



Communication

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child's communication skills are growing and blossoming. She is learning how to have conversations with people she knows and is starting conversations as well as responding to people's questions. She is learning different parts of speech and using more complicated sentences; for example, when describing something she might say, "It was a very big brown dog." She may use very silly language and laugh at her own jokes.

- Animal Guessing** This is a game the whole family can play. Cut out some pictures of animals from a magazine. Turn the pictures upside down and have one person at a time choose a picture. The other people playing ask yes/no questions to guess what the animal is (e.g., "Does the animal swim?" "Is it bigger than a cat?"). When someone guesses the animal correctly, it's another person's turn to choose an animal card and let the others guess.
- Bedtime Memories** When it's time to go to sleep each night, have a soft talk with your child. Whisper to him, "What was your favorite thing that happened today?" Ask what else happened. Share your favorite event, too.
- Reading Adventures** Read to your child every day. Read slowly and with interest. Use a finger to follow the words. Stop reading at times, and encourage your child to talk about the pictures and the story. Make this a special and fun time for you and your child.
- Moonbeams** On a night when the moon is visible, find a place to lie down or sit outside with your child and look at the moon and stars. What do you see? Can you connect the stars to make a picture? Can you make out a face on the moon? Ponder what it would be like to be an astronaut flying into space in a rocket. What do you think it is like on the moon? What would you do there? How would you feel about being so far away from earth?
- Rhymes and Rhythm** While chanting or singing a nursery rhyme, have your child tap it out on a drum, the bottom of a pot, or an oatmeal box. This musical activity can be made more challenging and interesting by adding new instruments such as bells, spoons, or shakers (small plastic containers filled with beans). Have some noisy fun with friends!
- At the Office** Set up a little office for your child with notebooks, a toy phone, a computer keyboard, pencils and pens, a ruler, a calculator, and a calendar. Add some envelopes, paper, and stickers. Encourage her to pretend to go to work, write letters, type messages, and make notes for friends. Pretend with her; call her on the phone and ask her questions.



54–60 months



Gross Motor

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child is continuing to develop and refine his gross motor skills. He has become much more stable and is learning how to balance on one foot or walk along a narrow beam. He is learning skills such as jumping, hopping on one foot, and skipping. He will enjoy activities such as throwing, catching, and kicking balls. You will need to watch him closely as he may try some dangerous tricks. He can ride a small bike with training wheels.

Fall Fun In the fall, take your child outside to play in the leaves. Rake the leaves into small piles. Chase each other around the piles, jump in them, or try to leap over them. Try burying each other in leaves or catching the leaves as they fall.

Freeze Tag Get a group of children together with your child to play a game of Freeze Tag. Designate one person to be "it." The person who is "it" runs around trying to tag other children. If a child is tagged, she must "freeze" (not move). Another child who is not "it" may "melt" a frozen player by touching her. A "melted" player can run around again to avoid being tagged. Whoever is tagged and made "frozen" three times is the next "it."

Splash Game This activity is good on a hot day. You, your child, and your child's friends can stand around a small plastic pool or bucket of water. Using a big ball (e.g., beach ball), take turns and try to make each other wet by throwing the ball hard at the water. Do not throw the ball at each other, just at the water. You can also just play catch. Of course, later you'll all want to get into the pool!

Ribbon Dance Cut a piece of ribbon or a party streamer into 6-foot lengths. Your child can explore ways to make designs in the air. Try circles and loops, up and down movements, and figure eights. Now try all of these movements with two ribbons, one in each hand. Finally, move from place to place taking the ribbons with you. Put on some music to help make a "ribbon dance." Try skipping, running, and walking.

Animal Games Cut pictures of animals out of a magazine. Turn them face down, and take turns choosing an animal with your child. You must act out the animal you drew, and your child has to guess what animal you are. Take turns so your child has to act out an animal for you to guess. If you draw a kangaroo, you must jump, jump, jump. If you draw a cheetah, you will probably need to run. If you draw a cat, you may relax and lick your paws or leap to catch a mouse. You may act out a giraffe by walking on tiptoes and stretching really tall.



54–60 months



Fine Motor

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child is now able to use her fingers in a more controlled way. Her finger movements are coordinated and faster, and she may be very interested in trying to write the letters of her name. Many children begin to prefer using one hand over the other during this time. Your child may be cutting out shapes with scissors and getting better at buttoning and tying her shoes.

Lacing Cards Using safety scissors, your child can cut out simple pictures of familiar things from magazines and glue the pictures onto cardboard. With a paper punch, punch several holes around the outside of the picture. Tie a shoestring or heavy piece of yarn through one of the holes. Make sure the other end of the string has tape wrapped around it to make a firm tip. Your child can sew in and out around the edge of the card. For variation, have your child sew two cards together.

Sidewalk Fun Decorate your sidewalks with beautiful chalk drawings. Colorful chalk can be found at any toy store and some supermarkets. Chalk is easy to wash off the sidewalk, or rain will wash it away. Don't forget to remind your child to sign his name!

