



United Way of Bucks County Pre-K Family Activity Guide



*Easy educational
activities to do at home with
young kids.*

Spring 2020

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INTRODUCTION

Research shows that 90% of a child's brain develops before the age of 5. As soon as children are born, they begin learning from the people and environment around them. During the early years, children develop quickly and their natural curiosity helps them build on what they learn.

Parents and caregivers play a very important role in shaping children's early learning experiences. Fortunately, parents do not have to be great teachers to help their children learn at home. Simple, everyday home activities can provide great opportunities for young children to develop their skills.

There are many resources available to support families' involvement in their children's Pre-K education. This guide includes a variety of simple, inexpensive activities that can be done at home.

As you use this guide we recommend that you: 1) Supervise and help your child. 2) Be patient. 3) Have fun!

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Activity 1: Alphabet Memory

Materials: paper plates (3x5 cards or paper into squares will also work), markers

Instructions: On one set of paper plates, write 8 upper-case letters (one letter per plate). On another set of plates, write the same 8 letters, but in lower-case. Lay all of the plates on the floor face down. Take turns trying to match each lower-case letter to the upper-case letter.

Questions: What sound does each letter make? What words start with each letter? What is your favorite letter? Why?



Activity 2: Creamy Letter Writing

Materials: shaving cream, flat surface (such as a tabletop or cookie sheet)

Instructions: This activity can be done inside or outside. On a flat surface spray four squirts of shaving cream. Have your child dip her finger in the shaving cream and write different letters of the alphabet in the shaving cream. Spray another four squirts of shaving cream and have your child dip her finger in to write her name.

Questions: Which letters were the easiest to write? Which letters were the hardest to write? Why? What else could you write or draw in the shaving cream?

Activity 3: Outdoor Scavenger Hunt

Materials: 3x5 cards (or paper cut into small squares), markers, paper bag

Instructions: Make 8-10 simple flashcards with words of things that can be found outside (such as leaf, acorn, rock, stick, etc). Review each flashcard, focusing on beginning letters and sounds. Go outside with your child, give him one card at a time, and ask him to find the item and place the item in the bag. Do the same for the remaining items. Talk about each item in the bag, such as the color, shape and size.



Questions: Which words were easiest to read? Why? Which items were easiest to find? Why?

Recommended Books

Chicka, Chicka, Boom, Boom, Bill Martin Jr and John Archambault
Dr. Seuss ABC, Dr. Seuss

Recommended Websites

www.starfall.com
www.readingrockets.com

Activity 1: Sink or Float

Materials: bucket, water, paper, household items such as a button, coin, plastic spoon, pencil, etc.

Instructions: Have your child gather items from around the house (see above for ideas). On a piece of paper, make a list of the items that your child gathered. Next to each item on the list, write down whether your child thinks the item will sink or float in the bucket of water. One at a time, place each item in the bucket to see if it will sink or float. Next to each item, write whether your child predicted correctly that the item would sink or float. Talk with your child about which items sank and which items floated, and why.

Questions: What makes an item float? What makes an item sink?
Which item surprised you most? Why?



Activity 2: Color Cubes

Materials: ice cube tray, food coloring (or paints or powders to color water), 3 or 4 clear containers, water

Instructions: Fill the ice cube tray with water. Color the water by adding one drop of food or other coloring to each cube. Use a variety of colors such as blue, red, and yellow. Let the tray sit in the freezer until all of the water in the tray is frozen (about 4 hours). When the ice has set, fill the clear containers with water. Ask your child to drop the different colored ice cubes into the containers and observe what happens.

Questions: How else could you make colored water? What happens when you put the ice cubes in the water? How can you make purple? Green? Orange?



Activity 3: Leak Proof Bag

Materials: 3-4 sharpened pencils, 1-gallon zip lock plastic bag, water

Instructions: Fill half of the gallon size zip lock bag with water. Zip the bag, making sure it is completely closed. Ask your child to predict what will happen when you poke the pencils into the bag of water. Poke a pencil straight through the bag, in one side and out the other. Leave the pencil in the bag. Talk with your child about what happens. Repeat with the other pencils.

Questions: What happens when you poke the pencils in the bag? Were your predictions correct? Why or why not? What will happen if we poke the bag with other items?

