some similar materials, fill your container, and describe what your child is doing. Continue to observe and imitate your child's actions, commenting on what you see them do. By frequently modeling measurement terms (e.g., big, bigger, biggest), you'll likely hear your child using some of these words as their vocabulary increases.

This setup not only keeps your child engaged and safely occupied while you cook but also promotes their cognitive development and fine motor skills. It's a simple yet effective way to integrate learning into everyday activities.

Others and I: Find Yourself!

To begin this activity, lay out family photo albums that include your child on the table or the floor. As the children look through these pictures with you, watch and listen for them to identify themselves in the pictures. Whenever your child points to themselves, acknowledge their identifications (e.g., "That's you on the wagon, Joey!"). Encourage children to talk about what they are doing in the photo. Your child may also identify others in the photos, and you can ask what those people are doing.

Kids will engage with:

- Identifying themselves and others
- Identifying images
- Identifying events
- Thinking about their family and community

Show your child photos from when they were younger or of different family members at younger ages. Your child might find it hard to believe that it's the same person, but that's okay! They may also have questions about the events you're describing, such as "Is that grandma's birthday? Was I there?" Answer all their questions, and then ask your own, like "Do you want grandma to come to your birthday this year?" or "What kind of cake do you think that is? Is that the kind of cake you want for your birthday?" Accept all of your child's answers!

When your child begins to lose interest, suggest that you are all done with the photos for now but can always look at them again some other time. Ask your child to help you put them away. This activity not only helps strengthen your child's memory and recognition skills but also fosters a sense of family connection and encourages storytelling.

Physical Development and Healthy Habits: Balls & Buckets

Kids will engage with:

- Numbers and Counting
- Moving parts of the body
- Moving the whole body

For this activity, provide buckets and different kinds of balls for children to play with. You can use any balls or buckets you have or include similar household items. Follow the children's lead as they play, imitating their actions and talking about what they are doing. Listen for counting

words and count as you throw some balls in the bucket (e.g., "One ball in the bucket... two balls in the bucket..."). Your child might want to sit and put balls in the bucket or stand and toss the balls in. Once a few have made it into the bucket, ask if your child wants to pour them out and play again.

For older children, you can even turn this into a game like skeeball. Line up a few buckets and have the child throw the balls to see if they can get them into the furthest bucket. Use this opportunity to count, ("Look, you got 3 in the blue bucket!"). This activity not only enhances their motor skills and hand-eye coordination but also introduces basic math concepts in a fun and engaging way. Additionally, it encourages cooperative play and creativity as children come up with their own variations of the game.

Preschool

Arts , Music and Movement : Foil Sculptures

Give children a piece of aluminum foil to look at and explore. Ask them to describe what they see, and write down their comments on a piece of paper (e.g., "It's

Kids will engage with:

- Creativity
- New words

shiny”; “It’s flat”; “It crinkles”). Follow what the children do with the foil and imitate their actions. If they squish it, you squish it. If they tear it, you tear it. This is called imitation, and children love to be the leader!

Make comments about how the aluminum foil is taking on different shapes, using words like twist, form, bend, and squeeze to describe what they are doing. Explain that the word "sculpture" is used to describe an object made by molding, bending, or twisting materials into a specific shape. Ask the children if they can sculpt their foil into something. Offer more foil as needed. Twist your foil into different shapes and comment on your creations. Then, comment on what the children are doing and listen to their descriptions.

If possible, write down the words children use to describe their work. However, don't let creating the list get in the way of having a fun art experience with them. This activity not only stimulates their creativity and fine motor skills but also introduces them to basic concepts in art and language. Moreover, it fosters a collaborative and interactive learning environment where children feel valued and heard.

Communication, Language and Literacy: Dancing with Letters

Kids will engage with:

- Alphabetic Knowledge
- Moving to music

Begin by drawing each letter of the alphabet on an individual sheet of paper. Then say to the children, “Today we are going to dance with letters.” Let the children pick their first letter.

Play some music and model different ways children might interact with their chosen letter, such as:

- Dancing with the letter in front of their body
- Dancing with the letter held high
- Placing the letter on the floor and jumping over it

Ask the children for ideas on how to move with their letter. You can extend this activity by stopping the music and giving the children a new letter. Ask them to show you a movement that starts with the same letter — for instance, J is for jumping and W is for wiggling. Encourage the children to come up with their own creative movements and praise their efforts.

This activity not only helps reinforce letter recognition but also promotes physical activity and creativity. It can be a fun and engaging way for children to learn while they move and express themselves through dance.

