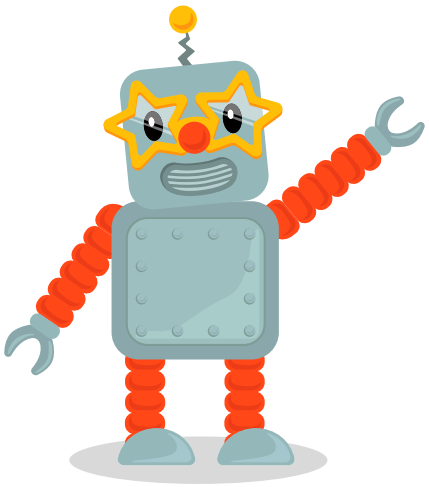
Ignite™
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Outdoor Play Experiences

Language
Math
Physical
Science & Technology



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Outdoor Play Experiences

Outdoor play and exploration provide endless learning opportunities! The activities in this section teach skills from the following learning domains:

Mathematics
Counting, recognizing shapes, determining distances, spatial positions

Scientific Knowledge
Effects of weather, experimentation, and observation

Social Studies
Community awareness, identify characteristics of neighborhoods

Language Development
Expressing observations, categorizing, identifying and naming objects, places and people

Physical Development
Movement, gross motor development, personal safety, improving sensory skills

Social Emotional Development
Taking turns, sharing, expanding communication and cooperation

Rain or Shine?

No matter the weather, put on sunscreen, bundle up, or throw on some raingear. Outdoor light stimulates the pineal gland; the part of the brain that is vital to keeping our immune systems strong. Spending time outdoors is also associated with improving mood and happiness. As a bonus, children who identify with nature are more likely to become adults who appreciate nature and want to protect the environment!

Precautions for Rainy-Day Activities:

While you won't melt away in the rain, take precautions against hypothermia. Keep in mind you may feel significantly colder once your clothes get wet (especially if there's wind). Also, if you observe shivering, clumsiness, and/or confusion, head inside, change into dry clothes and warm-up!

Be alert to the reduced visibility of traffic and take precautions such as wearing reflective clothing or blinking lights—especially when you are walking outside in the rain.

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Scavenger Hunt



Scavenger hunts are a fun, easy, inexpensive (dare we say, "free?") experience that provide children a guided way to explore the world around them while learning how to make observations. Scavenger hunts can also get your child moving and give you the opportunity to teach her about your neighborhood or community.

What you will need:

- [ ] A list of items to find!
- [ ] Good shoes
- [ ] Water
- [ ] Optional: Pencil and notepad

1. **Prepare for the hunt.**
   Create a list of objects, places, people, etc. in your yard, neighborhood, or local park for your child to identify. We recommend you start with five or six objects the first time you play.
2. **Invite your child to join you on a scavenger hunt!**
3. **Keep focused!**
   While on the hunt, continue to remind your child which items remain on the list.
4. **Record your child's progress.**
   Ask your child to identify what she sees. Engage with her by taking notes on her observations or photographing objects by her request.
5. **Do it again!**
   Scavenger hunts can easily be repeated, while not being boring! Change the scavenger hunt objects, add more objects, or try new locations each time you play.

Examples:

four bushes
eight trees
five cars
two people
two animals
one stop sign
triangle-shaped sign
circles
big trees
tiny pebbles

Level Up:

- Pair mathematical terms with the scavenger hunt items such as "big," "little," "one," "four," "round," or "rectangle."
- Add more objects to find.

Level Down:

- Reduce the number of objects to find.

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Counting Counts



What you will need:

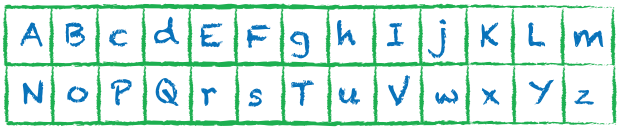
- ☐ Sidewalk chalk
- ☐ Paved driveway or sidewalk
- ☐ Optional: Beanbags
- ☐ Optional: Water-filled spray bottle

1. **Set up the line.**
Using sidewalk chalk, create a number line on your driveway or sidewalk where you child can easily hop or run between the numbers zero and ten.
2. **Identify the numbers.**
Have your child to walk the line, counting each number aloud as he moves.
3. **Find the number.**
Next, have your child stand at the beginning or end of the number line. Call out a number and ask him to run to that number and shout out the number when he lands on it.
4. **Hand-eye coordination bonus round!**
Another fun way to use the number line is to give your child beanbags to toss to numbers as you call them out.
5. **Make cleanup a game!**
When you it's time to clean up, give your child a water-filled spray bottle to spray each digit away as you call out the number.

