



31 Days of

PLAY



TeachingMama.org

31 Days of Play

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INTRODUCTION

Do you want your child to be smart? Then give them lots of time to play! Allowing time for children to just PLAY is so important.

Play is the foundation of learning for young children. It's voluntary, pleasurable, and engaging. Children have frustrations while playing, but overall it is enjoyable. Play is also process-oriented, meaning children play for the activity, rather than the end product.

With our busy schedules as parents, it is easy to rush kids around and not allow time for play. However, it is important to set aside adequate time for children to just play.

Here's why play is important:

1. **Play Develops the Brain.**

Play helps children experience the world they live in. They make connections, solve problems, spark creativity, use imagination, and develop language skills. Play-based learning activities help the development in a child's brain.

2. **Play Build Muscles.**

Play encourages children to use their muscles! Running, jumping, hopping, skipping, or crawling allow kids to use large muscle groups and help develop gross motor skills. When kids use their fingers to pinch, grasp, pick up, or hold something, they are working with the small muscle groups and help develop fine motor skills.

3. Play Improves Social Skills.

When children play, they are developing language and social skills. They learn to work cooperatively with others, to share, and to solve problems. I love that when a child is playing with their toy kitchen, they are reflecting on the behaviors they see in their home. They are learning about the world they live in. Kids need to use their hands and to explore with their senses. They need to act things out and play games to make meaning of new concepts in life.

As you can see, play is extremely important and beneficial to children. In this eBook you will find 31 play ideas for young children. My hope is that these play activities inspire you to do more playing at home!



Day 1: Ice Cube Sculptures

Materials Needed:

- Ice cube trays
- Water
- Food coloring
- Cookie sheet
- Water dropper

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Mix food coloring with water and pour into ice cube trays.
2. Pour a thin layer of water onto a cookie sheet.
3. Freeze the ice cubes and cookie sheet until frozen.

Invitation to Play:

1. Place the colored ice cubes in a bowl alongside the cookie sheet.
2. Also set out a glass of water with a dropper.
3. Use the dropper to squirt a little bit of water onto the ice cube and place another ice cube on top. Hold together for 15-20 seconds until the ice cubes stick to each other.
4. Continue to build this way and create an ice sculpture.

To see more pictures of our ice cube sculptures, visit [here](#)

Snowflake Slime



Day 2: Slime

Materials Needed:

- ½ cup Sta-Flo liquid starch
- ½ cup warm water
- ½ cup white Elmer's glue
- snowflake scatter (optional)

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Mix ½ cup of glue with ½ cup of warm water. Add in the snowflake scatter.
2. Slowly stir in the liquid starch until the slime forms.

Invitation to Play:

1. Set out the slime and let your child explore and play with the slime!

To see more pictures of slime, visit [here](#).



Day 3: Building with Grapes

Materials Needed:

Grapes (or marshmallows)
toothpicks

Invitation to Play:

1. Set the grapes and toothpicks in a bowl. Show your child how to build with them and then watch them create structures and objects with the grapes.

Building with grapes is a S.T.E.M. activity and is great for engaging creative minds.

To see how we built with them, visit [here](#).



Day 4: Hot Chocolate Dramatic Play

Materials Needed:

- Water (or snow if you want to squirt water on it to melt it!)
- Squeeze bottles
- Mugs or cups
- Straws
- Spoons
- Cocoa
- Cash register
- Café menu printable (you can download it [here.](#))

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. If you use snow with this activity, scoop snow from outside and put it in a pot.



Invitation to Play:

1. Set out the cups, mugs, cash register, and other materials. Show child the menu and encourage the child to use it if they'd like.

You can read more about how we created our hot chocolate café on this [post](#).



Day 5: Peppermint Cocoa Cloud Dough

Materials Needed:

- 5 cups of flour
- ½ cup of oil (baby oil or vegetable oil)
- ½ cup to 1 cup of cocoa
- peppermint extract or peppermint essential oils
- large container
- items to play with the cloud dough (scoopers, spoons, cups)

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Mix flour and oil together with hands. Then sprinkle in the cocoa and continue mixing. Squirt in drops of peppermint extract or oil and mix.

Invitation to Play:

1. Set out cloud dough along with tools to play with it.

To see how we played with the cloud dough, visit [here](#).



Day 6: Glue & Salt Pictures

Materials Needed:

- white glue
- salt
- food coloring or watercolors
- water
- dropper or paintbrush
- construction paper or card stock paper

Play Activity:

1. Invite your child to make a design on paper using white glue.
2. Then pour salt over the picture. Shake off the excess salt.
3. Now either paint on top of the salt or use a dropper to place watercolor onto the salt.
4. Watch as the color spreads along the lines of salt.

