

Here are some simple and fun learning activities you can try at home with your child:

Early Level:

TELL ME A STORY

Reading books aloud to children stimulates their imagination and expands their understanding of the world around them. There are many benefits to children when parents read aloud to them, these include promoting literacy and social-emotional skills. It helps children to develop language and listening skills and prepares them to understand the written word.

Encouraging learning through story time.

Reading comprehension is a child's ability to understand what they are reading or listening to and the skills for this can be honed very early on through exposure to books and engaging in high quality discussions with the adult reading the story. When reading comprehension is encouraged in the early years, children are more likely to go on to develop into successful, well-rounded readers and learners.

When children can relate texts to the real world around them, their understanding will grow. To encourage this try asking your child existing knowledge questions like:

- Is this book the same as/different to the ones we have read before?
- Have you ever heard of _____ before?
- Have you ever done _____ before?
- Where have you seen things like this before?

From an early age, the skill of inferring and making connections with the information is crucial, you can help your child master this by asking your child to think about:

- What kind of person the character is, encouraging the use of adjectives, such as kind, tall, grumpy, brave.
- What might happen next?
- What is happening in the story? Ask them to compare to their own lives
- Why did the character act the way they did? Ask your child to think about why they did this.

Help them to visualise the story, with younger children we can encourage this by focusing on the 5 senses and how they relate to text. The hungry caterpillar or the Gruffalo are great stories to practice this learning with.

- Imagine touching the objects mentioned in the story, what do they feel like?
- What sounds can you hear in your mind?
- What smells are associated with the story?
- What tastes might be linked to the story?

Summarise, talk about the story once it is finished, what happened at the start, the middle and how did it end?

- How did the story begin?
- What happened in the story?
- What was the problem in the story?
- What happened in the end?
- What did the characters learn in the end?

LET'S GET COOKING

Following a recipe with your child will give you lots of opportunity to develop your child's language and maths skills while providing an excellent foundation for self-help skills that they will need throughout their life.

Reading the recipe - Telling kids instructions - Kids asking questions and getting reassurance... It's all communication and this builds their language and maths abilities. There are words and numbers in the recipe you're reading to them when they hear these words and numbers in this context, it helps them to understand that they cause actions that make the recipe work.

Cooking with kids develops fine motor skills too. Cracking an egg or filling a measuring cup full and levelling it off is hard for little hands. Cooking is a great way to improve these skills, build muscles, and master those techniques. Taking part in these types of experiences now will help your child with later writing skills and other learning tasks.

Cooking with an adult also helps to build a child's confidence and independence. While children experiment with ingredients or help chop vegetables with knives, you are giving them a great opportunity to assess risk for themselves in a safe and nurturing environment.

Why not give these simple and delicious recipes a go...?

GOOD OLD VEGETABLE SOUP

Ingredients

2 tbsp olive or sunflower oil, or 30g/1oz butter

1 onion, peeled and chopped

1 garlic clove, peeled and chopped

1 potato, or other thickener if needed, peeled and cut into chunks

500g/18oz of any vegetables you have, these might be carrots, leeks, parsnips, cauliflower, butternut squash, all prepared as appropriate and roughly chopped

1-1.5 litres/1 $\frac{1}{4}$ -2 $\frac{1}{4}$ pints) vegetable or chicken stock

Seasonings

Salt (but not too much)

freshly ground black pepper

Encouraging learning through cooking

Show your child the ingredients and ask them to guess what they might be making with you. Encourage them to name each ingredient and consider if they think the ingredients are healthy or not.

Help the children prepare the vegetables, taking extra care when using knives.

Recipe

Heat the oil or butter gently in a large saucepan, then add the onion, garlic, potato and vegetables. Stir around to coat everything in the fat, then cook very gently for 10-15 minutes.

Add 1litre/1 $\frac{1}{4}$ pints of stock, saving the rest for thinning down (if necessary), and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Bring up to the boil, then simmer gently for about 20 minutes until all the vegetables are tender.

Optional:

Liquidise in several batches and return to the pan. Thin down with the reserved stock, water or milk as required, and check the seasoning
Reheat when needed.

