

Ideas for Providers Caring for Babies, Toddlers, Preschool, and School-Aged Children

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Fun Activities Providers Can Do with Children

During Minnesota’s Stay At Home order, providers may be wondering what do throughout day when there are so many changes.

A key to working with children during times of change and uncertainty is to **continue or to establish structure and reasonable expectations** for yourself and the children. You may feel stress—and so may the children—it is important to be kind to yourself as daily changes may occur. Give some rhythm to the day by **balancing quiet and more boisterous activities**, and help the children transition from one activity to another. Toddlers need cues that alert them to change. Preschool-aged children (4- to 5-year-olds) can help write or make a picture list of activities in the order that they occur. Use this to help them predict the day and develop important thinking skills. School-aged children are important teachers of younger children, but also need activities and space of their own. Use their ideas to help you plan the day.

Choosing activities and language that **stretch children’s thinking, move their muscles, and spark their imaginations** will help them continue to develop and learn during this time when people are staying home more and children’s routines have been interrupted. Remember that the minds of young children are always developing and learning from all of their surroundings and experiences throughout each day!

This brief guide, “Fun Activities Providers Can Do with Young Children,” is intended to provide you with ideas to help create fun activities, encourage the use of language, and support development both as an individual and as part of a group. Activities in this guide are suggested for babies (infant-12 months), toddlers (12-36 months), preschoolers (3-5 years old), and school-aged children (elementary grades). In each section the activities have been aligned so that—with some variation—the activity can support skill development and growth for the range of ages and abilities that may be in your education and care setting.

Please note that these activities are suggestions and are based on approximate ages of children. They may be modified or adapted to your setting and age(s) of children. You may substitute materials for the activities to make use of resources that are available to you.

Staying Healthy

Frequent and regular handwashing will help prevent the spread of unwanted germs. You and the children should thoroughly **wash hands for at least 20 seconds**. This includes meal, bathroom, and transition times between activities like when children move from outside to inside, or from an art project to a new activity. Babies need to have their hands washed, too. You can sing the “ABC’s,” “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star,” or your favorite song to make handwashing a fun routine. Record and share with parents any original songs that your children compose for handwashing.

Routines and Transition Activities: Knowing What to Expect

Routines are activities that follow a predictable order, are consistent, and give structure to a child's day. They help children move from one activity to the next and can create a sense of calm for children as they know what to expect next and how to prepare for it. An enormous amount of learning takes place when children are involved in daily routines such as feeding/eating, diaper changing, and playing together—things that you do with young children every day. Learning takes place as children are actively engaged by the different parts of a daily routine. Some of the activities within each of the following sections may be used to establish and support positive transitions.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
<p>While many of babies' needs are on demand when they need them such as feeding and diapering, other flexible routines can be established such as regular naps, playtimes, and rituals around saying good-bye to mom or dad. Routines help babies to feel secure and begin to know what to expect.</p>	<p>Build on the routines established for the babies. Have the toddlers predict what comes next. Observe the toddlers and plan in advance for needed timing of activities and transitions. If toddlers fall asleep at lunch, lunchtime might need to be earlier, allowing for smoother transitions to naptime.</p>	<p>Preschoolers thrive when routines include a combination of quiet and active opportunities. Design an environment that offers choice through play. Available items should include blocks, art and writing supplies, math toys, puzzles, dramatic play props, and books.</p>	<p>When establishing the daily schedule, engage the children and develop the schedule so that they see themselves in it. Make a list that is easily seen and used by the children to help predict and navigate the day.</p>
<p>Older babies can start holding on to a spoon or use a spoon to help feed themselves. Older babies enjoy sitting at the table with the other children.</p>	<p>Have toddlers practice using a spoon or fork during mealtimes. They can help set single items on the table or carry the silverware to the sink to help clean up. Toddlers may enjoy a clean-up song each time.</p>	<p>Encourage preschoolers to use utensils for specific purposes, like a fork for vegetables or using a plastic butter knife to put butter or peanut butter on sandwiches. They can help you set the table and clean up.</p>	<p>Involve children in mealtime routines by setting the table, or helping prepare one aspect of the meal.</p>

