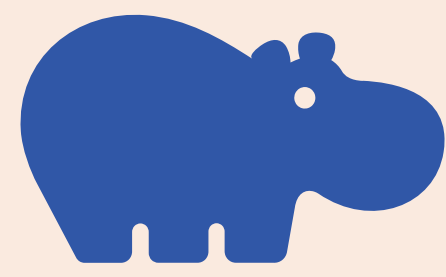
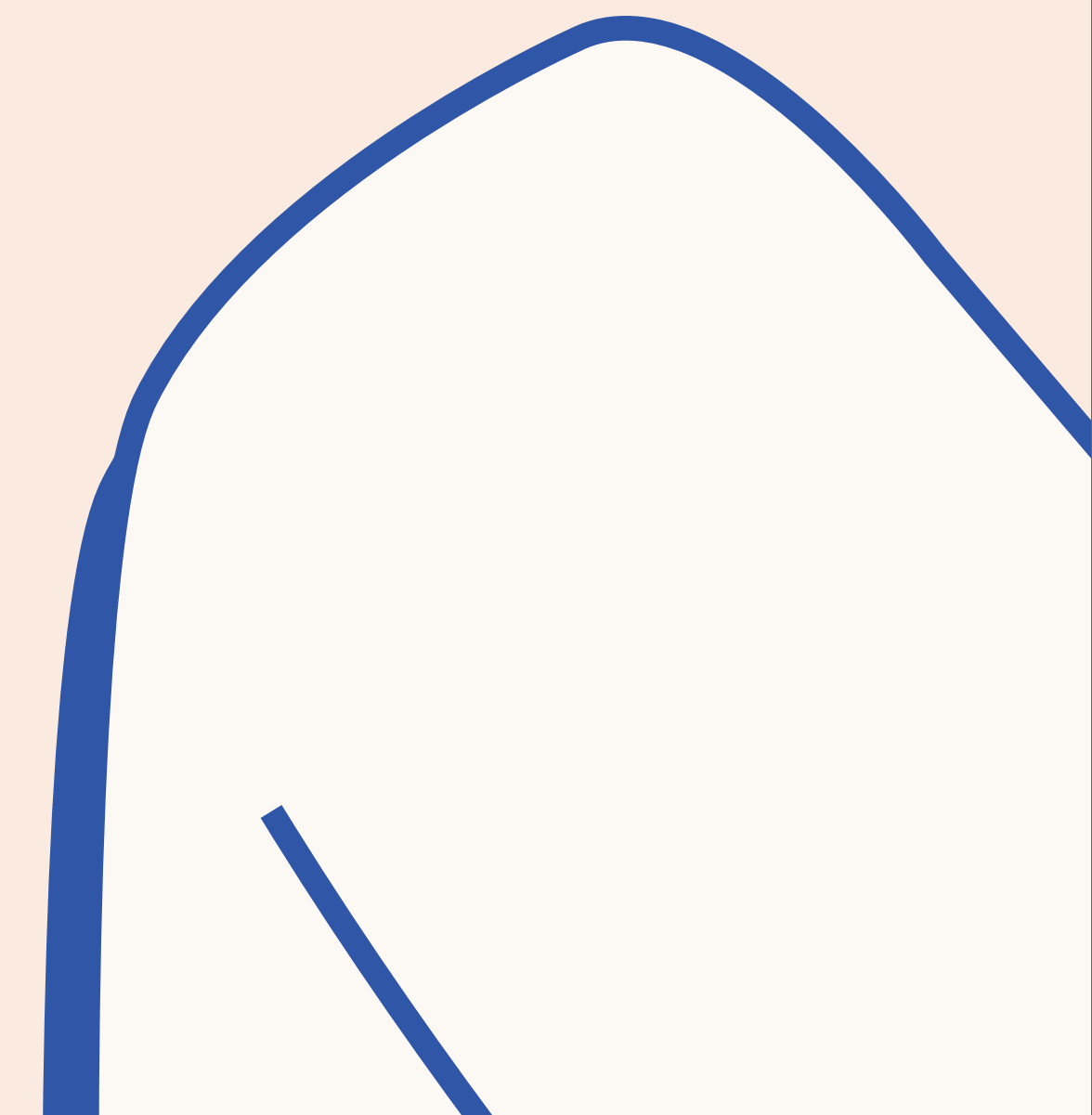