See how we made our glue and salt pictures on [this post](#).



Day 7: Colorful Sand Foam

Materials Needed:

- Colorful craft sand
- Shaving cream
- Large container

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Mix shaving cream with sand in a large container. Mix with a spoon until you get the consistency you like. The mixture will be foamy and soft.

Invitation to Play:

1. Set the colorful sand foam out, along with play materials (such as scoopers or vehicles).

The sand foam does stick to your hands, so it may be helpful to have a bucket of warm water nearby to rinse hands.

To see how we played with the sand foam, visit [here](#).



Day 8: Ivory Soap Experiment

Materials Needed:

- Ivory soap bar (needs to be Ivory!)
- Microwave
- Bowl or plate

Experiment:

1. Place the soap bar in the microwave in a microwavable container.
2. Microwave for 2 minutes.
3. Watch as the soap expands and makes a big puffy mound!
4. Let it cool a bit and then touch it and explore the ivory soap mound.
5. If you want, spray it with water and watch how it breaks into pieces.

To see our experiment, visit [this post](#).



Day 9: Small World Play in the Sink

Materials Needed:

- Sink
- Something to color the water (jello powder or food coloring)
- Ocean animals (like TOOB sets)
- Foam sheets

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Fill the sink with warm water. Add in the color.
2. Cut foam into circles for the animals to float on.

Invitation to Play:

1. Set the ocean animals next to the sink and bring your child over to play in the sink.

To see how we played with the sink, visit [here](#).



Day 10: Balloon Rockets

Materials Needed:

String
Balloon
Tape
Straw

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Slip a straw onto the piece of string.
2. Tie both ends of the string to something sturdy.

Play Activity:

1. Blow up a balloon and pinch it shut so air doesn't escape.
2. Tape the balloon to the straw.
3. Let go of the balloon and watch it fly down the string!

To see how we made our balloon rockets, visit [here](#).



Day 11: Creating on Sticky Paper

Materials Needed:

Contact paper

Materials to put on the contact paper (like pom poms, feathers, googly eyes, foam shapes or letters)

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Cut a square of contact paper and place it on the table. Add construction paper to the edges so it will lay flat.

Play Activity:

1. Invite your child to create whatever design he/she would like by sticking items onto the contact paper.

To see how we made our sticky paper pictures, visit [here](#).



Day 12: Homemade Snow

Materials Needed:

- 1 can of shaving cream
- 2 boxes of baking soda
- large container

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Pour the baking soda in a large container.
2. Spray the shaving cream into the container and mix with your hands.

Play Activity:

1. Invite your child to play with the snow.
2. Add in toy penguins or other toys to play with

If you want to add to the activity, squirt vinegar in the container and watch the snow turn fizzy!

To see how we played with the homemade snow, visit [here](#).



Day 13: Vet Clinic Dramatic Play Activity

Materials Needed:

- Stuffed animals
- Doctor kit
- Vet check-up list printable (you can download it [here](#))

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Print out the printable. If you want the sheet to be reusable, print it on card stock, laminate it, and use dry erase markers on it.

Play Activity:

1. Invite your child to play doctor with his/her stuffed animals!

To see how we set up our vet clinic, visit [here](#).



Day 14: Playdough Mats

Materials Needed:

Playdough

Playdough Mats (click [here](#) for snowman mat or [here](#) for people mats)

Optional: buttons, small pipe cleaners, googly eyes, beads, etc.

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Print out the printable. If you want the sheet to be reusable, print it on card stock and laminate it.

Play Activity:

1. Invite your child to create on the playdough mats.

To see how we played with playdough mats, visit [here](#).



Day 15: Water Beads

Materials Needed:

- Water beads
- Large bin
- Play tools

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Pour water beads in a large bin.
2. Fill the bin with water. Let it sit for several hours until the beads expand.

Play Activity:

1. Invite your child to play with the water beads.
2. Here are some play ideas for water beads:
 1. Add shaving cream to the water beads
 2. Put the water beads inside of balloons
 3. Freeze the water beads and smash them

To see 10 ways to play with water beads, visit [here](#).



Day 16: Playing with Cornmeal

Materials Needed:

- Cornmeal
- Large container
- Play materials, such as funnels, cups, and scoops
- Water (optional)

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Pour the cornmeal into a large container.

Play Activity:

1. Invite your child to play with the cornmeal. Have them scoop, pour, and play with it.
2. If you want, pour water in the cornmeal for a new consistency and texture.

To see how we played with cornmeal, visit [here](#).