Math , Science and Technology: Walking Feet.

The idea of this activity is to give children experiences that help them understand what direction and position words mean by having their bodies act out the words. For example, if you say, “Go and sit next to that tree,” children will go near the tree and sit. Moving their bodies in and among other things in their space helps them learn

direction and position words in a physical and direct way. This physical movement creates a real connection in their brains to the word or concept.

Kids will engage with:

- Spatial awareness
- Identifying positions
- Identifying directions
- Movement

Start by considering the outdoor space where children can move, whether near home or at a park. Write down activities on a series of index cards, each using a position or direction word. Here are some examples:

****Position words that describe the location of an object or person in relation to another object or person:****

- Under
- Next to
- Behind
- On
- Underneath
- At the beginning of
- At the end of

****Direction words that describe how something moves:****

- To
- Toward
- In

- Into
- Out
- Out of
- Up
- Down
- Forward
- Back

****Distance words that describe relationship:****

- Near
- Far
- Short
- Long

****Examples of sentences with position and direction words:****

- Stand near the car.
- Run a short distance away from me.
- Pick a leaf and stand underneath the tree.
- Jump up!
- Stand on top of a crack in the sidewalk.

Have the children pick a card and follow the directions. Each time they carry out a direction, walk to that place and then have them pick another card.

You can stop when you run out of cards or when children lose interest. For a fun ending, read the cards in reverse order to guide the children back to their original starting point. Alternatively, give children new directions to make their way back to the house or car. This activity not only reinforces their understanding of spatial concepts but also adds an element of adventure and excitement to learning. Additionally, it encourages active participation and keeps children engaged while they learn essential vocabulary.

Others and I: The New Itsy-Bitsy Spider

Kids will engage with:

- Singing
- Talking about feelings
- Learning how other people feel
- Pretend play

“The Itsy Bitsy Spider” Activity

The itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout.
Down came the rain and washed the spider out.
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain.

And the itsy bitsy spider went up the spout again.

To begin this activity, create some drawings of spiders with different emotions (sad, angry, scared, happy, worried, confused). Then sing “Itsy Bitsy Spider” with the children. Ask them to come up with hand movements to accompany the song or show them movements they can use. Show one of the drawings to the children and ask how they think the spider might be feeling. Then show the other drawings and ask the children to identify each emotion.

Show one of the drawings again and ask the children how they would move if they were feeling that emotion. For example, if the drawing shows a sad face, children might hang their head and walk slowly. Then ask how their voices would sound if they were to talk while feeling that same emotion. Have the children sing “Itsy Bitsy Spider” using that tone of voice.

When you’re done, let the children know that the spiders are tired from climbing the spout and it is time to let them rest, signaling the end of the activity. This exercise not only makes the song more interactive but also helps children understand and express different emotions. Additionally, it enhances their ability to empathize and connect with the feelings of others.

Physical Development and Healthy Habits: Germs

Teaching Children About Germs and Hygiene

Start by reading a book about germs to your children (you can read a book you have, like *Germs Make Me Sick!* by M. Berger, or watch a YouTube video like this one: [Germs Make Me Sick](www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBGsoimPXZg)). After finishing the story, talk about it with the children.

Kids will engage with:

- Taking care of his or her personal needs
- Engaging in healthy practices

Ask questions such as:

- Do you remember where germs come from?
- Where do you think germs are on your body?
- What do you think we can do to get rid of germs?

Next, take the children to another part of the house where you have placed a box of tissues on a low shelf so they can reach it. Show them how to take one tissue to blow their nose and where to throw it out. Then say something like, "Once you blow your nose, you have to wash your hands because some germs might have sneaked onto them! I have something exciting to show you in the bathroom! Let's go!" Lead the children to the bathroom and show them the step stool (this could be a store-bought stool, a thick piece of wood, or even a low chair they can climb up to). Show them how they can now step up to the sink and wash their own hands to get rid of the germs! Teach them how to use the bar soap or one squirt of pump soap. Have them sing the ABCs song once as they scrub. Show them how to dry their hands and then turn off the faucet.

Now, provide a model for the children by washing your hands while they sing the ABCs song for you! Ask the children if they can think of another way to stay healthy. Depending on their answers, you might be able to have them help you carry out these ideas. For example, if they say "keep our clothes clean," they could help you fold laundry or pour the soap in.

Additionally, you can introduce them to the importance of covering their mouth when they cough or sneeze, and regularly cleaning their toys to keep germs at bay. This hands-on activity not only teaches them about hygiene but also instills lifelong healthy habits in a fun and engaging way.