At Home Activities

Here are some fun simple activities that families/caregivers can do with their children during this time when we are all asked to shelter in place. These activities are meant for all children (sighted and/or blind) with varying abilities and of various ages. Hopefully these activities will provide some fun time together and spawn some new creative ideas of your own. Have fun!

If your family does these or any other engaging activities we would love for you to share a photo with a description. Additionally, if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions please feel free to send us an email. You may send photos or comments to jcarmack314@gmail.com

1. Scavenger Hunt – This activity can be done in your home and/or yard. You can make it to match the ability level of your child(ren). For example you may ask your young child who is learning about letter sounds to go and find 5 things that begin with the letter H (you could change this to focus on colors, shapes, or numbers). Another example, to make it a little harder, you may want to write a list of clues of possible items to be found(something smooth, rough, flat, prism shaped, etc) in their preferred reading media. Each item found should match one clue, so if you have a list of 10 clues then your child(ren) should find 10 items. The list can be as short or long as you feel is appropriate. For an extra challenge, try setting a timer and have your child(ren) find all of the items within that time.
2. Toothpick Towers – For this activity you will need toothpicks and mini marshmallows. This is a fun way to spark some creativity as well as work on problem solving skills. Give your child(ren) some toothpicks and marshmallows and ask them to build something (house, tower, shapes, etc). You can give them some direction on what you would like to see them build or you can let them build whatever comes to their mind. For a challenge two or more people can see who can build the tallest tower within a given time.(Hint: the marshmallows are meant to serve as the connectors between the toothpicks.)
3. Popping Bags – You will need sandwich bags with a zipper seal, vinegar, baking soda, toilet paper (or some type of thin tissue paper), measuring cup, table spoon, and eye protection (goggles or glasses). WARNING: if your child(ren) does not like sudden pop noises, you may want to prepare them ahead of time. The sound is not very loud (families may want to do the experiment prior to doing it with their child). Some children who have been in school for awhile may have already done this experiment. This is an outdoor activity. Before beginning put on your eye protection. First place a table spoon full of baking soda onto a piece of tissue paper and wrap the tissue paper around the baking soda so that it makes a pouch and twist the corners together a little. Next measure about 2/3 cups of vinegar and poor it into the sandwich bag. Then take the pouch of baking soda and place it in the bag with the vinegar and quickly zip the bag. Give the bag a shake and set it on the ground. Observe the bag by squatting down and placing your fingertips on the bag and listening for sounds. What happened? You should have felt the bag grow fatter and you should have heard the bag make a pop or burping sound. The results of the experiment may vary depending on measurements of vinegar and baking soda and on the quality of the sandwich bag. To continue experimenting change the amounts of vinegar and baking soda to see if you can make the bag pop louder or grow faster. (The baking soda and vinegar produce a chemical reaction which creates a gas called carbon dioxide. As the reaction produces more of the gas it makes the bag expand until it forces the zipper to pop open, which causes the pop noise.)
4. Puffy Paint Pictures – You will need shaving cream, Elmer’s school glue, a bowl for mixing, a spoon, and a sheet of aluminum foil (for a non toxic version, substitute Fun Foam bath foam for the shaving cream). Have your child(ren) measure out equal parts of shaving cream and glue into a bowl and mix them together. Food coloring may be added for color if desired. Have your child(ren) spoon out a scoop of puffy paint onto the aluminum foil. Your child(ren) can use their fingers to gently move the paint to create a picture. If your child does not like to touch the paint you may use q-tips instead. (Keep in mind that what ever is used to move the paint around that it will need to be done gently.) After your child(ren) is finished put the creation to the side to dry (it takes several hours). After it is dry the creation will be tactile.
5. Playdough Fun – Making homemade playdough is a great way to practice measuring, mixing, and needing. The texture of homemade playdough is easier to manipulate than store bought playdough. There are many recipes for playdough. The following link will give you six different playdough recipes, choose the one that works best for you or try several of them. <https://www.familyeducation.com/fun/playdough/play-doh-recipes> After your child(ren) have made some playdough it will be time to make some creations. Store the playdough in an air tight container or bag for more fun later.20 Questions – Prior to playing you and/or your child(ren) should use index cards and writeseveral items on them, they will be used to play the game. Each card will have one item written on it (i.e. cow, tomato, tree, bed, trampoline, etc). The difficulty of the items on the cards should match your child’s ability level. Make at least 20 cards. This game can be played with two or more players. Mix all of the cards and choose who will be the first player. The first player will randomly choose one of the cards and read it without showing it to any other player. The other players will take turns asking questions to try and figure out what is on the card. The questions must be able to be answered with “yes”, “no”, “sometimes”, or “maybe”. Players take turns asking questions until someone guesses what it is or until 20 questions have been asked. If another player gets it correct then that player will be next to choose a card. If the players reach 20 questions and no one has guessed correctly the first player puts that card back and chooses another card.