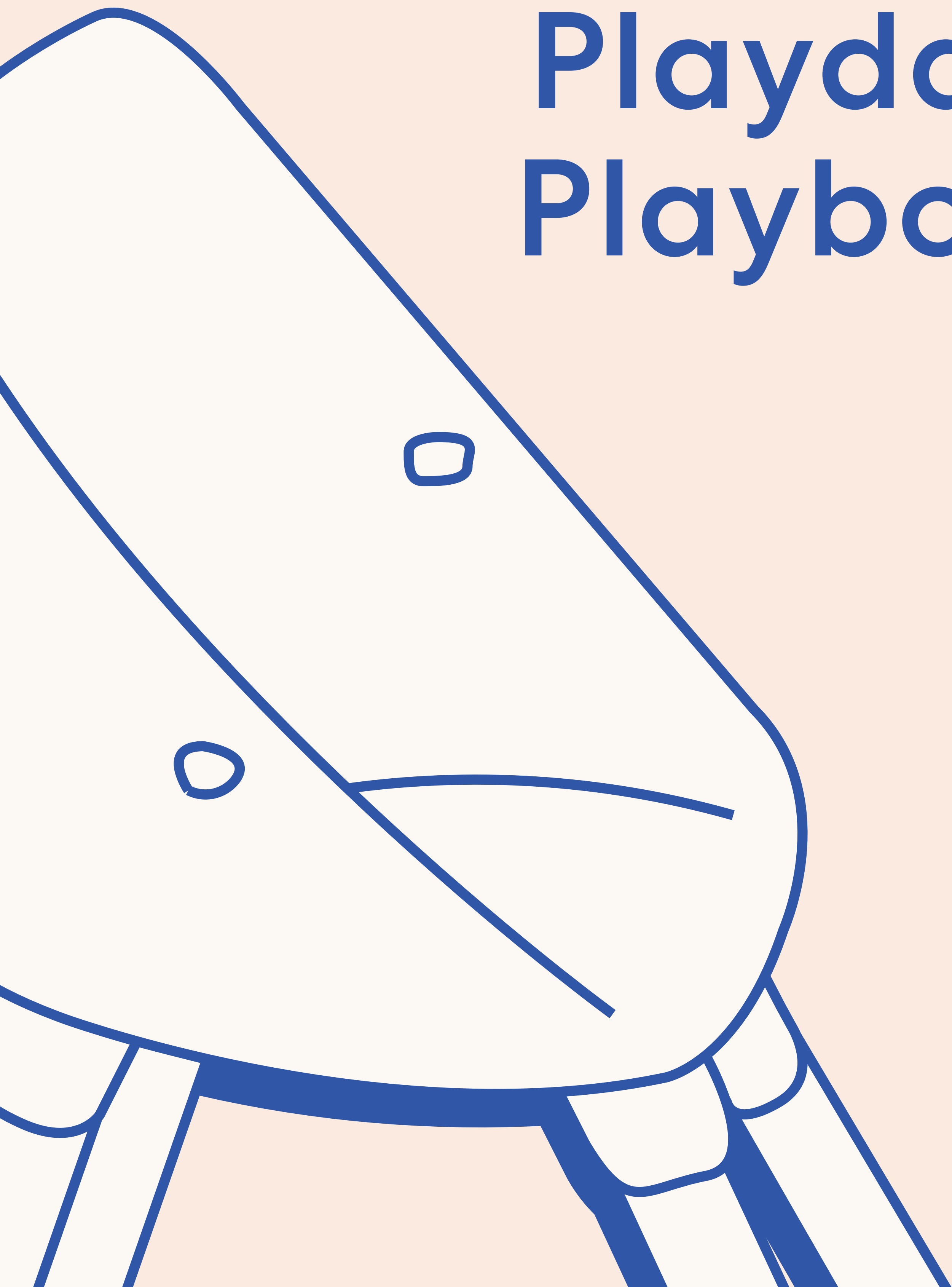