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
<p>There are parts of the day that babies will communicate different needs. Pay attention to what those things are as well as the time of day that they like, don't like, or need something. Figuring out the timing of routines and what makes babies happy helps them trust the world.</p>	<p>Help toddlers pick out what to play next. You can do this by limiting their choices by asking "Do you want to play with blocks or color a picture next?"</p>	<p>Make a play plan with preschoolers. When it's time for "free play," ask each child what they want to play and help them get started.</p>	<p>At the beginning of the day, have each child identify 1-3 things that they want to "work" on. It's a good idea to have some things that take more than one day to accomplish.</p>
<p>Talk gently with babies as you dress or change them. For example, describe how you are putting on his socks and then his shoes.</p>	<p>As toddlers are getting dressed to go outside, talk about the order that they are putting on their clothes. Create a poster that shows the order of dressing that they can follow. Summer looks different from winter.</p>	<p>Encourage preschoolers to get ready to go outdoors by themselves. Practice zipping up jackets or putting on their shoes.</p>	<p>Use music and sounds like clapping, chimes, or humming a tune as a way to announce a transition so that children become independent in moving from one activity to the next. Designate a child as the transition leader.</p>
<p>Watch how babies are discovering their bodies—looking at hands, sucking on feet, and arching backs and trying to roll. They are giving you cues as to what they are capable of doing next.</p>	<p>Introduce fun greetings, good-byes, and chatting as a way to transition between activities. "Please" and "thank you" build language, social skills, and teach positive behavior.</p>	<p>Encourage preschoolers to help with routines that require sorting and matching items that look alike such as toys, socks, or fruit. Build skills by counting, naming the item, or labeling colors.</p>	<p>Have school-agers tell you what their plan is for getting ready to end one activity and get ready for the next.</p>

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
Stay close by as babies explore and move around so they know you are near. Help them become comfortable in daily places and spaces.	Get older toddlers to help with everyday tasks—it won't be perfect, but they will like to help. Sorting toys or laundry is a great place to start.	Involve preschoolers in routine tasks like clean-up. Ask children to put away all the blue toys, then all of the red ones.	Initiate a project that requires daily routines, such as planting a container garden. Establish daily routines for watering, weeding, and harvesting.

Let's Get Moving: Indoor and Outdoor Physical Activities

Take time to enjoy play outdoors at least 20 minutes each day. Shorter times spread throughout the day work well and can be a way to take some instructional activities to new settings. Below are ideas to do indoors or outdoors to help children be active.

Smooth transitions from physical activities to less active ones are important for young children. Use a prompt to let children know an activity will be ending soon, such as “five more ball tosses” or “five-minute notice until we clean up.” When an activity is done, **create a song, rhyme, or rap to make the transition fun.** You can “perform” the song together for every transition. It doesn't matter if you are a good singer or not. It's the experience of singing or chanting that signals a transition for children. Your lyric can be really simple. You can make up the words as you transition to describe what you are doing, such as “this is the way we pick up our toys, pick up our toys, pick up our toys... and then we go inside!”