Recommended Books

Dr. Seuss's Book of Colors, Dr. Seuss

DK Workbooks: Science, Pre-K: Learn and Explore, DK

Recommended Websites

<https://www.bostonchildrensmuseum.org/learning-resources>

<https://pbskids.org/sid/>

Activity 1: Close Up Views

Materials: magnifying glass (or phone camera that can zoom), common items such as a coin, leaf, stick, rock, a piece of jewelry or ornament, etc.

Instructions: Have your child practice using a magnifying glass or phone camera to zoom in and out to look at the different items. Look at each item, one at a time, first without the magnifier and then with the magnifier. For each item, ask your child to talk about the details that he can see without the magnifier and with the magnifier.

Questions: What do you like most about magnifying? When is it useful to magnify objects? What other things would you like to see close up?



Activity 2: Follow the Arrow

Materials: paper, markers, a small toy such as a car, horse, figurine

Instructions: Draw or print 10 arrows on a piece of paper and color all of the arrows the same color. Give your child a blank piece of paper, the toy of choice, and the arrows. Ask your child to make a maze on the piece of paper using the arrows provided. Once the arrows have been placed on the paper ask your child to move the toy from one end of the paper to the other following the directions of the arrows.

Questions: How can we change the maze? How can we make the maze longer or more challenging?

Activity 3: Tool Hunt

Materials: a variety of household tools (such as scissors, hammer, shovel, etc.)

Instructions: Talk with your child about the purpose of tools. Ask your child to search your home and gather 5 tools. Talk about the purpose of each tool. Ask your child to name other tools that are used at home, including small tools, big tools, indoor tools, outdoor tools, etc. Talk with your child about a tool that he would like to invent. Ask your child to draw his invention.

Questions: Which tools are easy to use? Which tools are hard to use? Which tools do we use often? Which tools do we not use often? Why?



Recommended Books

All About Light, Lisa Trumauer

See Inside How Things Work, Conrad Mason

Recommended Websites

<http://peepandthebigwideworld.com/en/>

<https://pbskids.org/apps/play-and-learn-science-.html>

Activity 1: Bridge Building

Materials: plastic cups, craft sticks (or 2-inch strips of cardboard or thick paper)

Instructions: Lay out the materials and ask your child to balance the craft sticks (or thick paper) from cup to cup in different ways to build a bridge. Also ask your child to use the cups in different ways to change how the bridge is supported. Talk with your child about how to make a long bridge, a tall bridge, a strong bridge, etc.

Questions: What do you think is the best way to build a bridge? Why? What other materials would help build a better bridge?

Activity 2: Marshmallow Engineering

Materials: marshmallows, straws



Instructions: Talk with your child about different types of buildings. For example, a house, apartment or a local store. Demonstrate for your child how to connect the straws and marshmallows. Ask your child to create different buildings using the marshmallows and straws. Encourage your child to make buildings of different shapes and sizes.

Questions: How many marshmallows and straws did you use for each building? Which buildings were hardest to build? Which buildings were easiest to build? Why?

Activity 3: Bird Feeder

Materials: empty toilet paper or paper towel roll, string cut to 18 inches, peanut butter, bird seeds or cheerios, spoon

Instructions: Thread the string through the toilet paper or paper towel roll, then tie a knot with both ends of the string. Have your child evenly spoon peanut butter on the outside of the paper roll. Have your child roll the paper roll in the cheerios or bird seeds. Hang the finished product outside for the birds to enjoy.

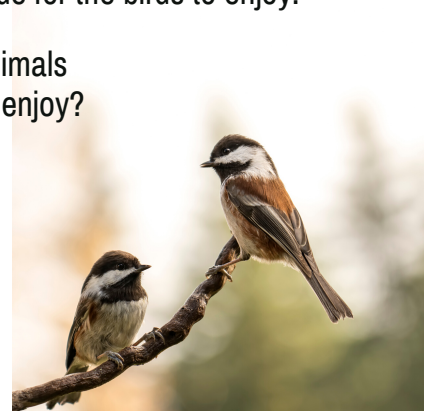
Questions: What are some ways to make the bird feeder better? Which animals besides birds can eat this treat? What else can we make for the animals to enjoy?