love all little ones



Playdate Playbook





“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood”

-Fred Rogers

love all little ones

The Playdate Playbook

“Should I start planning playdates again?” Spoiler alert: There’s no easy, one-size-fits-all answer, and there’s still a lot that’s up in the air. But one thing we know for sure? Play is critical and necessary for the development of children—physically, cognitively and socially. In a study conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, children who were in active play for at least 1 hour per day were better able to think creatively and multitask more effectively.

But after more than a year of not having playdates, it’s no surprise that parents may need a little guidance about hosting playdates again, especially when safety guidelines seem to vary and change often. Well, that’s our cue! We tapped on experts in different fields to create the ultimate Playdate Playbook to give you activities and tips on how to host an easy, engaging and, most importantly, safe playdate.

QR Codes

While we were working on the Playbook, we realized that sometimes step-by-step instructions just aren’t enough. So instead of guessing at how you’re supposed to set an activity up or prepare a recipe, our expert friends shot some quick video tutorials for you to easily reference! If you see a QR code on a page, you can simply open your camera app on your smartphone, hover it over the QR code and you’ll be directed to the accompanying video. If you’re viewing the Playbook on a computer or similar device, you can also easily click on the text below the QR code to watch the video. Watch these quick videos while you’re setting up for the playdate!



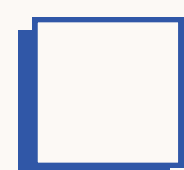
Scan this QR code or [click here](#) to find all of the how-to videos in one place.

SAFETY SECTION

Dr. Playforth of @thepediatricianmom

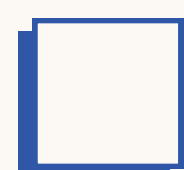
Playdates are extremely important for children, and perhaps even more so during this unprecedented time of social distancing. Letting our children regain some sense of normalcy and practice their social skills is important. Providing opportunities for our children to socialize and return to some sense of normalcy is a good goal, although it must be balanced with pandemic-related safety concerns. Ultimately, communication will always be key to a successful playdate, not just between parents but also with your child. Having to navigate this during a pandemic is challenging and non-ideal, but it can be done.

Here's a checklist of things to consider and talk about as you plan playdates, plus some tips on how to minimize risks and keep your family safe. Whether you're hosting or sending your child to someone else's house, make sure you've had these conversations that will help with your peace of mind and your child's safety.



Safety

I think the most important thing to consider in planning playdates with other families is whether those families are on the same page when it comes to safety. The only way to figure this out, of course, is to be willing to have open conversations. Whether the topic is pool or gun safety, or social distancing and masking, you ideally want to be making plans with families who think about safety and supervision in the same way you do. This does not mean, of course, that you have to be aligned on all fronts - simply that everyone is open and willing to discuss and adjust things to accommodate different family styles and rules.



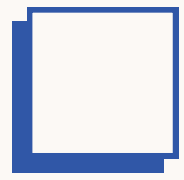
Supervision

Who will be watching the children and to what extent will they be supervised? For younger children, especially, a parent or other responsible adult is the best choice (rather than an older sibling).



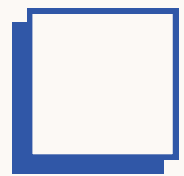
Hey, I'm Dr. Playforth! I'm a mother of 3 and a board-certified pediatrician and with special interests in healthcare education for parents and in pediatric nutrition. In today's connected, internet-dependent world, it is easy to become overwhelmed by information overload. I created [@ThePediatricianMom](#) to help parents find some peace, some answers, and hopefully some confidence to trust their parenting style as I discuss the most common questions pediatricians receive from parents.

“Ultimately, communication will always be key to a successful playdate, not just between parents but also with your child.”



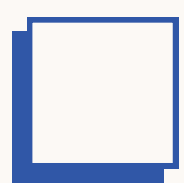
Activities

It can also be helpful to discuss what activities the children will engage in, so you can prep your child and share with the other parents if you have specific concerns. For example, if they will be swimming, you may want to share how comfortable your child is in the pool, and make sure there will be an adult present with the children at all times.



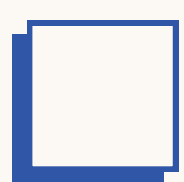
Hazards

These include not just swimming pools, but also guns, trampolines and even pets. If your child is allergic to (or scared of) dogs, for example, this is helpful information to share with the other family. Even children who are used to being around these hazards can get carried away in a new environment, and knowing what your child might be exposed to allows you to review rules with your own child ahead of time. Make sure you ask not just about whether or not guns are in the house but also how they are stored; about 1/3 of households in the US own a gun, and many are not stored optimally. This is not a political issue. Many parents worry that asking about guns will cause offense or be awkward, but rest assured, surveys of parents overwhelmingly show that the vast majority do not mind being asked these questions.