After outdoor playtime, be sure to have a routine for going back indoors. Importantly, taking outdoor clothing off at the door and washing hands. Following outdoor time, children are likely to be thirsty. This is a good time to have a drink of water and talk together about what you did and saw outside. For older children, these activities can be independently done when they know what comes next and can move into that activity.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
Place babies on their backs, allowing them to move their arms and legs.	Use open physical spaces that encourage movement. Provide soft or oversized balls that are easy to manipulate. Set up objects that act as baskets to toss a soft ball into—like a medium to large box or laundry basket.	Provide spaces and equipment that encourage active movement and provides purpose as they climb, run, jump, and gallop. Encourage both independent and group activities.	Provide equipment and space for physical activities and game playing, like a mat for yoga, or balls, Frisbees, jumping ropes, and game outlines on a solid surface (hopscotch, 4-square, etc.).
Create safe spaces for babies to roll and move. Spread out a blanket for them to lay on their backs or tummies. As they become more mobile, place things in front of them to climb up or over like “pool noodles.”	Push and pull toys are a good way to move around and have some support as they become competent walkers and navigators.	Define space by putting up objects for targets and set boundaries using cones or something similar. Design play activities within these boundaries that allows for play with balls, practice running, kicking, or bouncing.	When going outside, start with a cooperative short group game or set of exercises and then offer free-choice time using available equipment and open spaces.
Provide places where babies can see themselves in an unbreakable mirror or shiny object and mimic their actions and actions of others.	Use large muscles to move and imitate familiar things: jump like a bunny, fly like a bird, or crawl like a worm.	Pick pictures of animals out of a book or magazine and move like those animals (for example, wiggle like a snake, jump like a kangaroo, and gallop like a horse).	Teach mindfulness, strength, and flexibility through yoga, martial arts, or Nia dance movements using picture cards, videos, or online apps.
Babies love sounds. Sit them in a group and give them each a rattle or similar safe, sound-producing object. Sing and shake and dance.	Use covers to pans as cymbals or a plastic bowl and spoon as a drum for an impromptu parade. March around.	Play the freeze game. Dance to the music. Freeze when it stops. Or give movement directions and then say “Freeze.” For instance, “Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle. Freeze!” “Jump, jump, jump. Freeze!”	Host a dance party, and make it interactive with friends who are in different locations using an online app. Give directions like the game “Simon Says.” Simon says dance like a: leaf, bee, swimmer, etc.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
<p>Take babies on frequent walks outside in strollers or wagons. As they become more mobile, find spots on the walk where they can safely get out and explore.</p>	<p>Provide foot-driven riding toys, small wagons for pulling, or stand-up toys for pushing.</p>	<p>Provide riding toys such as a tricycle or small bicycle with training wheels.</p>	<p>Develop bike-riding skills by setting up a course with cones or detergent bottles filled with sand. Practice weaving, turning, and stopping on a line. Plan short neighborhood rides.</p>
<p>Hold toys or rattles above babies' heads and encourage them to reach for them (2- to 3-month-old). Blow bubbles and watch their reactions, blowing them close enough so that older babies can try and touch them.</p>	<p>Blow bubbles and let toddlers pop them. Talk with toddlers about how they "pop them up high in the air" or "way down low on the ground."</p>	<p>Fill different-sized containers with bubble solution. Provide a variety of objects that can be used for making bubbles. Have them experiment and see what works best. Try coloring the bubbles with food color and catching them on paper.</p>	<p>Make monster bubbles that are life-size and can be chased or shaped with different bubble-making tools and solutions. Have the children experiment with solutions and supplies for making the tools.</p>
<p>Provide babies with a variety of toys to touch. Use a variety of colors, shapes and textures. Practice rolling soft balls to them to stop (catch) or examine.</p>	<p>Tape a line on the floor as a balance beam or tight rope. Have children walk on it. Make up stories and have them pretend, such as they are on a bridge and crossing over cold water or hot lava that is all around.</p>	<p>Create a "pool noodle" obstacle course. Lay them on the ground, hang them from a branch, or drape them over chairs. Then challenge the kids to jump over, walk across, limbo under, crawl around, etc.</p>	<p>Provide a variety of equipment such as a roll of tape, basket, cardboard box, and beach ball. Have children construct an obstacle course that must use each piece of equipment and give directions for how to complete it—over, under, around, etc. Have the children think of variation, such as complete the course wearing a hat, or big boots, etc.</p>

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
<p>Provide a safe place for babies to play on the floor. Babies like to try to reach for a soft toy while playing. Or provide a soft place for them to crawl into like a shallow pet bed with a rim around it.</p>	<p>Provide balls for toddlers to kick, roll, and throw. Begin introducing games by using a plastic liter bottle and a soft ball to “bowl” or a basket to throw a ball into. Have children play make-believe by turning objects into other things, such as a basket into a train.</p>	<p>Play simple games where children follow directions. Start with one direction and work up to three directions before they do the actions. For example, “Put your hand on your head, turn around, and then touch the ground.” Keep it fun with silly actions. Have the child be the leader sometimes, too.</p>	<p>Plan a scavenger hunt with a list of items to find. Themes for the list might include: locating natural objects; matching a particular texture like smooth, bumpy, pointy, etc.; taking a digital picture of a named item such as a rock, oak tree, ladybug, flower, bird, etc. Put them together into a poster or chart, and then play bingo or make a matching game.</p>
<p>Use a towel in a sandbox to help babies who are learning to sit up without tipping over. The sand helps form a stable base.</p>	<p>Provide safe areas for toddlers to walk and move around. Play music or provide a rhythm that can help control their movements.</p>	<p>Use tape to create lines that can be crawled along (like an alligator), walked on, or jumped across. Use a jump rope to create lines or wiggle so that kids must coordinate their eyes and feet as they jump across it.</p>	<p>Place hula hoops close together and have children jump from one to the next, or hop through them on one foot, and then change or alternate feet. Have them reconfigure the hoops and make up their own set of exercises.</p>
<p>Have regular Tummy Times for babies who are 4-to-6 months old by placing them on their tummies for very short periods of time when awake (young babies). When on their tummies, encourage babies to lift their heads by holding toys at eye level. Let them try to grab the toys. This can also be done outdoors.</p>	<p>Toddlers can play simple fun games by following basic instructions. Create some fun by using silly actions. For example, “open your eyes really wide while you run,” “close your eyes tight and twirl around,” “cover your feet with your hands and walk across the yard.”</p>	<p>Teach children to play outdoor games that require following directions like some of the old favorites: Follow the Leader, Simon Says, Red Light, Green Light, or Stop and Freeze.</p>	<p>Provide outdoor games like bean bag toss, bocce ball, or Frisbee golf that can be played in pairs or small groups. Other games like volleyball, badminton, or pickle ball also provide good challenges for older children.</p>