6. Making Music – You will need two or more drinking glasses, a metal spoon, and water. Fill each glass with different amounts of water. Use the spoon and tap the side of each glass. Listen for the different sounds. Does it make different sounds if the glass is tapped in different places? Does the size of the spoon make the sound different? After you have found a few pleasing sounds see if you can tap out a melody. Challenge each by playing “Name That Tune.” Have fun with this one. Activity extension: use dry beans, beads, or other small items around your house and put them into different types of containers (i.e. empty bottles, butter tubs, oatmeal canister, etc) and shake or tap on it to make a new sound. Be creative.
7. Tactile Art – You will need poster board (or some other thick paper or cardboard), glue, and a variety of recycle items or items from nature. First have your child gather a variety of items. These items can be recyclable things such as Styrofoam, paper, bottle tops, foil, and much more. Your child could also go in the yard or take a walk around your neighborhood and collect some nature such as leaves, grass, sticks, flowers, or whatever draws their attention. Use the items and glue them onto the poster board to make a picture of their choice. Hint: some of the items may be cut or torn into desired shapes. For children who have a difficult time squeezing a glue bottle, poor some glue into a small bowl or cup and let your child(ren) use a q-tip to place glue on the poster board or item and then place the item in its place.
8. Paper Bag Puppets – You will need lunch bags, glue, scissors, and a variety of items to create a puppet. Some ideas for materials are; cotton balls, straws, aluminum foil, construction paper, bottle caps, scraps of material, yarn, and more use your imagination. Use the square bottom part of the bag that folds over as the face. Your child(ren) can turn the bag into a monster, animal, person, or anything they want by gluing the materials onto the bag. After the creation is complete your child(ren) can put their hand into the bag and use their fingers to move the bottom to symbolize a mouth. These awesome character creations can now talk to each other and even put on a play for you. If your child(ren) has difficulty with a glue bottle poor some glue into a small cup or bowl and give your child(ren) a q – tip to spread the glue on the part to be glued on the bag
9. Clean Mud – This is a clean kind of messy sensory fun activity. You will need a bar of soap (Ivory seems to work best, but any brand will work),1 roll of toilet paper, water, a grater, a bucket or large container. Begin by asking your child(ren) to take all of the toilet paper off the roll and shredding it into the bucket or container. Next help your child(ren) grate the bar of soap over the shredded toilet paper. Then add one cup of warm water. Have your child(ren) mix and need the mixture with their hands, it will take several minutes to get it all mixed together. If it is too dry add a little more water to the mixture and if it is too wet add a little more toilet paper to the mixture. The mixture should be the consistency of mud. After it is made your child(ren) can play in it; squeezing it through their fingers, scooping it with spoons or cups, making mud pies, etc. (You can substitute the toilet paper with Kleenex, paper towels, or napkins but you will need to use an amount equal to a roll of toilet paper.) It will make your house smell great.
10. Paper Bridge – Challenge your child(ren) with this activity by testing their knowledge about weight distribution. Ask your child(ren) if they can make a bridge that can hold 100 pennies out of paper?? For this activity you will need a piece of paper, 5 paper clips, a ruler, books, and 100 pennies. Make two stacks of books each one being at least 3” high, the stacks should be of even height. Use the ruler to place the books so that the gap between then is 20 centimeters wide. Now your child(ren) is ready to attempt to construct a bridge using no more than the piece of paper and the 5 paper clips and no part of the paper can be attached to the stacks of books. After the construction is complete have your child(ren) place the pennies on the bridge to test its strength. Your child may need to make adjustments or want to start over, there is no rule on how many tries are allowed. Good Luck!
11. Silly Stories – Your entire family will hopefully get a good laugh out of this simple activity. You will need writing materials that fit each person’s reading/writing media of choice. Each person who is participating in the story writing will write a paragraph independently (you can decide on a topic that everyone will stick to or you can choose to do free writing). After everyone has written their paragraph everyone should sit together. Each person will take turns reading their paragraph, which will end up making one silly story. If everyone in the group reads and writes braille then you could use a braille writer and paper and pass the braille writer around with each person taking their turn to write a paragraph without reading what has already been written. After each person has had at least one turn, then it can be read as one story (either one person can read the entire story or each person can read what they wrote). Be creative and silly with your paragraphs, they are meant to be nonsense, silly stories.
12. Cooking Creations – There are many simple and delicious recipes you can make with your child(ren), all you need to do is Google “easy family recipes” and you will find lots of choices. Cooking is a great way to work on a variety of skills while having fun and having a yummy reward at the end. One recipe that my children and their friends have always loved is, English Muffin Pizzas. You will need English Muffins, pizza or spaghetti sauce, a block of cheese, other pizza toppings of your choice, a grater, and a baking sheet. Have your child(ren) do as much of this recipe as possible, depending on their abilities and your comfort level. After you and your child(ren) have decided what toppings will be used, they will need to be prepared. Use the grater to shred the cheese, chop up any meat or vegetables that will be used, precook any meat you are having. Set your prepared topping to the side. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Next cut the English Muffins open. Laying the muffins opened face and spread pizza sauce over each one (about 1 tbs of sauce or the desired amount). Next top the pizzas with your favorite toppings in any order you like. Place prepared pizzas on a baking sheet and bake in the oven for 10 minutes (or until cheese is melted and English muffins are your preferred crispness). Remove the pizzas from the oven and let them cool for about 5 minutes. Next comes the best part, eat them and enjoy the deliciousness.