Example:

You say, "Find the number four," and your child should toss a beanbag to the number four.

Letter Line-Up



1. **Set up the line.**
Similar to the **Counting Counts** activity above, use sidewalk chalk to make an alphabet line on your driveway.
2. **Identify the letter.**
Have your child to walk the line, saying each letter aloud as she moves.
3. **Find the letter.**
Next, have your child stand at the beginning or end of the letter line. Call out a letter and ask her to hop to that letter and shout out the letter when she lands on it.
4. **Make cleanup a game!**
When you it's time to clean up, give your child a water-filled spray bottle to spray each letter away as you call it out.

Tip:

To make it easier for your child to learn either use all uppercase ("A, B, C..."), all lowercase ("a, b, c..."), or pair both upper- and lowercase letters together ("Aa, Bb, Cc...").

Level Up:

- If more than one child is playing, turn it into a race or competition.
- Scramble the letters/numbers.

Level Down:

- **Counting Counts:** Start with fewer numbers (e.g. 1–5).
- **Letter Line-Up**: Work on one section of the alphabet at a time (e.g. start with "A"–"E" then "F"–"J" the next time).

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Natural Counting

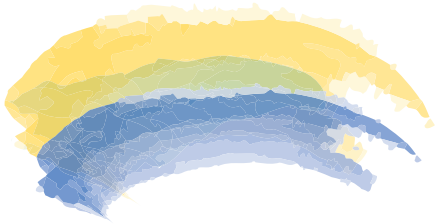


What you will need:

- [ ] Sidewalk chalk
- [ ] Paved driveway, sidewalk, bricks, or stepping stones
- [ ] Outdoor natural area

1. **Set up a workspace.**
   Using sidewalk chalk, write the numbers one through five on an accessible workspace for your child.
2. **Match the numbers.**
   Ask your child to gather natural items (seeds, leaves, flowers, etc.) from your outdoor space and to match the number of items to each respective number you've written with the chalk.
3. **Level up!**
   If your child is comfortable counting one through five objects, add six through ten and assist your child as you see fit.

Homemade Rainbows



What you will need:

- [ ] Sidewalk chalk
- [ ] Paved driveway, sidewalk, bricks, or stepping stones
- [ ] Paper plate
- [ ] Food coloring
- [ ] Sheet of paper

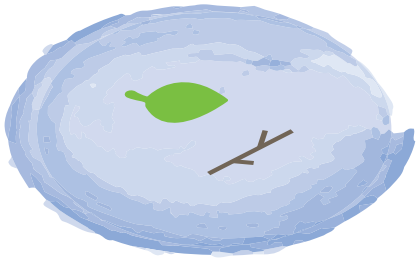
1. **Rainbows with chalk.**
   After a rainstorm have your child use sidewalk chalk on wet pavement. Point out how moisture intensifies and blurs the colors. The effect is very different from coloring with chalk on dry land!

   As the colors blur, ask your child to describe what they see as the colors mix ("What happens when yellow and blue blend?").
2. **Rainbows with food coloring.**
   While it's raining, sprinkle a few drops of food coloring onto a paper plate. Have your child take it outside and watch the rain make watercolors!

   Encourage your child to swirl the liquid around to make designs. Bring the plate inside to dry, or press another piece of paper on top and peel it off to make a print.