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
<p>Make different facial expressions—especially smiling—while changing diapers.</p>	<p>Draw the name of an animal or insect out of a hat. Then have the children move around the yard mimicking the creature and demonstrating how the creature moves from one place to the next, finds food, sleeps, stays safe, etc.</p>	<p>Write each child’s name on a piece of paper. Then have them use their bodies to spell out each letter of their names. Write down other names or words to spell out each letter. Have them practice the first letters from others’ names and identify the sound those letters make. Or have the other children guess whose name is being spelled.</p>	<p>Have each child draw a number line from 0-20. Have them stand on a number and solve math problems by jumping to show the answer, e.g. stand on 5 - 2 = 3 or 15 + 4 = 19. Have the children develop their game using the number line.</p>
<p>Play peek-a-boo with a scarf or a lightweight towel.</p>	<p>Throw a lightweight scarf or dish towel in the air and have children catch it.</p>	<p>Give each child a scarf. Have them move using the scarves to demonstrate different concepts like high/low, loud/soft, fast/slow, over/under, etc. This can also be done to music.</p>	<p>Have children pick a song and create a dance routine using scarves or other props for movement.</p>
<p>Give babies a large, safe place to move around and explore. Include a sturdy object where they can pull themselves up to a standing position.</p>	<p>Set up a simple obstacle course by placing chairs or pillows around the room. Toddlers can practice crawling over or walking around the obstacle course.</p>	<p>Set up a challenge course. Place Frisbees around the room or playground, have the children stop at each spot to perform a task such as 10 jumping jacks, spin around 3 times—then change direction and do it again, crawl to the next Frisbee while you spell your name, etc.</p>	<p>Set up a teams challenge course that small groups must complete together. Some examples include: they must walk along a log while holding hands, figure out a way for all of them to stand on a rock at the same time, or spin a hula hoop as a group using only 1 finger on each hand of each group member.</p>

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
Hold your babies upright with feet on the floor, and sing and talk to them.	Encourage toddlers to practice jumping across the room or around chairs.	Use an old pillowcase as a jumping bag. Encourage children to jump from one place to the next. Place cones (or similar) and have them jump around them. Set up relay races that require jumpers to exchange the bag.	Practice basic jumping skills such as the scissors, cross jumps, swing, duckie, etc. Jump to classic rhymes or make up chants or raps for jumping.