Allergies or Medical Issues

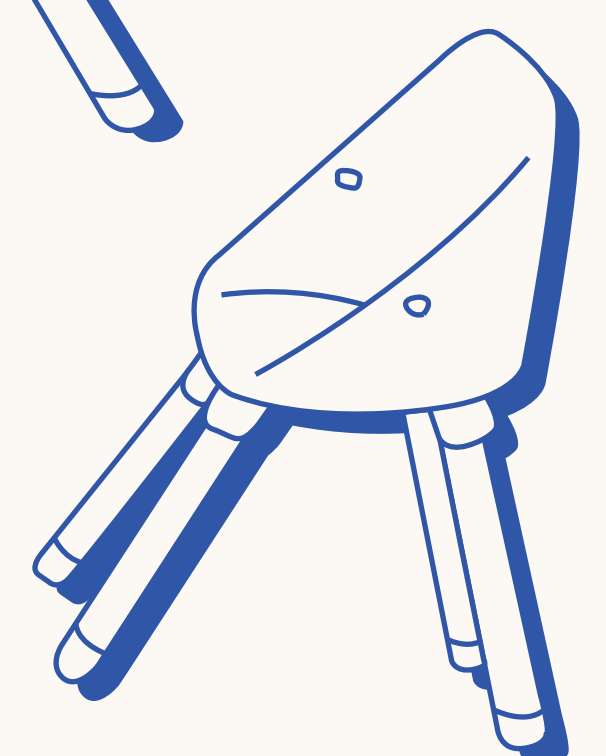
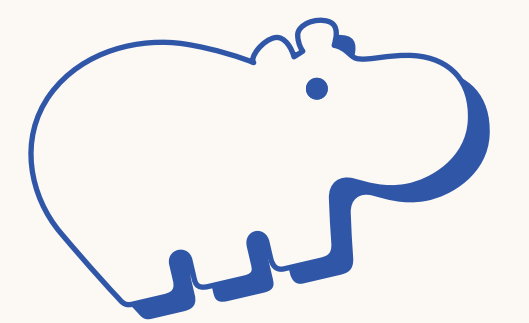
If your child has any food allergies or other medical issues, it is important to volunteer this information. Most parents will already know this, of course, but a list like this would not be complete without the reminder.



COVID-19

Depending on vaccination and infection rates in your area, recommendations will likely vary. It is important to look to your local health department for the most up-to-date guidelines regarding masking and distancing in your area and modify your plans accordingly. In general, playdates outdoors with small groups of children will be safest in terms of COVID-19 transmission. Especially right now, if your child is showing any signs of illness, it is the right thing to do to reach out to other parents and let them know. Risk thresholds will vary by family, and the last thing you want to do is to bring any infectious disease into a household with high risk members.

Put a tick on the checklist as you plan playdates with other parents.



SAFETY SECTION

Dr. Fradin of @advicegivemyfriends

Tip #1 : Minimize the Risk

While it can be so nice for both parents and kids to get out of the house and see friends, if anyone has recently been sick or exposed to COVID-19, you should reschedule. Especially during surges of infections, playdates outside or in well ventilated environments will decrease the risk of transmission. In youngsters who tend to taste every toy when teething or exploring their environment, it's best to have a "yuck bucket" and clean those toys carefully to prevent all sorts of germs from spreading. Touching germs doesn't seem to account for much coronavirus transmission, but washing hands is a well established way to decrease your risk of catching stomach bugs and colds by 33% and 20% respectively.

Tip #2: Keep it within the school pod as much as possible

When planning a playdate, pick your school pals, as much as possible. Having playdates with children from the same class is a helpful way to prevent exposing your school community to additional germs. While we want children to have broad diverse social networks, we also know that it's special seeing friends from school in different environments, and it makes it much less likely that you will be the reason your class gets dismissed for a 10 day period of quarantine.

Tip #3: Communicate any concerns pre-playdate

Before the playdate, communicate about common safety concerns. "Thanks for hosting my child. Just so you know he has no food restrictions or allergies. However, he is pretty inquisitive and quick to get into things. If you all have a pool or firearms in your home, I want to double check that he won't get into any potentially dangerous mischief. What's your set up like?"



