



## Cognitive Activities for Preschoolers

As the parent, you can help increase your child's cognitive learning by making available fun and playful cognitive activities. No structured agenda or lesson plan is required. Just plenty of time to play alone and with others expanding their experiences.

Play Ideas to Support Cognitive Development Activities:

### PUZZLES

Age-appropriate puzzles build concentration, memory, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, puzzles can reinforce sorting by color, type, or shape. Choosing a puzzle, concentrating on that activity, and completing it helps support cognitive control.

### CARD, MATCHING, OR BOARD GAMES

Simple card, matching, or board games like "Old Maid," "Go Fish," "Matching Game," or "Chutes & Ladders" teach kids how to follow directions, share, take turns, and problem-solve. As your preschooler masters these games, you can introduce more games with complicated strategies, like checkers. In addition, when your child encounters a problem during play, it tests their judgment, reasoning, and ability to find a solution.

### OTHER GAMES FOR COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

When you are out and a board or card games just won't do, try games like "I Spy." What about spending the day at the park? Physical games are a wonderful way to engage. Test out games like "Hide & Seek," "Red Light, Green Light," or "Simon Says." If your preschooler has mastered "Simon Says", add a twist and have them do the opposite of what "Simon Says."

### BLOCK PLAY

Preschoolers engaged in **block play** not only are having fun but also are exploring science and math. Children stacking or playing with **wooden building blocks** begin to understand wider, shorter, taller, higher, longer, heavier, and more. As children advance through the **stages of block play**, you will see their block structures become detailed and elaborate.

### CONSTRUCTIVE PLAY

While it often includes blocks, constructive play is about experimenting with different materials and building approaches. Preschoolers learn to plan and assess their actions through trial and error. Trying new methods and modifying when needed is problem-solving at its best.

### SINGING, RHYMING, AND FINGER PLAY

Simple songs that include rhyming and actions help build cognitive skills; for example, the "ABC's Song" helps them remember the alphabet. "I'm A Little Teapot" Or "Head And Shoulders" helps them learn to follow directions. Some songs introduce number concepts like "5 Little Ducks" or "5 Monkeys Jumping On The Bed."

## READING

Daily reading is critical to cognitive development in preschoolers. Foster the love of books by checking out the local library or bookstore for children's story time.

## TELLING JOKES

At this age, preschoolers start to really develop a sense of humor. Find a book filled with jokes or engage them by having them tell you some jokes.

## STORYTELLING

Encourage storytelling by alternating adding parts to a story or asking them to finish one you started.

## COOKING

Invite your preschooler to help you in the kitchen. They can begin learning about healthy ingredients, measuring, and following directions. Looking at a recipe allows them to understand photo directions while building their reading and language skills. Start with simple recipes like "Ants On A Log" or "Bagel Pizzas."

## OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AND PLAY

Getting outside not only helps with **gross motor development** but also builds cognitive skills. Nature provides an awesome science lab for preschoolers. Go on a walk, **create a nature tray** or keep a nature journal.

## MAZES AND OBSTACLE COURSES

You can build an obstacle course or maze from simple household items. Grab a roll of painter's tape and create a maze on your floor (test first), patio, or driveway for your preschooler to navigate. They can maneuver their cars, balls, or bodies through the maze using their cognitive abilities. Put up an obstacle course inside or out using tables, chairs, large boxes, or **giant blocks**.

## IMAGINATIVE PLAY OR ROLE PLAY

Many preschoolers are naturally drawn to pretend play. It is the perfect way to build their **creative skills** and imaginations. You are likely to find your child pretending to be something imaginary like a pirate, superhero, or princess. However, they may also act out familiar roles like grocery shopping, cleaning the house, or going to the doctor.

- Jump in and play, but let your child lead the way. Keep in mind you may need to adjust to your child's creative process.
- Imaginative play can be as simple or elaborate as you care to make it. Add basic dress-up props, like old hats, purses, or shoes from time to time. Need a crown, sword, or magic wand? Get the kids involved and try some crafts projects using paper towel rolls or construction paper.
- Build a fort from **jumbo blocks** or put a blanket over a table and chairs.
- Preschooler running out of ideas? Feel free to prompt a new pretend play scenario. It might be based on real-life activities like shopping, caring for a baby, animal, or someone sick. Maybe it involves acting out a fairy tale, good versus evil, or some other silly idea.

So, no matter how you engage with your preschooler, whether through outdoor activities, unstructured free play, or cognitive activities like block play, let them be the leader. Everyday experiences like talking, reading, or playing a game have the power to boost their cognitive development, growth, and cognitive skills. What cognitive activities for preschoolers will you try today?