Practicing Social Skills

Learning to develop socially and how to play with others is a skill that children begin to learn at a young age. This happens through lots of coaching and interaction from caring adults. Watch babies to learn their signals—does this baby cry when hungry, rub eyes when tired, or look away when he/she wants to do something different? Pay attention to how babies and toddlers react to new situations and people, and try to do things that help them feel comfortable and happy. Toddlers begin to understand themselves in relation to others (adults and children) through actions and words. Preschoolers recognize and respond to others emotions and begin developing play skills with friends. School-agers increasingly learn to interact with peers and make independent choices. Children need time and opportunity to practice skills needed to understand others, and develop a variety of relationships. Help children learn actions and words to use with others so that they can communicate their needs, wants, and emotions. Establishing routines is a good way to help children feel safe and secure as they try new things.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
Talk, sing, and play with babies while feeding them or changing diapers. The routine of sharing and repeating favorite songs is reassuring to babies.	Play games or sing songs where toddlers can sing with you, copying your sounds and body movements. Sing favorite songs over and over again. Toddlers enjoy repetition.	Act out a well-known story like Goldilocks and the Three Bears, exaggerating the emotions while you or the children tell it or act it out. Gather stuffed toy animals, bowls and spoons, three chairs, and towels or blankets for the beds.	Play “Match My Face.” Have children mimic and identify the emotions that are being displayed on the leader’s face. Make sure to switch leader-follower roles so that everyone has a chance to demonstrate and read emotions.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
<p>Read books or tell stories to babies using a quiet voice. Point to the words and pictures in a book as you read.</p>	<p>Read books or tell stories to toddlers using a quiet voice. Point to the words and pictures in a book as you read. You might say, "Remember when we did ____? That was kind of like what they are doing in this story."</p>	<p>Read to or tell stories to preschoolers often throughout the day. Have the children select books they are interested in. Include books that introduce or enhance learning activities that connect to real-life experiences or themes from topics being taught.</p>	<p>Identify a daily reading time. Vary it by reading a book as a group, independently, or with a friend. Be sure to have a time for sharing so that kids can show how they connect to the story and make meaning from the text.</p>
<p>Play hiding games by hiding a stuffed animal toy under a blanket or cloth. Look for the toy together. Show surprise and delight when you find the toy.</p>	<p>Have a toddler pick a toy or stuffed animal, and then hide it somewhere. Help the toddler find it. Add a flashlight for more fun.</p>	<p>Play games like "I Spy." Identify an object in the room. Describe it to the children providing one hint at a time until the children guess. Say something like, "I spy something that is round. Red. Hot. On the stove." It's the pan of spaghetti cooking. Or play the game "I'm thinking of an animal. It has four legs, a long neck, and is yellow with brown spots. What is it?" (Answer: a giraffe!)</p>	<p>"Eyes on the Forehead" is a fun partner game. Have one partner sit across from each other. Place a sticker on the partner's forehead. Have the other child look at the sticker. The round is over when one child blinks. Swap roles and continue the game. Modify the game using culturally sensitive variations that may be appropriate; eyes can be focused on the hands or other designated places.</p>

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
<p>Look at photos together. Look at pictures of other babies. Talk about what you see in the pictures. Mimic the expressions or emotions expressed by the subjects in the pictures when appropriate.</p>	<p>Look at photos. Name the people and talk about what was taking place at the time. Young children enjoy looking at photos of themselves and pictures of other children.</p>	<p>Look at photos and talk about the activities and people in the photos. Older preschool children may enjoy taking photos of each other and talking about what the person was doing in the photo.</p>	<p>“One-Question Interviews” are a way to learn to listen to and understand others. First write a list of questions that the children are interested in learning about. Examples are favorite foods, pets, or activities. Have each child choose a partner. Read one of the questions to the group and have each child answer it for the partner. Ask the children what they learned about their partner.</p>
<p>Older babies will enjoy rolling a ball back and forth. Talk about what you are doing as you are playing a sharing activity together.</p>	<p>Take turns rolling a toy car or ball back and forth. Talk about what you are doing as you are playing a sharing activity together.</p>	<p>Encourage lots of pretend play. During pretend play, switch roles: let the children pretend to be the grownup and you be the child. Or pretend to go to the pizza or coffee shop. Children can be the cook or the waitstaff and “write” down your order.</p>	<p>Help understand different perspectives through creative storytelling. Start by identifying key story elements like place, characters, and time (historic, of year, of day, etc.). Then design 6-12 cards with emotions and 6-12 cards with objects. Each person picks one card from each pile and has a 1-2 minute turn to unfold the story. Take turns until the cards are used or the story comes to a satisfying conclusion.</p>