Day 17: Fizzing Hearts Activity

Materials Needed:

- ½ cup of baking soda
- 4 tablespoons of water
- food coloring
- heart cookie cutters
- 1 bottle of vinegar
- squeeze bottles

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Mix baking soda with water and add in food coloring. The mixture will be slightly wet, yet crumbly.
2. Place the dough in a mold, like a cookie cutter or silicone mold.
3. Put it in the freezer for about 30 minutes.

Play Activity:

1. Put the hearts into a large container.
2. Pour vinegar on the hearts and watch and listen to them fizz!

To see how we made our fizzing hearts, visit [this post](#).



Day 18: Bubble Wrap Fun

Materials Needed:

- Bubble wrap
- Tape

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Roll bubble wrap on the floor and tape it down.

Play Activity:

1. Have your child jump, roll, crawl, and run on the bubble wrap to make it pop.
2. Another way to play with bubble wrap is to tape it around your child's feet and have them hop around. It makes the bubble wrap pop faster and louder!
3. Here are some actions they can act out:
 1. Stomp like an elephant
 2. Jump like a kangaroo
 3. Gallop like a horse
 4. Waddle like a penguin

To see how we played with bubble wrap, visit [this post](#).



Day 19: Ice Excavation Activity

Materials Needed:

- Large bowl
- Water
- Items to put in the water (sequins, string, buttons, etc.)
- Water droppers

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Pour water into a large bowl. Add in objects.
2. Place in the freezer overnight.

Play Activity:

1. Take the ice out of the freezer. Put it in warm water until the ice pops out of the bowl.
2. Have the kids use water droppers or other tools to melt the ice and take the objects out of the water. You can even use tongs to practice fine motor skills.

To see more pictures, visit [this post](#).



Day 20: Playing with Rice

Materials Needed:

- Bag of white rice
- 1 tablespoon of rubbing alcohol
- food coloring
- Ziploc gallon-size bag
- Wax paper
- Cookie sheet
- Large container

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Place rice in the gallon-size Ziploc bag. Pour rubbing alcohol in the bag and shake to coat the rice.
2. Drop in some food coloring. Close the bag and shake some more. Let it sit for 5 minutes.
3. Pour the rice onto cookie sheets lined with wax paper. Let it sit until it is dry.
4. Once it's dry, pour it into a large container.

Play Activity:

1. Let the child play and explore with the rice.
2. Add some funnels, cups, scoopers, and more to play with.

To see more pictures, visit [this post](#).



Day 21: Post Office Dramatic Play

Materials Needed:

- Writing utensils
- Pretend post card (free printable can be downloaded [here.](#))
- Mailbox

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Print the post card printable. If you want it to be reusable, print on card stock and laminate.

Play Activity:

1. Have your child pretend to work in a post office.
2. Write pretend letters and mail them in the mailbox.

To see more dramatic play ideas (including 9 other play ideas), visit [here.](#)



Day 22: Surprise Color Eruptions

Materials Needed:

- Baking soda
- Colored craft sand
- Vinegar
- Styrofoam cups
- Large tub

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Pour colored sand into a Styrofoam cup.
2. Cover the sand with 1-2 tablespoons of baking soda.
3. Place the cups in a large container.

Play Activity:

1. Have your child squirt vinegar in the cups to see it erupt and unveil the color.
2. After all the cups have erupted, pour them together into the bin.

To see pictures of how we did this activity, visit [here](#).



Day 23: Plastic Straw Sensory Bin

Materials Needed:

- Plastic straws
- Kid scissors
- Plastic bin
- String

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Cut straws and place them in a bin (or have your child cut them up if they are old enough.)

Play Activity:

1. Invite your child to explore and play with the straws.
2. Here are some play ideas:
 - Fill cups with the straw pieces
 - Thread straw pieces onto the string
 - Stack the straw pieces together to make a line

To see pictures of how we did this activity, visit [here](#).



Day 24: Kinetic Sand

Materials Needed:

Kinetic sand (you can buy it or make a [homemade version](#))
Play tools (cookie cutters, molds, letters, cars, straws, etc.)

Play Activity:

1. Invite your child to play with kinetic sand. Let them use tools to play with it.
2. Here are some play ideas:
 - Make a track with the sand and race cars on it
 - Create shapes and designs with molds
 - Poke straws in the sand
 - Make letter imprints with magnetic letters
 - Cut out designs using cookie cutters

To see pictures of how we did this activity, visit [here](#).