It's a Wrap Give your child a small sturdy box, some newspaper or wrapping paper, tape, and ribbon. Let her practice wrapping the box. Later she can wrap a real present for a friend in her very own way.

Family Portrait Encourage your child to draw a picture of the family. When he is done, ask him to tell you about his picture. You can write down what he says about his siblings, parents, pets, or grandparents and save his responses with the picture.

Map It You and your child can make a map of your neighborhood. Go for a walk to start this activity, and point out streets, buildings, and nearby parks or other landmarks. Then, after the walk, use paper and pens or markers to encourage your child to make a map of what she remembers. You may need to help her get started with her map. If the neighborhood is too large, start by mapping your own house or her own room. Ask your child, "Where's your bed?" "How about your toy box?"



54–60 months



Problem Solving

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child may be counting to 15 from memory and accurately counting 10 objects. He is able to follow directions when he is in a group activity and knows the rules at home and at school. He enjoys pretend play and may act out different roles with friends. Wild stories and exaggerations are common. He enjoys “reading” books and may have simple books memorized. He is really starting to understand how things work in the world and is endlessly curious about why things are the way they are.

- Pretzel Fun** Make pretzel letters (or numbers). Pretzels can be made with pizza dough or pie crust dough. Cut the dough into strips and form numbers or letters out of the dough. Brush with a beaten egg, sprinkle with a little salt and bake until golden brown. Eat up an A, B, or C!
- Fun Food Coloring** Most children love to experiment with food coloring. Let your child color her food. Here are some ideas: color scrambled eggs blue, color a glass of milk, add a drop of color to a piece of apple or to a slice of bread before toasting it, and color mashed potatoes. Ask your child to think of other ideas.
- How Long?** Count how long your child can do a new skill, such as standing on one foot, or how many times he can bounce a ball. Celebrate each time he can do a new skill for a little more time. Let him count while you try something, such as balancing a book on your head. This will help your child practice new skills and counting.
- How Many?**
- Storytime** Tell a story to your child. Use different voices, body postures, and facial expressions to be different characters. Now it’s your child’s turn to tell a story. Encourage your little one to ham it up—and don’t forget to be an appreciative audience.
- What’s Missing?** Lay out five or more different toys and give your child time to look at all of them. Now, hide a single toy at a time. See how long it takes your child to figure out which toy is missing. You may need to give her some clues at first. Once she guesses which toy is missing, hide a different toy. Now it’s her turn to try to trick you!
- Find the Treasure** This activity has to be planned well ahead of time. Hide “treasure” (e.g., a favorite snack, a small bag of old jewelry, a new toy) in a place your child is able to reach. Make drawings of all of the places you want your child to search (e.g., a TV, a mailbox) for the “treasure.” Be sure to make the drawings simple and clear. Each clue should direct your child to a place where he will find the next clue until he eventually finds the “treasure.”



54–60 months



Personal-Social

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child is able to meet most of her personal needs but may need practice or help on some of the more difficult parts of a task, such as tying her shoes. She eats a variety of foods, has social dining skills, and is dressing herself. She enjoys playing with other children and working together on projects. She is beginning to use her words to help solve conflicts with friends.

Going on a Date Go on a “date” with your child. Go out to lunch, or go to see a movie. Before you go out, you and your child can get ready. He can put on a special shirt and pants, wash his hands and his face, use the potty, and brush his teeth. Show him a mirror so he can see how great he looks. Now go have fun! Be extra polite. Use “please” and “thank you” throughout your date.

Fruit Salad Make a fruit salad for lunch. You can use any favorite fruits such as grapes, bananas, apples, and oranges. Your child will enjoy washing, peeling, and scooping the fruit into a bowl. She could even help slice a soft fruit such as a banana with a butter or plastic knife. Add things to the salad that sound yummy such as yogurt or nuts. Your child can practice using a spoon and fork as she helps make and serve the fruit salad.

Pressed Flower Cards Collect flowers from your yard or neighborhood, a park, or a roadside. Flowers that are small and delicate work best because they press flat. Once you collect your flowers, place them between sheets of paper towels or newspaper and lay them between heavy books (such as old phone books). Then, give the flowers a few days to dry and flatten out. Glue these flowers on a piece of paper to make notecards for family and friends. Help your child write someone a special note.

911 Talk to your child about what he should do if he gets lost or if there is an emergency in the house. Your child can learn how to dial 911 and give information to the operator. You can role-play this with your child using a pretend phone, but teach your child to use a real phone for a real emergency. Teach your child his name, address, and telephone number. Sometimes it helps if he learns this information as a song. Pretend you are a police officer, and your child can pretend, too.

All by Myself Make sure your child has a little extra time in the morning to get dressed. Then encourage her to try to button her shirt, snap her pants, or tie her shoes. She will need some help and some time, but be patient. The more she practices, the sooner she will be able to get dressed all by herself.

You as Me, Me as You You and your child can switch roles for part of the day. She can pretend to be you and help you get dressed or brush your hair. You can pretend you need help getting ready. The make-believe could include a change of duties, clothes, behaviors, vocabulary, and other habits. Keep the activity positive and fun.



54–60 months