

Homemade Toys, Games, and Activities
for Children 1 to 3 Years Old

Compiled by Deanna Iris Sava, MS, OTR/L, and Barbara Weber, OTR/L

These ideas were submitted from various occupational therapy listservs. Thanks to all who contributed these wonderful ideas.

1. Fish made with paper clips and a magnetic fishing rod
2. A big Tic Tac Toe game. You can divide the board into 9 squares using colored tape. You can attach the Xs and Os to the board with Velcro
3. Plastic bottles filled with colored water for bowling
4. Washing basket to throw balls into
5. Clothes pegs that we use to 'decorate' rope ladder
6. A big tub full of plastic pieces and plastic coins scattered inside. This provides great tactile input, and children love to look for hidden treasures
7. Small bottles (such as extract bottles). The child fills the bottles with tiny balls of playdough
8. Transparency sheet (for overheads). Attach all but the top side to cardboard or plastic to create a pocket. Any worksheet can be inserted into the pocket, and the child draws on it with an erasable marker. You can erase any unwanted lines easily and the worksheet can be reused many times
9. "Two-handed" activities, such as eggbeaters in bubbles, jack in the box/wind-up toys, cutting Velcro fruit, etc. 2.8 year old children show a preference for one hand, then switches. This is typical for age 2.8. The child may continue this throughout preschool, and even Kindergarten. Encourage crossing midline with whichever hand is being used and see if child is having difficulty crossing midline, and if that may influence his choice of hand use
10. Finger paint with salt, sand, glitter etc added for added texture. Put some finger paint in the freezer or microwave to create different temperatures
11. Stack of small boxes to knock down
12. Stuffed animals to hug and wave to
13. Toys hanging from plastic links can encourage back extension, reaching, visual tracking, and sitting balance
14. Paper bags to hide things in. Folding the top down requires more manipulation
15. Tupperware dishes with noisy items inside to turn and rattle
16. Pretend play with comb, brush, washcloth. Child can use on him/herself or on a doll
17. Plastic cups and bowls to stack and nest
18. Sponges for squeezing during water play (you can use a shaped sponge with one rough side for added texture)
19. Paper to crumple
20. A large piggy bank. Take the large discs from frozen orange juice and make a slit in a throw away canister (like those for protein drinks)
21. Shallow bucket of blocks with spoon
22. Clorox wipes container with Popsicle sticks. Have them push the Popsicle sticks through the small opening at the top, or just reach in the container to get the sticks out

23. Empty baby wipes plastic can in which the wipes pop up through a petal-type opening. Take a large long piece of elastic (you can use a colorful patterned kind, like the elastic that is used to make Chinese jump ropes). Tie a large bead to one end to prevent pulling through the opening, and place the elastic in the container. Thread the other end through a bead on that end, too. You'll end up with a pulling string that gives 10 -20 repetitions of pull. Its bilateral, good for whole arm work, and shoulder proprioception. Because it's a bit different, children are usually interested in it. You can put sticky back shelf paper on the outer can for a more "professional toy" look
24. Sherbet containers with holes cut in the top to stuff pieces of sponge into. Cut the hole smaller than the sponge and you get great resisted tripod pinch. You can use sponges of various colors and shapes – or even sponge letters -- to grade the activity
25. Use an old plastic ice cream container that has a lid (but any container would work, such as a coffee can). Draw a face on the lid, and create an opening, which is the mouth. Then you can "feed" the container different things. You can use this activity in conjunction with various holidays, special events, or to go along with the curriculum. For example, you can "feed" the container plastic Easter eggs at Eastertime, circus peanuts when they are getting ready for a field trip to the circus, or sea creature beanbags for an ocean lesson. You can also make different faces to put on the lid for variety
26. Various types of tweezers and "pinchers" (tea ball, strawberry hullers, clickers from party shops, pickle tongs, etc.). You can use the tools to remove the pegs from putty, after forming the putty into various patterns or shapes. Or you can have the child just stick the pegs into the putty
27. Use solo plates and wipe off markers for writing practice. You can also use mirrors/glass and 'bright-write' markers
28. An empty parmesan cheese shaker. You can use the large opening to "feed" small discs etc. The hole side is great for more challenging FM, stuffing in a small cotton ball, or using pincer grasp to drop in dry beans.
29. Lotion/oil - rub hands together, rub on legs/feet, and use for infant massage
30. Head stands
31. Somersaults
32. Backyard swings
33. For younger children, make a swing out of a blanket, have an adult hold each end of the blanket, and swing the child
34. Rolling
35. Sitting in an office chair and spinning it for rotary movement
36. Sitting on top of a sheet or blanket and have someone pull it across the floor
37. Rocking chair
38. "Rides" in your lap or on a crossed leg (bounce or rock side-to-side, etc.)
39. Piggy back or horsey back rides
40. Yoga exercises for children

41. Ring around the rosie
42. Duck, duck, the goose
43. Magic mountain on your knees -- lower one knee, then the other, and up again

Here is a recipe for sand castles:

Ingredients

4 cups of sand
2 cups of corn starch
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon cream of tartar
3 cups hot water

Directions

Mix sand, corn starch and cream of tartar in a saucepan. Stir in hot water. Cook over medium heat until water is absorbed and mixture is too stiff to stir. Cool until it can be handled. Refrigerate and store in airtight container until ready to use. Can be pressed into a mold.