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
<p>Play games like “my turn, your turn” with a ball or toy. This even works when you are putting on a baby’s socks or shoes. Having fun together builds a positive relationship.</p>	<p>Play games with toddlers, such as taking turns jumping off the bottom step, kicking a ball, or blowing bubbles. Taking turns is essential to good social skills.</p>	<p>Play a card game of Go Fish, Old Maid, or Concentration. Simple board games, like Candyland, are fun for preschoolers. Games help preschool-age children learn to take turns.</p>	<p>Plan a game day and invite children to bring a board or card game to share with and teach others. Set up a chart with a list of the games so children can record which games they have played. This will encourage participation by all of the children in the group.</p>
<p>Talk to the babies you are caring for by asking questions and waiting for a response as though you were in a conversation. Mimic their response that may be a gurgle, legs kicking, or a laugh. Repeat this several times if the baby is interested in maintaining the responses.</p>	<p>Play make-believe with stuffed toy animals. Tell a simple story with the animals or toys. Take turns telling a story. Even a young toddler can share in this by telling a story, too—even if you don’t understand the words he is trying to say. It is fun to play make-believe with your toddler and builds early communication and language skills.</p>	<p>Make up stories together where the children take turns determining what happens next. You can offer suggestions like “Do they next go to the park, the beach, or a movie?” Make up stories about toys or stuffed animals that you have placed or hidden around the house.</p>	<p>“Let’s Make a Deal” is a strategy that teaches the art of compromise. When a child brings up an idea that is not appropriate at that time but could be later, respond with “Let’s make a deal.” Brainstorm solutions and together choose the one that can work for both of you and the group.</p>
<p>Narrate your actions as you do daily tasks using a variety of words and voice tones. Show and label your emotions. Let them mimic you.</p>	<p>Take turns handing toys back and forth to each other. Name the toys as you pass them. Add the words “please” and “thank you” as you pass the toys.</p>	<p>Practice taking turns solving social problems by playing a word game where you ask “What might happen next?” if you bring a snowball in the house or you build a tower taller than you?</p>	<p>Solve problems together as a fun way to encourage team work. Put together a paper bag of props and have small groups work together to create a skit that uses all of the props. Have them perform the skits for each other.</p>

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
Help babies learn to calm themselves by giving a pacifier or offering a favorite blanket or soft object.	Be consistent with what you let toddlers do. Let toddlers know when you appreciate what they are learning to do and when they are helping, such as picking up toys or bringing their plate to the sink.	Complete a scavenger hunt as a team of 2. Designate a place for the team’s collection basket. The team must go out together and find an object and bring it back to deposit in the basket. Then they are given the next object to find. Partners must work together until all objects are found. Some possible ideas for objects are things with different: textures like smooth, bumpy; geometric shapes like circles, squares, and rectangles; or natural objects like rocks, pinecones, etc.	Learn to understand ways that people are similar and different from each other by having children stand in two lines facing a partner. The leader will make a statement like I am the oldest/youngest child in my family, I like singing in the shower, I am a runner, I love to cook, etc. Have the pairs identify if the trait applies to themselves. At the end, ask what each pair has learned about their friend.

Learning to Become Independent

The desire for independence is a natural and important part of growing up. When supporting activities that nurture independence, it is important to set limits that allow exploration, but maintain the children’s safety. This can often be done by offering choices or building on already acquired skills. The approach also helps to develop problem-solving and thinking skills. An example that shows this is when a child is being coached to dress themselves. It may start by putting on their own socks, then adding pants, shirt, and eventually choosing their own clothing and putting it all on by themselves. (Stripes mixed with polka dots shows independence.) Some ideas to nurture independence are listed in the following table.

Additionally, there are numerous web resources for children that—when carefully selected and supervised—can be made available to preschool and school-aged children. These resources are available if there is access to broadband and Wi-Fi in your community. Many child development and medical experts recommend setting screen time limits with children and teaching appropriate digital behavior as children have increasing access to a wide range of devices and applications. It is important that any media that children watch or interact with is a *quality* program or website. As with any activity, it is important to provide a balance of the use of media with other activities. More on this topic can be found at:

- Mayo Clinic: [Screen time and children: How to guide your child](#)
- American Academy of Pediatrics: [AAP's Guidelines for Screentime for Kids](#)

There are several interesting child-friendly websites that provide virtual tours and can be bookmarked so that the child can independently navigate them. Here are a small sample of some of the types of websites that can support independent learning:

- The [San Diego Zoo](#) has a website with images of zoo animals, videos, games, and activities.
- A website from Canada provides a [tour of farms](#) with pigs and cows, apple orchards, and eggs.
- Watch live webcam of [what lives underwater](#), such as whales, at the aquarium.
- Minnesota's [live eagle cam](#). This year, the parents are sitting on three eggs.
- Minnesota Marine Art Museum [audio tours](#) of famous artists.
- National Geographic [How Things Work for Kids](#) explains in detail how things of interest to kids work.