13. Let’s Go on a Trip –We can go anywhere we want to in our imaginations. This activity works on letter sounds, memory skills, and critical thinking. This activity can be played two different ways, depending on the skill level of those participating. The first thing you need to do is to decide where everyone wants to go in your imaginations. Some places you may think about are; a picnic, the park, the beach, a family members house, Disney World, Another state, another country, etc. Now you are ready to start the game. The first person says “I’m going (insert, where ever you decided) and I’m going to bringing (insert, something that starts with the letter A)”. The next person will say I’m going (insert, where ever you decided) and I’m bringing (insert, something that begins with the letter B). Everyone keeps taking turns and advancing through the alphabet. The things that are brought on your trip should be relevant to the chosen destination, for example you probably would not bring an “ape” to “grandma’s house.”c but you might bring “apples” to “grandma’s house”. Now, if this seems too easy then you can make it more challenging. You will begin the same way. Choose your destination, the first person will go and name something that begins with the letter a. But, the next person has to name what everyone before them has said and then add their item on. For example, if I am the fourth person to have a turn and we are going on a picnic, it might sound like this: “I’m going on a picnic and I’m bringing apples, a basket, chicken, and drinks”. The further through the alphabet you get the more difficult it becomes to remember everything. (Hint: Since there are very few words that start with the letter X, you may want to make a rule that the letter X has to be somewhere in the word or you may want to skip the letter X, its up to the players.) Happy traveling.
14. Memory Boxes – Children always have things that they are saying is “special.” It may be a friendship bracelet, a small racecar, something they made, a picture, etc. The things that children say is “special” may or may not have any significance to the adults in their lives, but it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of these things to the child. Making a memory box for children to put their special things in is a wonderful way to keep their special treasures safe. To make a memory box you will need; a shoe box (or something similar with a lid), glue, and a variety of things to decorate the box with. Some things that could be used to decorate these boxes might be: paint, buttons, dried pasta, pieces of foil, yarn, straws, stickers, etc the possibilities are endless. Give the box and the choices of decorating materials to your child(ren). Explain to your child(ren) what the box is for and that they should take their tie decorating the box so that it will be just as special as the things they will put inside it. After the box is decorated and the glue and paint has dried you and your child(ren) should find a special place to keep this special memory box. (Hint: If your child(ren) has a difficult time using the glue bottle, poor some glue into a small bowl or cup and give them a q – tip to use to apply the glue.)
15. Make A Book – This may sound like a boring idea, but there are so many ways that it can be done and it’s a good way to pass time. Making books is a fun way to work on story telling skills, writing/reading skills, and creative thinking. Here are a few suggestions on how to make a book. First a book can be made out of a wide variety of materials and what is put inside the book has endless possibilities. You can make ziplock bag books in each page made goes inside a ziplock bag, after all of the pages are made staple the bags together (on the zipper side) and then complete the binding with masking tape to secure it better and to make sure the staples don’t poke anyone. Additionally books can be made with paper bags(grocery size), notebook paper, printer paper, construction paper, braille paper, card stock, wrapping paper, paper plates, etc. After your child(ren) has decided what to make the book out of then they need to choose what shape the pages are going to be. The shape may be simple such as a square ore rectangle or more challenging such as circle, triangle, or even a teddy bear. Your child(ren) will need to cut the pages to their desired shape before adding content. Now, what will the book be called? Choose a title and design the front page (note: when designing the pages be sure to leave a little room on the left side to bind the book at the end). The books can be made with braille, hand writing or a combination. Your child(ren) can create a picture book with little or few words, a memory book with each page describing a memory, a texture book with different textures on each page, a poetry book with the whole book being one poem or a short poem on each page, a short story book with or without pictures(in any genre of interest), , or whatever may be interesting and fun for your child(ren). If your child(ren) chooses to add pictures, then the pictures can be drawn, painted, pre printed, cut from magazines, photographs, made from materials to make them tactile, or any other creative way. After your child(ren has made all of the pages for the book, it will be time to bind it. Stack all of the pages together in order, then bind the book by putting two or three staples down the left side of the book or by punching two or three holes through all of the pages on the left side and put a piece of yarn through the holes and tie the yarn. Now your child(ren) is an author with their very own book to share with the family.