Hey, I'm Dr. Kelly Fradin! I'm a pediatrician and mother of two from NYC. To support families during the pandemic, I wrote [Parenting in a Pandemic](#) to provide calm, realistic, and evidence-based advice. I also share pediatric health and parenting advice on social media—check it out on [@advicegivemyfriends!](#)

“Before the playdate, communicate about common safety concerns.”

Tip #4: Be upfront about your rules for your child

If you have any rules for your child, like screen time preferences, be upfront about it. It can be helpful to make it clear that your rules are not about the host. "I'm so happy my child is getting out of the house, he has been having a lot of screen time and iPad time this summer. Hopefully, they can do something more active or creative. If they seem bored and demand the screens, I know it happens, just give me a call. I am happy to come pick him up early." Another screen-related opinion to consider, monitoring. "I know the kids are looking forward to playing games together, but I have heard some kids stumble so quickly into inappropriate content. How do you handle that?" If you can't have these conversations with the other parent (too awkward?), make sure to set a plan with your child.

“Especially during surges of infections, playdates outside or in well ventilated environments will decrease the risk of transmission.”

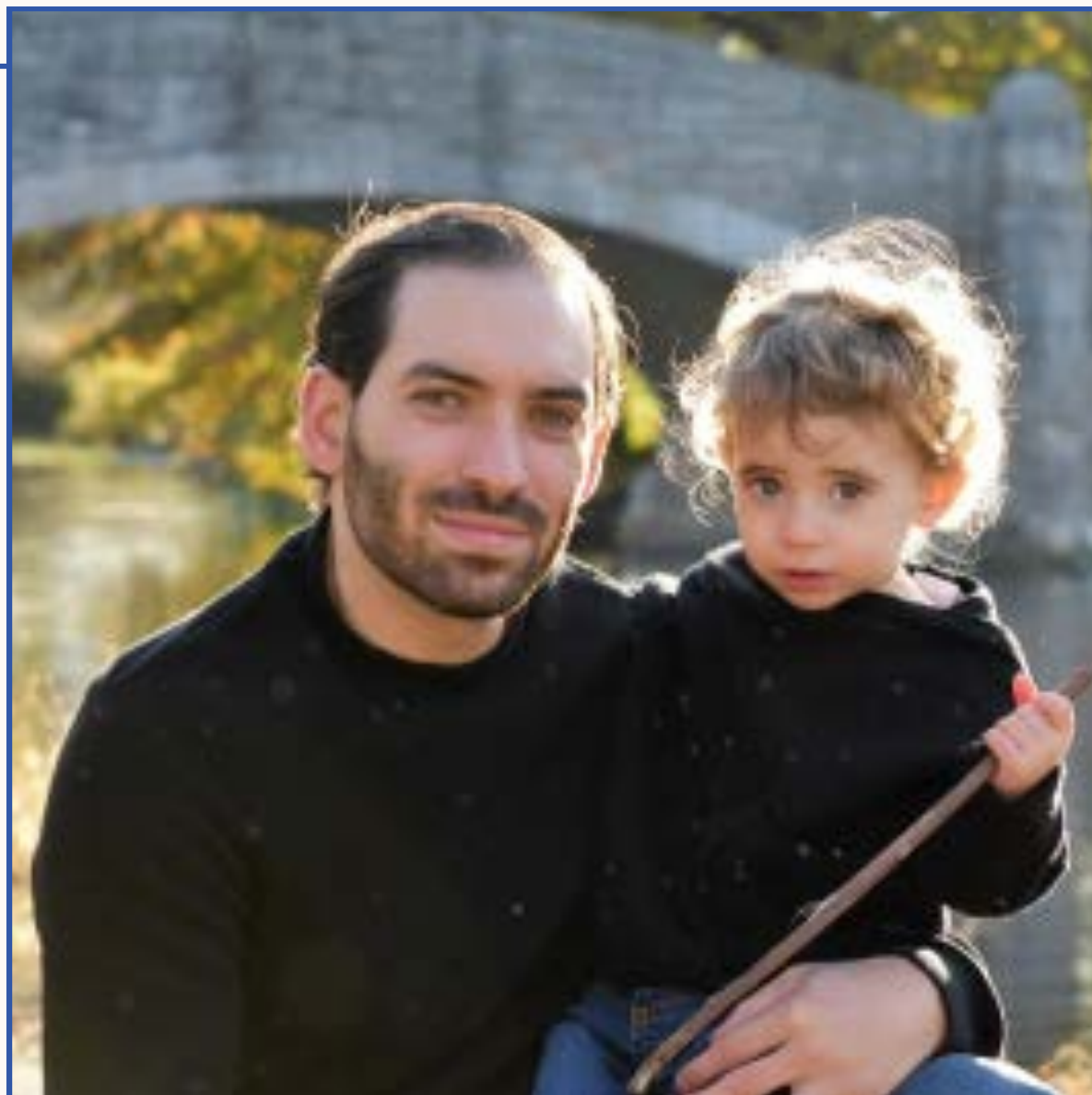


PLAY SECTION

Chris of @montessoridadsway

ACTIVITY 1

“One piece of advice I would give you would be: keep it simple.”



Hey, I'm Chris! I became a stay at home dad during COVID. Before that I helped run my family's florist and photography business. I have a 2.5 year old son with my second child on the way. I fell in love with the Montessori philosophy, and I try to incorporate it into our daily lives in my own way. I love creating play based learning activities with household items for my son and after some encouragement from my wife, I began sharing all these play ideas through my Instagram page [@montessoridadsway](#) Starting this account has given me the ability to continue being creative, which was something I loved about my job. Now I get the opportunity to do that in a way that benefits my son and hopefully families all around the world.

You may be starting to get comfortable hosting playdates to build your child's social skills. With so much time being isolated from others this could be an overwhelming experience for both you and your child. One piece of advice I would give you would be: keep it simple. Looking back at all the activities I have set up for my son, it always amazes me that the ones that took minutes to set up always end up being the most engaging.