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Float Your Boat

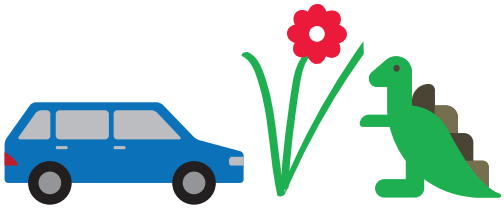


What you will need:

- [ ] A shallow water source such as: puddle, rimmed cookie sheet, plastic tub, or a large bowl
- [ ] Outdoor natural area

1. **Set up a workspace.**
   Find a puddle or bring a shallow container filled with water outside.
2. **Explore and gather.**
   Encourage your child to explore nearby and bring back a variety of small objects like leaves, twigs, and acorns.
3. **Does it float?**
   Have your child select one of the items he found and ask him if he thinks it will float or sink and then have him place it on top of the water.
4. **Sort it out.**
   Have your child group the items that do float into one pile and those that do not float in another pile. Ask him how the items are similar, and how they are different.

Inside Out



When children are encouraged to utilize toys in different ways, inspiration blossoms! A change of scenery may help your child see and use her familiar toys in very different and imaginative ways!

What you will need:

- [ ] Plastic animals, dinosaurs, cars, or other nature-resistant toys
- [ ] Optional: Bath toys

1. **Bring the inside to the outside.**
   Ask your child to gather a collection of nature-resistant toys, and take her outside for open-ended play.
2. **On a rainy day, invite your child to bring bath toys outside.**
3. **Give the toys a bath!**
   Before bringing the toys back inside, fill a plastic bin with soap and water so your child can give the toys a bath!

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Ready, Set, Rain!

1. **Make a rain gauge with a Mason jar.**
Using a ruler, mark inches vertically on the outside of the jar.

2. **Use a plastic 2-liter bottle.**
Cut the top off of the bottle about a fourth of the way from the top; turn it upside down and tape it to the inside of the bottom of the bottle; add stones to keep the bottle from being blown over; then use a ruler to add the measurement marks on the outside.

3. **Place the rain gauge outside.**
Work with your child to place the rain gauge in a place that will capture the rain.

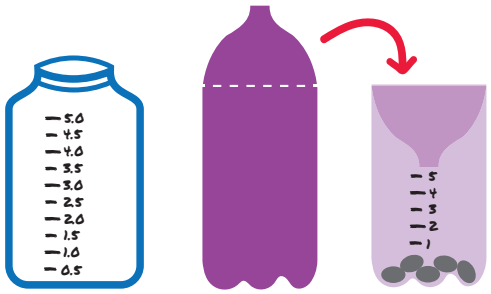
4. **Keep a log.**
Create a log that outlines the measurements (for example, Monday- 1 inch, Tuesday, 1/3 inch). Talk with your child about the differences in the rainstorms, using language such as "this is a lot of rain", "there is less rain today than yesterday", "there is more rain today", etc.

5. **Make two!**
Make two rain gauges so you can measure ongoing rainfall. One gauge to collect continuous rainfall, and the second to collect daily (or hourly) rainfall to compare against each other.

What you will need:

- ☐ A Mason jar or plastic 2-liter bottle
- ☐ Ruler
- ☐ Permanent marker
- ☐ Tape*
- ☐ Small rocks*

*if using the 2-liter bottle



Making Beautiful Music!



What you will need:

- ☐ Pots, pans, or other containers

1. **Find unexpected instruments!**
Ask your child to help you scout out household items that can make music: pots, pans, spoons, plastic containers (really anything will work!).

2. **Line up and listen.**
Take the items outside during a rainstorm, and line them up to listen to how raindrops sound as they drop onto various surfaces.

3. **Play with the instruments.**
To make other rainy sounds, invite your child to swirl water inside a pot, to pour water from one container to another (from way up high, or from close-by!).

4. **Sort it out.**
Have your child to arrange the musical household items from their favorite, to their least favorite. Or, from smallest to biggest (or, biggest to smallest).

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Simple Rainy Day Fun!

1. Follow the rain when it falls on the ground. Where does it flow to? Down the street? To a drain?

2. Explore the earth: the dirt, the sand, the grass. How does the rain change these things?

3. Go for a walk in your neighborhood and ask your child to tell you about how the rain makes things look different. Also, what is the same?

4. Don't just jump in the puddles; skip, hop, run, gallop, or walk through them. Who can make the biggest splash?

5. If there are puddles, toss rocks into them. Who can make the biggest ripple? What size rock makes the loudest sound?

6. Listen to the rhythm that the rain makes and have a dance contest. Give a prize to the person who comes up with the silliest rain dance.

7. Instead of jumping in the puddles, try jumping over them!

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