Below you'll find suggestions that do not rely on media.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School Age
Give babies soft toys, such as dolls or stuffed animals, to pretend to take care of by holding, feeding, rocking, or singing.	Have toddlers begin helping clean up by giving them one item at a time to put away in a designated place.	Put away toys after each play activity. Make sure that the bins or baskets are labeled (with words and pictures) so they know where to put things.	Identify space(s) and times of the day designed for independent work. Have the children help design the areas, choose the materials, and set the rules.
Let older babies use large crayons or washable, non-toxic markers for scribbling and drawing. Be sure to supervise closely.	Give toddlers a little alone time to explore while you are close by to let them know that they are okay.	Encourage children to engage in dramatic or imaginative play using dolls, action figures, or other make-believe props to create stories, express emotions, and explore their ideas.	Choose a group project that is made up of small components. Some examples are: a variety show, a wall hanging, or a movie. Have children work on the pieces of the project independently and then bring the pieces together into a final product or production. Consider using the final product as a fundraiser for a local charity.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School Age
<p>Let babies look at board or plastic books by themselves. Take a board book and glue pictures of the staff or parent faces that the babies can recognize.</p>	<p>Let toddlers look at books by themselves. Give them a variety, and rotate some books to match with the season or topics of interest.</p>	<p>Let preschoolers look at books by themselves. Preschoolers like to “pretend” they are reading the story. Have children “read” or tell a stories to one another or stuffed toy animals.</p>	<p>Help children develop criteria for picking a book or movie that they want to read or watch. Have children list 3 books or movies that they are interested in. Have them write/draw a description of each one and rank them in the order that they would be interested in watching them.</p>
<p>Let babies turn the pages when looking at a book together and take turns naming items in the pictures.</p>	<p>Have toddlers draw (or scribble) a picture to send to a family member or friend.</p>	<p>Encourage writing for a reason such as writing a note to a friend, making a list of things to do, or pretending to take an order at a restaurant.</p>	<p>Have school-aged children keep a daily observation journal on something of interest. Ideas might include watching: a bird feeder, a young child, a garden, an animal, etc. Record an observation daily. See what was learned at the end of each week.</p>
<p>Place soft toys on the crib surface next to babies’ feet. Babies can kick the toys and they will move. Share the enjoyment of “cause and effect” (when babies move their feet and legs, the toys move as a result).</p>	<p>Let them try out toys on their own. Set out a few things and let them play on their own. Play dough is a good example: they can play by tearing off pieces of play dough and rolling it into balls. Provide containers for toddlers and encourage them to drop in the play dough pieces.</p>	<p>Take pictures that show activities choices that the children will have for a part of the day. Have each of them place or draw the activities in the order that they will do them. Have a way that they can show when they have finished each activity.</p>	<p>Design an activity that allows children to try something new or take a controlled risk. Food preparation is a good example where they might be allowed to use a mixer or measure ingredients on their own. It will build confidence for both the children and the provider.</p>

Some Time to Relax: Quiet Activities

Similar to grown-ups in children’s lives, it is important to create a balance of activities between quiet activities with times of more active play. Times of rest and relaxation can be chances to let children’s brains develop further. Be sure to have regular times of rest and relaxation each day for all ages. Follow the children’s cues; they will let you know when it’s time. This is especially important during uncertain times in a child’s life.

Even during quiet times or when young children are relaxing, you have the opportunity to build oral language skills by talking together. Really sitting and having a conversation with a child, asking them to tell a story, recounting what they did that day, asking a child to plan their next activity, or think through a problem. This may be one of the most significant times each day that you can connect with children to help them grow their minds and emotional selves.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
While reading to babies, use a quiet voice and talk about the pictures in the book.	After a period of being busy or active play, read a book with toddlers. It’s also relaxing to just talk about the pictures together or have toddlers tell the story. Be sure you’re using a quiet, gentle voice.	Using recorded books or music is a good way to help children relax and learn to listen. Find a place for each child to relax, turn off or dim the lights, and turn the story on.	Allowing children to listen to music on personal devices with ear buds is a way to help them relax and have some time to themselves. Some may choose to rest, draw, or play a simple game while they listen to music.
Very gently stroke babies’ backs, legs, arms, and tummies to encourage them to relax. Follow babies’ cues about their preferences for touch. Singing a quiet song may make this time even more relaxing.	Some toddlers may enjoy having their back, arms, or legs rubbed. Follow each toddler’s cues about their preferences for touch at that time. Singing a quiet song may make this time even more relaxing.	Teach preschoolers some gentle stretches or basic yoga moves, especially deep breathing. Yoga has been shown to help some children relax.	Progressive muscle relaxation techniques can teach a child to relax and calm down. Start at the head and work to the toes by tensing and relaxing muscles in each area of the body.