Here are some of my favorite activities I like to set up for my son when he has a playdate to keep them learning, playing and having fun!

Water Balloon Toss

If you want to keep things outside, here's a great activity to do that's fun for the little ones but also helps with color recognition. My neighbor's son saw us playing this on our driveway, so we invited him over to join in and they had a blast!

Materials

- Water balloons
- Painters tape or sidewalk chalk

The Steps

- ① Start by taking different colors of painters tape or sidewalk chalk and creating around 6 different X's on the ground. These are the targets! The colors of the targets should match the different colors of the water balloons you have.
- ② Then, fill up your different colors of water balloons. Pro tip: Use the self sealing water balloons for an easy breezy setup!
- ③ Keep the water balloons in a bucket, and invite the little ones to throw the water balloons at the target of the same color as the balloon.



PLAY SECTION

Chris of @montessoridadsway

ACTIVITY 2 + 3

Ping Pong Target Practice

When we opened up our Lalo Play Table box, it had perfect sheets of styrofoam to upcycle and use for this outdoor activity that's great for further developing fine motor skills.

Materials

- Styrofoam (bonus points if you reuse some from a recent package you got!)
- Golf tees
- Ping pong balls
- Spray bottle or water gun

The Steps

- 1 Take your pieces of styrofoam and make sure they're cut into blocks or strips.
- 2 Stick around 5-8 golf tees into the styrofoam so that they're in a line.
- 3 Then, place the ping pong balls on each of the tees.
- 4 Fill up a spray bottle or water gun and make sure it's on the jet setting. Once it's filled up, prompt your

little ones to carefully aim at the ping pong balls and squirt them off the tees. Pro tip: The squeezing of the spray bottle and putting the ping pong balls back on the tees is great for building fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination.

- 5 Parents, arm yourself with a spray bottle too because this will definitely turn into a spray battle!



Box Ball Toss

Our family gets a lot of packages (can anyone else relate?!), so I like to upcycle the boxes from those and use it to set up activities for my son. Large boxes are the best and have so much potential for engaging activities!