Recommended Books

Rosie, Revere, Engineer, Andrea Beaty
When I Build with Blocks, Niki Alling

Recommended Websites

<https://www.steamsational.com/engineering-activities-for-kids/>
<https://www.nasa.gov/stem-at-home-for-students-k-4.html>



Activity 1: Shoe Measures

Materials: child's shoe

Instructions: Using the shoe as a measurement tool, have your child go around the room and find four items that are shorter than the shoe. Have your child place those items in a pile. Have your child go around the room, find four items that are longer than the shoe, and place those items in a pile. One at a time, have your child compare the length of each item to the length of the shoe. Ask your child to place the items (including the shoe) in order from shortest to longest.

Questions: Which item is the longest? Which item is the shortest?
Which items are about the same size?



Activity 2: Shoelace Shapes

Materials: paper, markers, shoelace or string

Instructions: Draw 2-3 large shapes, such as a triangle, oval, or irregular shape on a sheet of paper. Demonstrate for your child how to outline each shape using the shoelace or string. Then, allow your child to do the same. Draw other shapes on different paper and have your child outline those shapes using the string. Have your child draw his own shapes and outline them with the string.

Questions: Which shapes are similar? Which shapes are different? Which shapes are easiest to outline with the string? Which shapes are hardest to outline with the string? Why?

Activity 3: Muffin Tin Color Hunt

Materials: muffin tin (6-muffin tin is best), paper, crayons

Instructions: Cut a piece of paper to fit the bottom of each of the muffin tin bottoms. Color each piece of paper a different color (red, blue, yellow, etc.). Put each colored paper in the muffin tin so that each bottom has a different color. Ask your child to collect household items that match each muffin color and sort the items by color in the muffin tin. For example, put a blueberry in the blue muffin, a leaf in the green muffin, etc.



Questions: What are different items we can find that match these colors? Which color was the easiest to find? Which color was the hardest to find? What are some of the best places to look for small items?

Recommended Books

Pigs Love Potatoes, Anika Denise
Inch by Inch, Leo Lionni

Recommended Websites

<https://www.naeyc.org/math-at-home>
<https://pbskids.org/games/math/>

Fine Motor Skills

Activity 1: Cutting Fun

Materials: scissors, paper, markers, glue

Instructions: On a piece of paper draw different types of lines such as zig-zag lines, loopy lines, and straight lines. Have your child use scissors to cut along each line. On another piece of paper, draw different shapes such as a circle, square, triangle, etc. Have your child cut out the different shapes. Have your child draw her own lines and shapes and then cut them out. When finished, your child can glue the cut shapes on paper to create a collage of shapes.

Questions: Which lines are the easiest to cut? Which lines are the hardest to cut? Why? What shapes did you cut? How many sides does each shape have?



Activity 2: Spaghetti Cutting

Materials: bowl, cooked spaghetti, scissors, piece of paper, marker (or pen or pencil), ruler

Instructions: Put a handful of cooked spaghetti (rinsed and cooled) in a bowl. Allow your child to practice using scissors to cut the spaghetti. On a piece of paper, draw lines of different lengths (4 inches, 8 inches, etc.). Have your child cut spaghetti pieces to fit on the different size lines. On another piece of paper, draw different shapes such as a circle, square, triangle. Have your child use the spaghetti to outline each shape.

Questions: Which spaghetti piece is the longest? Which spaghetti piece is the shortest? Which spaghetti pieces are the same size? Can you put the spaghetti pieces in order from shortest to longest?

Activity 3: Cereal Jewelry

Materials: cereal that can be strung on a string (like Cheerios or Fruit Loops), string

Instructions: Put a handful of cereal in a pile. Cut string that is long enough to be made into a necklace (about 18-24 inches). One by one, have your child string the cereal onto the string. Tie the string and wear the necklace. Have your child repeat the activity to make a bracelet.

Questions: How many pieces of cereal do you think are in the necklace? How many pieces of cereal are in the bracelet? Do you think it's easier to string the cereal or to unstring it?