FRUIT SKEWERS

Ingredients

Any of your child's favourite soft fruits will work for this recipe

Bananas

Grapes

Strawberries

Mango

Nectarine

Plum

Peach

Equipment

Children's knives

Wooden kebab skewers

Encouraging learning through cooking

Talk about the names of the fruits, how they grow and what makes them healthy. It is important to discuss the properties of food and which food group category they fall into to increase children's knowledge of healthy eating.

Give a demonstration of preparing the fruits, cutting them into smaller pieces and peeling the skins.

Recipe

Allow the children to cut the fruit into small pieces, talk about the smells, textures and which ones they like or dislike. Offer support to those who need it, they may need help removing skins and stones.

Once the fruit is all cut let the children choose which fruits they would like to put onto their skewers, threading pieces of fruit until it is full.

HEALTHY PIZZA

Ingredients

100grams strong whole-wheat flour

1 sachet of dried yeast

125ml warm water

Cherry Tomatoes

Chopped tomatoes

Sweetcorn

Courgettes

Olives

Grated cheese

Recipe

Place the ingredients out in front of the children and ask them what they think they are making. Talk about why pizzas can be included in healthy eating. Mix the flour, yeast and water until it comes together to form a dough, knead for a minute and then split into smaller pieces for the children to make individual bases.

Uses the chopped tomatoes to make the sauce for the base, allow the children to add their own

Encourage the children to chop the cherry tomatoes and olives into quarters and to cut the courgettes into diced pieces, offer help to those who need it.

Allow the children to choose their own toppings, remind them they only need a small amount of cheese and encourage them to try new things. Once finished bake in the oven for 10-12mins

LET'S GET CREATIVE

There are lots of ways we can encourage creativity in children and the importance of its benefits should not be underestimated in the Early years. When children have the freedom to create something for themselves, they gain a great sense of achievement. So, providing your child with opportunities to get creative is a valuable way to nurture their self-confidence, independence and social and emotional intelligence.



What can you do at home?

JUNK MODELLING

What you need:

- Empty cardboard boxes
- Egg cartons
- Old magazines
- Foil
- Bottle tops
- Dried pasta
- Straws
- Cardboard tubes
- material
- Glue or cello tape
- String
- Paint

Clear a space and cover your table to protect your surfaces. Lay out all the materials and the items the children can use to stick them together and sit back and watch them create their masterpieces, some children will need you to hold the bits together while they stick or glue, please be patient and let them try to master the tricky bits for themselves. Once model is complete paint and display.

MAKE SOME PLAYDOUGH

Nurturing creativity is often a messy process. Playdough is an excellent way for children to create something which has hours of a playing power at the end.

What you will need

2 cups of Flour

1 cup of salt

2 tablespoons of vegetable oil

1¼ cups of boiling water (**warning**: this is a job for the adult)

2 tablespoons of cream of tartar

Food colouring of your choice

Optional extras for additional sensory fun

Add essential oils

Add a touch of glitter

Ask your child to add all the dry ingredients and mix slowly, talk about what is happening and what they see, is it easy to mix or hard. Then add in the oil and the food colouring, what happens now? Is it still power or does it look different? Lastly the adult should slowly add the water taking great care when mixing so save splashing. Once the playdough has been mixed into a dough and left to cool you and your child can make and create whatever you like. Enjoy

Encourage learning through making playdough:

What happens when you add all the different ingredients?

How does it feel?

Does it look different?

Does it smell different?

PAINT OR DRAW A PICTURE

This activity helps to promote your child's fine motor skills, improve hand eye coordination increases confidence and is an outlet for children to express themselves and share their thoughts and ideas. Most children enjoy drawing and painting, and this is a great way to encourage your child to mark make as their early writing skills emerge.

What you will need:

Paper

Pencils/pens/crayon/paint

Imagination

Encourage learning through drawing:

Ask your child about their picture and encourage them to add as much detail as they can as this will help them with the story telling of their drawing. You can help them with this by asking them to add missing body parts like Where is daddy's nose? or What does mummy hear with? Or if they are drawing a house encourage them to think about adding fine detail you can do this by asking Would I need to help me get into your house? Most importantly love the creations they make, make a fuss and display their work. Showing them how proud you are about their achievements will give them confidence and pride in what they do.