Babies	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School-Age
<p>Older babies may enjoy “drawing” on a piece of paper, newspaper, back of envelope, or paper plate with a crayon. Talk quietly about what each child is doing, such as the color she is using and the designs she is making while coloring.</p>	<p>Set up a bin with soft sensory items or warm water. Allow the children to explore using simple tools or objects. Mix in some colors or bubbles. Make sure the materials are calming and easily manipulated.</p>	<p>Set up a table with selected art activities, such as drawing or coloring. Provide paper or a white board, markers, crayons, or chalk. Provide paper of various types or simple images for coloring that leave space for personal additions or any unneeded papers.</p>	<p>Provide each child with a sketch pad and utensils for drawing. Let them draw or doodle experimenting with color, shape, and design. The notepad preserves the drawings so they return to them over time.</p>
<p>Take babies for a quiet walk. Point out what you see and hear, sing a quiet song or just enjoy the quiet time and physical movement.</p>	<p>Take toddlers for a quiet walk. Use words to name all that you see and hear (such as birds or dogs), sing a quiet song, or just enjoy the quiet time and physical movement. Be sure to answer any questions toddlers have about what they see.</p>	<p>Take preschoolers on a focused walk. Ask them to observe specific things like houses that have porches, signs of pets, or sounds. Enjoy pointing out what you see and hear; ask preschoolers what they see and hear. Be sure to answer questions preschoolers have about what they see.</p>	<p>Determine safe spaces, distance and time limits that school-agers can walk to and/or spend some relaxing time visiting. If you have multiple staff, the boundaries may be larger as the staff can supervise from different points of view.</p>
<p>Create a routine and ensure a regular naptime. Allow babies to play quietly in their cribs, if that is something they enjoy.</p>	<p>Create a quiet, special place for toddlers, such as a tent or cave where they can relax and play quietly.</p>	<p>Provide preschoolers the opportunity to construct a quiet place, such as under a table or inside a big box, where they can relax and play or read quietly. Use old sheets, curtains, or rugs to create the space. Preschoolers can select a quiet toy or book to have with them inside.</p>	<p>Find a place that is restful and allows some downtime where school-agers can engage in interesting activities. Examples are simple puzzles, number games, and word searches; beading activities; origami paper-folding; or reading a book.</p>

Other Resources for Finding Activities

The following list highlights just a few of many sites that offer reliable activity suggestions for providers working with a wide age range of children:

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) website offers more ideas for activities in the [Parent Guides](#) located on the [Early Childhood Indicators of Progress webpages](#).

Learn more about children’s healthy development and find other ideas on the state [Help Me Grow](#) website.

[PBS Learning for Preschoolers](#) offers lessons, interactives, audio, and websites to foster preschool learning and development.

[Ranger Rick](#) offers a wide variety of free activities, videos, games, and more for the next several months. A great way to learn about natural science.

[Rhythms of Play](#) provides an array of outdoor activities, building, gardening, arts, and crafts projects.

[Scholastic](#) has put many of their interactive lessons online for free. New lessons are added daily. This website has a lot of resources for families and teachers.

Scholastic [Learn at Home](#) provides 20 days’ worth of active learning journeys designed to reinforce and sustain educational opportunities for those students who are unable to attend school.

[Scratch Jr](#) provides opportunity for older kids (5-7 year olds) to create their own games and activities by learning coding techniques and strategies.

Stream Sesame Street:

- English: <https://www.youtube.com/sesamestreet>
- Spanish: <https://sesamo.com/>

[Wide Open School](#) is a collection of online learning experiences that can be completed both offline and on smartphones. It includes bilingual and English-language learner resources.

Be sure to have some fun together even during uncertain times! Stay safe and healthy!