Additional Resources

Below are some additional resources for families/care givers to check out.

On the National Federation of the Blind COVID-19 resource page there are other resources and activities for families, here is the link.

https://www.nfb.org/resources/covid-19-resources

The National Organization of Parents of Blind Children NOPBC has a Facebook page where a lot of information is shared everyday. This is a great place to ask questions, share concerns, and share joys and successes. It is a closed page so you will need to answer a few questions before being accepted into the group (this is to ensure that all of the participants have a vested interest in blind children). To find this group go to Facebook and search for National Organization of Parents of Blind Children NOPBC.

If you have an Amazon Alexa device there are many skills that you, your child(ren) or the entire family may enjoy. Here are some suggestions; braille challenge, O&M challenge, escape room, interactive stories, jeopardy, trivia, 20 questions, etc. When searching on your Alexa just ask her to play (insert the name of the game) or ask her to find (insert, a topic).

Dolly Parton is reading a bedtime story once a week for 10 weeks. These are children’s books that are positive and comforting for children. To find these stories go to You Tube and search “Good Night with Dolly.”

There are many virtual tours/field trips online, especially during this time when schools are closed. Many are not accessible for screen reader users. This web site talks about ways to make some of these museums partially or completely accessible and provides some links for virtual tours with audio description. Remember that if your child(ren) is really interested in virtual tours you can utilize apps such as “Be My Eyes” or “ira” to have someone describe what is being seen on a screen. Here is the link to the site that provides some links and insight for virtual tours.

<https://veroniiiica.com/2020/03/25/rijksmuseum-virtual-tour/>

Here is another site which some options to make more virtual tours partially or totally accessible.

<https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/resources/virtual-field-trips>

Paths to Literacy is a great resource for families and teachers. The main focus is literacy, but I have seen many links related to a variety of education/activity resources in recent weeks. Take a little time to explore the content on this site.

<https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/>

Reading is a very important skill for children to continue practicing while they are out of school. There are many ways this can be done. Book Share offers a selection of books in large font or braille. You can sign up by going to this page.

<https://www.bookshare.org/cms/help-center/learning-center/learning-at-home-parents>

It is important for children to stay active. Even going for a walk around the neighborhood is a great way to stay active. It is also a good time to practice some orientation and mobility skills. Jessica Givens, a certified O & M instructor with Special School District in St. Louis County, has a google classroom with activities to do with children so they have the opportunity to keep their skills sharp. You can send her an email for a code to access her Google Classroom page.

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