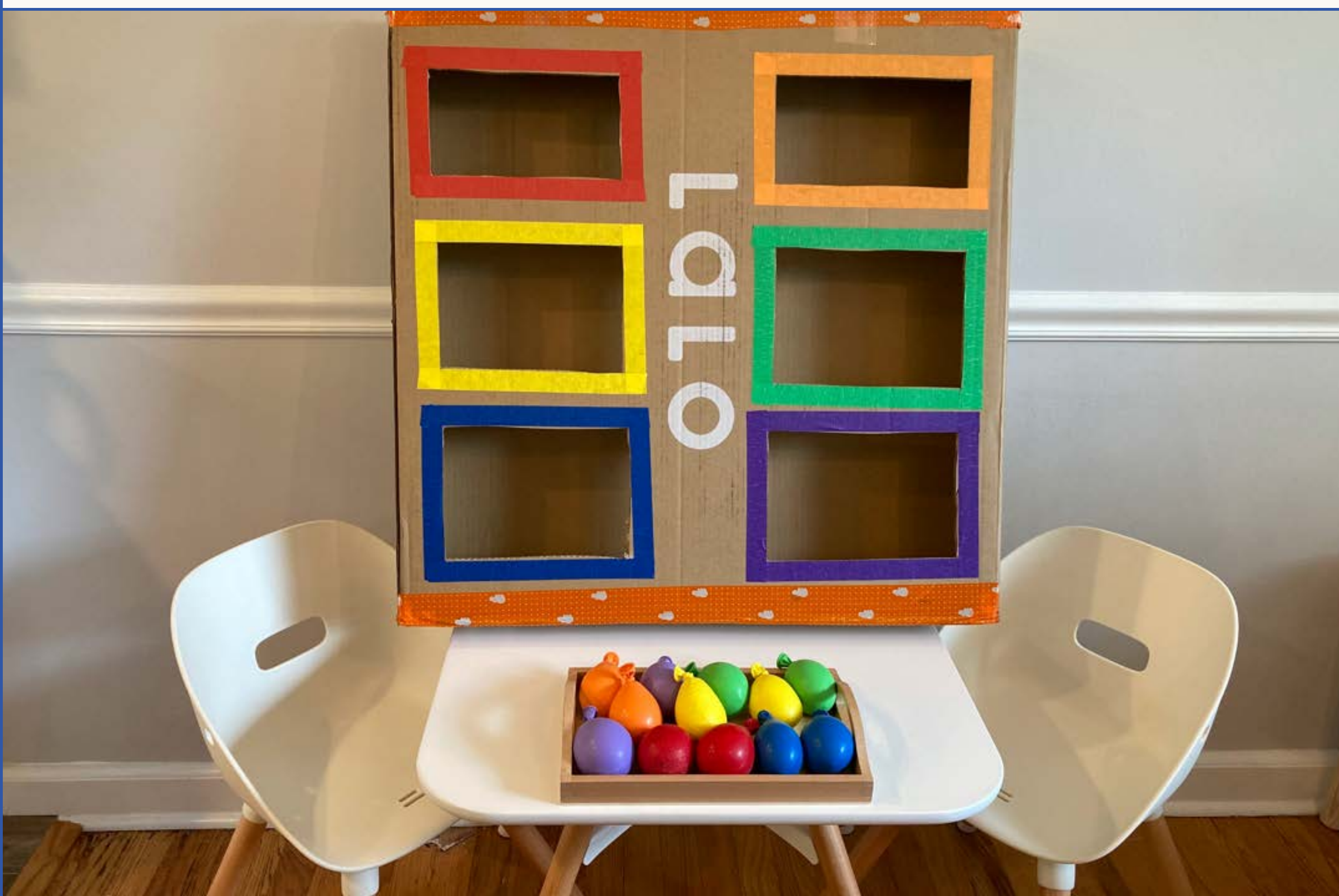
Materials

- Large box (bonus points if you reuse a box from a recent package you got!)
- Painters tape or markers
- Balloons filled with rice or rainbow balls

“Large boxes are the best and have so much potential for engaging activities!”

The Steps

- 1 Take a large box and make 6 rectangles by outlining the shape with painters tape or markers.
- 2 Then, use a box cutter to safely cut the center of each rectangle out. After you're done cutting the rectangles, your base is all set.
- 3 Get some rainbow balls out that the little ones will use to shoot inside each of the rectangles. Pro tip: Use a pack of balloons and fill them with rice. That way, they won't bounce back out after they're thrown in!
- 4 Prompt the little ones to throw the balls or balloons inside the rectangles that are outlined in the same color as the balloon. Another simple activity that helps build color recognition while they have a blast!