INCLUDE ME IN CHORES

Children love to have a job, making these jobs fun is important to getting the children to engage with whatever it is you would like them to do.

Tidy their toys

In Nursery the children are responsible for tidying their toys up after themselves once they have finished playing with them so that they are ready for someone else to use. At the end of the session we all work together to put everything away clean and tidy. This is best done when there is music on so we can have a dance and enjoy ourselves. Why not challenge your child to show you how good they are at tidying up when they are in Nursery to see if they are just as good at it at home?

Help plan and make meals

We have a very special job in Nursery for all children to take their turn and be a snack helper. This job helps to build children's confidence and self-help skills in a safe and supported way. The children are responsible for pouring the milk and water into the jugs for the other children to use and help the snack lady to prepare the snack and layout the serving plates. The children know to wash their hands to make sure they keep everyone safe and healthy. Why not ask your child to help choose and prepare meals, set the table and help you serve the rest of your family?

Help write a shopping list and go shopping

This is a great activity to encourage your child to mark make and understand that the marks they make have meaning. Planning is also a great life skill that should be nurtured and encouraged.

Help weed the garden and plant new plants and vegetables

Getting out in the fresh air and doing a bit of gardening is a fun and active thing to do with your child. Children learn best when they are engaging all their senses and gardening uses all 5 senses making it a fantastic all-round experience for your child.

Why not try:

Developing fine motor by scooping up dirt and planting seeds in pots – these types of activities help your child to strengthen muscles needed that will help them improve their writing, cutting and typing skills.

Introduce science concepts talk to your child about the process of growing a seed. What do you need to make it grow? How will the seed change? What might it look like?

Teach responsibility and patience garden is a great opportunity to teach responsibility and patience by showing them that by taking care of the seeds every day will lead to healthy plants.

Develop maths skills there are numerous opportunities to support your child's emergent maths, encourage them to count the seeds, measure the depth of the soil, keep a record of how tall their plants are growing and so much more.

BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY... PLEASE PLAY WITH ME

Dressing up/imaginative games

Indulging in imaginative play not only supports a child's language development it helps to support their social and emotional development too, providing them with a good basis for developing friendships and relationships with others. It also lets children test their ideas, thoughts and feelings in a safe and fun way. Imaginative play allows your child to "go to a lot of places and become a lot of things." There is no limit to where a child's minds can take them. Whenever you see your little one getting into role play mode, encourage them and provide the necessary environment that they can express themselves freely.

Sing songs

When we sing with children we are encouraging their language development and vocabulary, encouraging their rhythmic actions in time to music, developing their recall and help them to learn pitch notes and memorise melody. It is also a great mood lifter and can help settle children when they are anxious.

Play a board game

Playing board games helps your child to develop their social skills, practice their turn taking skills and teach a child how to lose gracefully. It is also a great way for all the family to spend some quality time together.

Do a jigsaw

Jigsaw puzzles are a fun way to pass time and developing problem-solving skills and reasoning skills in children with the bonus of promoting their concentration. Jigsaws help to pass the time and act as an additional educational tool when you talk about the image you are creating.

Build dens

Building dens are a simple and fun thing to do with your children. All you need is some bed sheets or towels, chairs or tables to prop it up with and a sprinkling of imagination. You and your child can have hours of fun pretending to be wherever your mind takes you. You could even take this activity outside and make a den with some sticks... what will you be building? The possibilities are endless.

Have an teddy bear picnic or a tea party

This activity is easy to set up and provides lots of opportunity to develop social skills such as, sharing, taking turns, kindness, love and caring for each of the "guests" invited.

Build something

Get out some Lego, Duplo or wooden blocks and build a masterpiece. This activity will promote your child's creativity and encourage early maths and engineering skills through hands on learning. Let your child build something tall and knock it down or count the bricks as you build the learning and fun is endless.

Children love the one to one time they have when playing with their parents and families and learn from everything they do. Please remember to take time to be with one another, have fun and to share in lots of cuddles, conversation and laughter during this unusual time. Please stay safe and well and we hope to see you all very soon.