Recommended Books

Little Pencil Finds His Forever Friends, Christine Calabrese

Fine Motor ABC: Alphabet Themed Activities to Strengthen Fine Motor Skills, Stacie Erfle

Recommended Websites

<https://www.theottoolbox.com>

<https://www.aota.org>

United Way of Bucks County Pre-K Family Activities

Gross Motor Skills

Activity 1: Spelling Hop

Materials: paper plates (or paper), marker

Instructions: On each paper plate (or piece of paper), write a letter of your child's name. Put the plates on the floor and be sure that they are not too close to furniture, sharp corners, or things that may break. Have your child jump to each letter in the correct order of their name saying the letters out loud. Repeat this activity with other family member's names and other words.

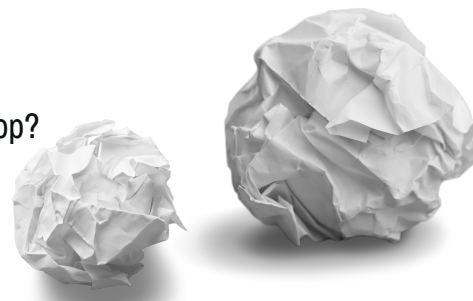
Questions: What letter does your name start with? What sound does each letter of your name make? What are the easiest words to spell-hop?

Activity 2: Paper Ball Toss

Materials: old paper, basket

Instructions: Place a basket in the center of the room. Take old paper and have your child crumple up the paper to form a ball. Have your child shoot the ball into the basket from different spots in the room. Add points for each time the ball goes in the basket. Have your child crumple another piece of paper to make a smaller ball and repeat. Have your child crumple another piece of paper to make a bigger ball and repeat.

Questions: How many points did you score with each ball? Which ball was easier to throw in the basket? Which ball was harder to throw in the basket?



Activity 3: Animal Moves

Materials: 3x5 cards (or paper cut into squares), marker

Instructions: On each 3x5 card, write the name of an animal (such as dog, frog, cat, lion, bird, etc.). Place the cards face down on a flat surface. Take turns flipping over a card and acting out the different type of animal on the card.

Questions: Where does each animal live? What noise does each animal make? What kind of food does each animal eat? Which animal would you most like to be? Why?



Recommended Books

From Head to Toe, Eric Carle

Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything, Linda Williams

Recommended Websites

<https://www.gonoodle.com>

<https://www.learningstationmusic.com>

Activity 1: Emotion Rocks

Materials: rocks, paint, markers

Instructions: Go on a family walk and look for rocks that are big enough to paint (like the size of your hand). Ask your child to decorate the rocks to show different emotions. Your child can paint faces with eyes, a nose, and a mouth to show emotions or other things associated with emotions (like the sun with a rainbow, a beach scene, or a monster). Ask your child how each emotion feels and how it is expressed.

Questions: What kinds of faces and pictures did you paint? Why did you choose these emotions to paint? What are some things that make you feel each emotion?



Activity 2: Mindful Coloring

Materials: coloring books or paper, crayons or markers, calm music

Instructions: Put on calm music and have your child color or doodle. As your child colors, ask him to breathe in and out calmly. Talk about how deep breathing helps people relax. Talk with your child about times that he has felt upset. Talk about ways to calm down when you get upset.

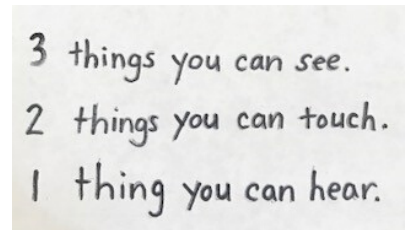
Questions: How does listening to calm music make you feel while you color? When could you listen to soft music or color to calm down? What are some other things that might help you feel calm?

Activity 3: Mindfulness 3-2-1

Materials: 3x5 card (or piece of paper), pencil

Instructions: On a piece of paper write down: 3 things you can see. 2 things you can touch. 1 thing you can hear. When your child gets upset, ask your child to stop and look around. Then ask her to name the things that she can see, touch, and hear. For example, when your child is having a hard time with a transition or feeling anxious, calmly help her use this 3-2-1 technique. Encourage and help your child to use the technique as often as she needs to.

Questions: Why are you upset? How does using this technique help you? What other things can we use to count down 3-2-1?



