

Companion Activity Sheet: Supporting Play at Every Age

Play is the child's work – Maria Montessori

Why this sheet?

This companion to “[Play Is the Child's Work](#)” is for all the grown-ups who want to nurture confidence, connection, and learning through play, but aren't sure where to start. Whether your child is two or twelve, this guide offers simple ideas to help them build competence and joy through play.

A few quick tips before you start

- **Follow their lead.** If they're into dinosaurs, go with dinosaurs!
- **It's not about being perfect.** It's about presence and permission to explore.
- **Mess is okay.** Learning is messy! Literally and emotionally.
- **Don't force it.** Some kids play differently. Respect their pace.
- **Connection first.** Just being nearby can be powerful.

Ages 2–4: The world is their sensory playground

At this age, kids are exploring textures, sounds, movement, and cause-and-effect.

Play ideas:

- water play with cups, spoons, and containers
- sand, mud, or kinetic sand play
- dress-up and pretend play (animal masks, kitchen sets)
- blocks, Duplo, or simple stacking toys
- music time—banging pots or toy drums
- repetitive role-play: feeding dolls, putting toys “to bed”.

What they're learning:

Motor skills, independence, language, emotional expression

Your role:

Narrate what they're doing. Celebrate small efforts. Join in without taking over.

Ages 5–7: Imagination and identity

These kids love storylines, role-play, and “I can do it myself” energy.

Play ideas:

- forts made with cushions and blankets
- puppet shows or action figure storytelling
- obstacle courses in the backyard or lounge room
- dress-up boxes with hats, capes, and shoes
- simple board games with turn-taking
- basic crafts: cutting, pasting, painting.

What they're learning:

Problem solving, persistence, social rules, emotional understanding

Your role:

Ask open questions like, “What happens next?” or “Can I be a character too?”

Ages 8–10: Mastery, meaning & group play

Children at this stage start to crave mastery and love rules, strategy, and making things “real”.

Play ideas:

- building kits (Lego, Meccano, magnetic tiles)
- story writing and comic drawing

- cooking or baking with supervision
- making their own games with rules
- scavenger hunts or mystery games
- “maker” projects: cardboard robots, slime kits, DIY science.

What they’re learning:

Executive functioning, self-direction, collaboration, planning

Your role:

Support trial and error. Be their sounding board. Let them be the expert sometimes.

Ages 11–13: Social play, creativity, and identity

Older children may drift away from “traditional” play, but they still need creative expression, sensory play, and exploration.

Play ideas:

- role-playing games like Dungeons & Dragons
- music or songwriting with apps or real instruments
- journaling, vision boards, or art projects
- team sports, martial arts, or dance
- strategic games like chess, Minecraft, or coding
- DIY challenges: “Invent a new snack”, “Design a new sport”.

What they’re learning:

Abstract thinking, resilience, identity formation, creative problem solving

Your role:

Give them space and access to creative tools. Stay curious and engaged – without “hovering”.

Bonus section: play for healing

For children who've experienced trauma, the following play types can be especially powerful:

Nurture play

Let them care for dolls, pets, or plants – this builds empathy and regulation.

Dramatic role play

Offer safe themes (school, family, superheroes) for working out emotions.

Movement play

Jumping, swinging, yoga, or balancing can regulate the nervous system.

Expressive play

Art, music, and storytelling allow kids to “speak” without words.

Simple prompts to support play

Use these to guide, connect, or just keep the energy flowing:

- “Tell me about what’s happening here.”
- “What do you want to happen next?”
- “How can I help your plan work?”
- “That didn’t work – what else could we try?”
- “You figured that out all by yourself!”

DIY “play power” kit

Create a basic play kit to support spontaneous creativity at home.

Suggestions:

- cardboard boxes of different sizes
- fabric scraps, paper, glue, tape, scissors
- markers, crayons, chalk, paints
- toy animals, vehicles, dolls or action figures
- playdough, sand, or sensory rice
- a bell or timer to use in games

Let your child add to the kit over time with their own creations and ideas!

Want to go deeper?

If you'd like to explore how play connects to healing and development, check out:

- [Play Is the Child's Work](#)
- [Every Child Needs a Raving Fan](#)
- [Helping children grow their superpowers](#)

Or reach out to your caseworker or support worker for more ideas tailored to your child's needs.

You've got this

Whether it's five minutes after dinner or a whole rainy Sunday afternoon, play is one of the most valuable gifts you can offer a child.

You don't need to be a Pinterest parent or a drama teacher – just someone who *shows up, gets curious, and laughs a little*. Because when we say, “*play is the child's work*”, we also mean this:

Play is how they become who they're meant to be.

And with your support, they'll do just that.