



Mid-Summer Play Ideas

***Play Ideas that Encourage Creativity, Imagination, Initiative, and Problem-solving**

Toddlers 1-2 years

- A big rubber bin filled with puffed wheat, rice, lentils, trucks and cars, measuring spoons and cups makes a great indoor/outdoor sandbox.
- Place white paper over coins, or any etched surface and rub with crayons.
- Spread sofa cushions over the floor for islands.
- Put a plastic swimming pool under a slide.
- Make white playdough and roll it out. Give the children markers to draw on the playdough and watch the colors squish into patterns.
- Paint the house outside with water filled pails and paintbrushes or sponges. Let children wash the car, bikes, or bike trailer.
- Blow bubbles from bubble solution on the kitchen floor. Use the excess soap to mop the floor after.
- Use a shaker filled with cornstarch that they can sprinkle it outdoors.
- Fill the baby bathtub or bowls with soapy water and pouring cups.
- Use a small stool as a play table in the bathtub and give them cups to pour from. Be sure to supervise water play.
- Get a small trampoline to jump on. Or designate certain sofa cushions for jumping on and fort building.
- Fill empty plastic soap/spray containers with colored water to squirt pavement or snow.
- Give a toddler a clean dustpan for a snow shovel. (Put rubber gloves over a child's gloves so they won't get wet when they play outside with wet snow days.)

Preschoolers 3-5 years

- Darken the room and hang a sheet with tape across a corner from one wall to the other wall. Shine a flashlight over the sheet. Make shadow puppets out of hands or objects from behind the sheet.
- Drape old sheets over the bunk-bed top for a puppet or stuffy theatre show.
- Get big boxes from appliance shops for fort making. Let them paint and decorate it.
- Throw an old mattress on the basement floor and let the children jump. Old couch cushions work great for forts and old sheets for roofs, walls, and draping.

- Tables and chairs would also hold sheets for fort play.
- Save junk mail, envelopes and stickers and let the children play post office.
- Buy an old turntable at a garage sale. Put paper on the spindle and give markers and crayons for children to draw on while it is spinning.
- Use a portable carpenter's tray to carry markers, scissors, and rulers. Makes for easy cleanup and moving around the house.
- Have a dedicated craft table if you have room. Sometimes building projects take more than a few days and will be out of the way.
- Paint with toy car tires or anything with texture. Roll a marble or toy car in paint on a cookie sheet tray lined with paper for interesting pictures.
- Melt broken crayons into foil lined muffin cups for mosaic crayons.
- Pre-hammer some nails into wood scraps and let preschoolers hammer the rest in. They love real tools.
- Have a decoy drawer of real, unused, broken items that are old cell phones and keyboards that they can play with.
- Draw on an old shower curtain a number of roads, buildings and city features so they can customize a car play mat.
- Get a basic car track that you put together in a line. Then use pillows to make hills and valleys. See how far the cars will go.
- In a bathtub with no water, put your child in naked or with just underpants and add a bowl of chocolate pudding. Allow finger painting on the walls. Just hose down the walls and your child with a little soap afterwards.
- For children past the tasting stage, put small amounts of shaving cream in a muffin tin and tint with food color. Allow finger painting on the tub walls.
- Spread the sheets out on the floor and have a picnic in the house.
- Let the children ride bikes on the concrete basement floor.
- Round up old toys and sell on a internet buy-sell site and scoop up real deals on used toys from the same sites. Or scour second hand toy stores for great bargains on "new-to-child" toys.
- Have a bedroom dresser with drawers for storage of art materials: old bits of wrapping paper, string, tubes, egg cartons, paints, brushes, magazines, paper scraps. Or have an easy to reach craft box of odds and ends: ribbons, cards, paper, markers, scissors, glue or glue sticks, glitter, paint, rulers so the children can help themselves and create a craft that is unstructured and entirely of their own imagination.

School-Aged 6-12 years

- Have a good old-fashioned lemonade or iced tea stand.
- Give them a low-supervision job that can easily be fixed such as sanding decks, weeding the garden, or painting fences. You may have to pay them for those!
- Help them set up a neighborhood lawn-mowing business with a hand mower.
- Teach them how to cook, bake or assemble food.
- Together, embark on the annual Halloween costume sewing project early and teach them to sew.
- Bring out saved new toys and kits that were put away after birthday parties.
- Consider drop-in day camps for just the day.
- Allow the children to use your video camera to make Lego™ movies after you've given a care lesson and are supervising.
- Have a video game swap among friends.
- If you have a handheld GPS, take them Geocaching.
- Paper Dolls are still fun. Give them white paper and markers and challenge them to make a house, zoo, store, pool, school, library out of each sheet of paper. They can also draw and cut out people, pets and items. Before long, children will be acting out roles and scenarios!

- Egg drop test. Hard boil a dozen eggs and cool. Assemble lots of materials and packaging and challenge the kids to wrap the egg so that it won't crack when dropped from six feet above the floor. Great for problem-solving and learning science.
- Have a "Christmas in July" day – decorate a backyard tree with popcorn, and with pinecones dipped in peanut butter (for the birds to eat) and rolled in birdseed. Using newspaper, wrap "used, but loved" gifts taken from around the house and finish it off with a turkey dinner.
- Have a board game day.
- Any small gadget or appliance that is broken is wonderful to take apart and unscrew with parent supervision. Check out second hand shops and garage sales for free stuff.
- Have a history theme day. For example, declare a "prehistoric" day and make cave paintings, eat with your hands, camp out in a tent in the back yard and wear draped sheets. Try to talk via writing instead of talking.
- Have a backwards day where you have a bedtime story, bath, dinner, then lunch and breakfast last.
- Play potions. Experiment in the kitchen by making different combos of liquids that are edible and see what tastes, properties and observations can be made from combining different mixtures.

Teenagers 13–19 years

- Drop them off at the library for a day to immerse in reading books, trying out the computer terminals and use new software applications that libraries offer, but you may not have at home.
- Teens love grown-up board games and especially old favourite card games.
- Summer is a great time to volunteer at many worthwhile places.
- Teach your teen how to drive.
- Show them how to set up a few yard sales so they can earn cash to buy new play items.
- Most teens would be interested in the school-aged play ideas also.
- Organize a regular teen lunch at the mall or movie night and have all friends bus to the meeting place at a regular time each week.

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