Recommended Books

My Many Colored Days, Dr. Seuss
I'm in Charge of Me!, David Parker

Recommended Websites

<https://pbskids.org/games/feelings>
<https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu>

How to Prevent Challenging Behaviors

- Together as a family, **set home rules and expectations**. Keep the family rules simple and to a maximum of 5 rules. Have your child draw the rules and hang them for everyone to see daily. Talk about the consequences of negative behavior and the rewards for positive behavior.
- **Be consistent** with your expectations and how you respond to your child's behavior. Make sure that the consequences of negative behavior and rewards for good behavior are reasonable and age appropriate.
- **Give positive attention** to the behaviors you like seeing. Say things like: "You did a good job cleaning up," and, "You are sharing the cars so nicely!"
- **Control and manage your own behaviors**. Model the behaviors you expect from your child. For example, when you are upset, talk about your feelings, and the appropriate way to deal with your feelings. Encourage your child to do that as well.
- **Create a calm down area** for your child. Find a spot at home that is quiet, isn't too busy, and in which your child can relax. Make the area cozy by adding things your child likes (like a blanket and book).

How to Deal with Challenging Behaviors

- **Calm yourself** when you're getting upset by your child's behavior. Drink some water, take deep breaths, and ask for help if you need it. Avoid yelling or using an aggressive tone with your child.
- **Reflect** on how your child is feeling. What might your child need? Think about what might be connected to your child's behaviors. Ask your child if she is hungry, tired, needs to use the bathroom, etc.
- **Reconnect** with your child. Make sure that you are calm and your child is calm. Then help him identify and talk about his feelings.
- **Redirect** the negative behaviors. Suggest a positive behavior in place of the negative behavior. For example, if your child has taken another child's toy, ask him to play with another toy of choice. "You can trade, or you can have the bear instead." If your child needs to calm down, suggest that he spend some time in a calm-down place.

Recommended Books

The Way I Feel, Janan Cain

Tucker the Turtle Takes Time to Think at Home, NCPMI (free download)

https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/TuckerTurtle_Story_Home.pdf

Recommended Websites

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/apr2018/backpack/guiding-your-childs-behavior>

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/seven-tips-for-practicing-positive-discipline>

<https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/resources/index.html>



How to Help Your Child Get Ready for Kindergarten

- Help your child to learn more **independence**. Encourage your child to dress and undress himself, pour drinks, wipe up spills, etc. Practice buttoning, zipping, and clasping. Talk with your child about when to ask for help.
- Teach your child **responsibility**. Start giving your child age appropriate jobs around the home. For example, feeding a pet, putting clothes away, or making the bed.
- Develop and **follow routines** at home. When your family is home together, follow the routine. Talk about the proper times and places to do things. For example, help your child know and predict when it's time to play and when it's not time to play.
- **Read aloud every day** with your child. Read a variety of books, both fiction and non-fiction. Get to know what books and stories your child enjoys. Allow your child to select the books to read.
- Help your child **practice writing**. Work with your child to improve how she holds and uses a pencil, crayon, and marker. Have your child practice tracing scribbles, lines, shapes, letters, and numbers.
- **Practice cutting, gluing, and other basic skills**. Give your child opportunities to use scissors, glue sticks, and arts & craft supplies such as stickers, pipe cleaners, pom-poms, etc. Encourage your child to learn and practice tying knots, folding paper, measuring things, and other skills that will help him complete projects.
- **Acknowledge your child's feelings**. Talk with your child about the different types of feelings and appropriate ways to express each feeling.
- Help your child **practice self-control**. Have your child practice taking turns with others. Talk about the importance of learning how to wait patiently.
- Provide opportunities for your child to **socialize with other children**. Talk about social skills like listening, sharing, and using good manners. Model good social skills and praise your child when he uses good social skills.
- **Monitor your child's health**. Be sure that your child gets her annual physical, vision, hearing, and dental exams. Learn about about what to expect with your child's development and discuss your questions and concerns with your child's doctor.

Recommended Books

The Night Before Kindergarten, Natasha Wing
The Kissing Hand, Audrey Penn

Recommended Websites

<https://papromiseforchildren.com/help-them-learn/prepare-for-kindergarten>
<https://www.ccswf.org/news/9-kindergarten-readiness-skills-your-child-needs>