Day 25: Chocolate Oobleck

Materials Needed:

- ½ cup of cocoa powder
- 1 – ½ cups of corn starch
- 1 tablespoon of flour
- 1 cup of water

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Mix the cocoa powder with the corn starch in a bowl.
2. Slowly pour the water in while mixing with a spoon.
3. Mix in 1 tablespoon of flour (to keep it from getting too sticky)

Play Activity:

1. Encourage your child to get their hands in the oobleck and play with it! It's a mix between a liquid and a solid, so it feels pretty slimy. When you pick it up, it feels like a solid, but when you let it sit in your hands, it runs down your fingers.
2. This is a messy play activity, so keep a warm bowl of warm water nearby to clean hands.

To see pictures of how we did played with chocolate oobleck, visit [here](#).



Day 26: DIY Fossils

Materials Needed:

- 4 cups of flour
- 1 cup of salt
- 1—1/2 cups of water
- plastic animals or shells

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Pour 1 cup of salt and 4 cups of flour together in a large bowl.
2. Slowly pour the water into the bowl while stirring.
3. Pour the mixture onto a cookie sheet and spread it out.

Play Activity:

1. Have your child make imprints in the dough using shells, animals, plants, or other various objects.
2. After they've made the prints, put it in the oven at 350 degree Fahrenheit for about 45 minutes.
3. When it's done, have fun looking at the fossil imprints. Kids can also use this with dramatic play.

To see more pictures of how we made the fossils, visit [here](#).



Day 27: Make an Air Fort

Materials Needed:

- A large bed sheet
- Duct tape
- Fan

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Tape the short side of the sheet to a box fan. Turn the fan on.



2. Pull the sheet straight and tuck one side under the other. Put a piece of tape down to hold it together.



3, On the outside, tape down half of the open side. The other side stays open so kids can crawl through it.



Play Activity:

Invite your child to play inside the fort!

To see more pictures, visit [here](#).



Day 28: Playing with Magnets

Materials Needed:

- Large magnet (like a horseshoe magnet or pick-up tool)
- Magnetic items (bolts, magnetic letters, tin cans, keys, etc.)
- Bin full of colored rice

Pre-Activity Prep:

Put magnetic items and rice into the bin.

Play Activity:

1. Explore magnets with your child. Have them use a large magnet to search for magnetic items in the bin.

To see more pictures of how we played with magnets, visit [here](#).



Day 29: Racing Pom Poms

Materials Needed:

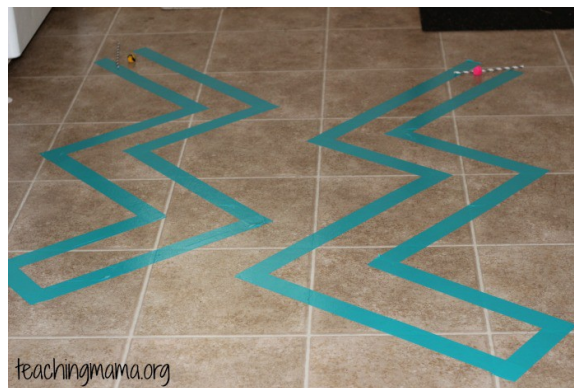
- Duct tape
- Pom pom
- Straw

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Tape a track onto the floor.

Play Activity:

1. Race pom poms with your child. Simply use a straw to blow the pom pom down the track.
2. You can make two tracks on the floor, like this one:



For more play ideas with pom poms, visit [here](#).



Day 30: Homemade Floam

Materials Needed:

- 1 cup of grated Styrofoam
- 1 tsp. Borax
- warm water (1/4 cup and 2 tablespoons divided)
- 2 tablespoons of white glue
- Gallon-size Ziploc bag
- Food coloring

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. In a small bowl, mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of warm water with 1 tsp. of Borax
2. In another bowl, mix 2 tablespoons of glue with 2 tablespoons of water. Mix in the food coloring.
3. Pour the glue and water mixture into the Ziploc bag.
Add the 1 cup of grated Styrofoam into the Ziploc bag. Seal the bag and mix the ingredients.
(The foam will form quickly)
4. Take the foam out and mix with your hands. Squeeze the excess water out into the sink.
5. Squeeze with your hands until you get it to a good consistency.

Play Activity:

1. Invite your child to play with foam. It's similar to playdough and is moldable. You can show your child how to mold into balls, flatten it, or squeeze it.

To see more pictures of how we played foam, visit [here](#).



Day 31: 2-Ingredient Silly Putty

Materials Needed:

- 2 tablespoons of corn starch
- 1.5 tablespoons of dish soap

Pre-Activity Prep:

1. Mix the corn starch and dish soap together in a bowl. After 10 seconds of mixing, mix with your hands until it's a good consistency.

Play Activity:

1. Invite your child to play with the silly putty!

To see more pictures of silly putty, visit [here](#).