PLAY SECTION

Chris of @montessoridadsway

ACTIVITY 4

“It always amazes me that the ones that took minutes to set up always end up being the most engaging.”



Animal Rescue

One of my son's favorite activities that keeps him engaged for hours is what we call "animal rescue" in our house. You don't need much to keep them occupied! Cue the toilet paper, water and toy animals.

Materials

- Toilet paper
- Water
- Medium-sized container
- Toy animal figurines



Scan the QR code or [click here](#) to watch the how-to video!



The Steps

- 1 Grab a few of your little one's animal figurines (action figures work too!) and wrap them in some toilet paper. Pro tip: There are a ton of versions of this activity you can do depending on what you have lying around at home. For example, you can use tinfoil, playdough, shaving cream and so much more.
- 2 Once they're wrapped, dip them into water and squeeze out any excess water.
- 3 Put them all in a container, and invite the little ones to try and get all the animals out. Watch them as they try to unravel the animals, working on their fine motor, problem solving and even language skills if they're talking through it. Let them take the lead!

PLAY SECTION

Jennie of UNION SQUARE PLAY

ACTIVITY 1

“One of the ways we respect our child is how we respond to their play.”



Hey, I'm Jennie! I'm the Co-Founder of [Union Square Play](#), a parenting community and play space that helps make the early years of parenting a little bit easier, a lot more fun, and very communal; I'm also the Founder of [@momommies](#), my personal Instagram account documenting the joys and challenges of motherhood coupled with my experience working with children. I've been an early childhood educator for more than 12 years and love using both my educational background and personal experience of motherhood to educate and empower new parents and to share the type of information that all parents need. My methods are centered around the RIE® approach to respectful parenting and open-ended play to encourage kids to learn in the most natural, innate way.



How to set boundaries during play

It's our job to ensure that our little ones navigate the world safely, which is why we have to set boundaries. It's important that when we set these boundaries, that we are clear and sure of ourselves. The moment our child senses a back and forth or uneasiness is when they start to think "Wait, am I the one in charge here or is she? This feels uneasy. My mom is supposed to be the one keeping me safe."

The boundary, once set with confidence, is accepted better than we anticipate. When we say "I won't let you" instead of asking a child to stop what they are doing, we are setting a very clear boundary.



Scan the QR code or [click here](#) to watch Jennie's video on setting boundaries.

How to set up a provocation

One of the ways we respect our child is how we respond to their play. When we provide our children with open-ended play experiences, we are giving them the opportunity to show us what they are interested in and what they are curious about.

Materials

- Recyclables (toilet paper rolls, cardboard boxes)
- Household items (wooden spoons, pans, sponges, brushes)
- Water

The Steps

- 1 Plan.** Assess where your child is in terms of their capabilities and interests. Also, set realistic expectations in terms of time of day and your child's temperament. Right now, my girls love experiencing materials and sensory play. They also can sit at a table for a period of time and aren't as active during the early afternoon part of the day.
- 2 Present.** Then, put out materials that have an unlimited way in which they can be used. This is called setting up a provocation, which is intentionally setting up materials to create an invitation to play. In the video (check it out through the QR code!), I put out a sneeze guard partition, soap and water. Then, I invited them over by just offering something to scrub with. I didn't ask them to do anything specific. I had no agenda. I just simply offered this invitation to play. I also gave them a choice when I let them pick between brushes, sponges, and bottle brushes.
- 3 Observe.** Once the kids are exploring the materials, sit back and watch them play without distractions (no phone) and without interrupting. This is also why it's valuable to use open ended materials that have no "wrong" use. Giving your child the message: what you're doing now is important. It's exactly right. I'm focusing on only you.
- 4 Learn.** I may prompt conversation with a question that is open vs closed. Instead of asking, "What are you making?" I'll say, "Tell me about that." Sometimes they don't know what they're doing or making, whereas telling me about something they want to tell me opens them up to thinking about the experience. I don't push them if they don't want to answer. I see that they're engaged and that more questions can be disruptive to their "play flow."
- 5 Reflect.** After the experience, I think about what I can adjust or add for next time. No play experience is a "fail" it's an opportunity to learn about your child!

PLAY SECTION

Chelsea of the dough Project

ACTIVITY 1

Hey, I'm Chelsea! I'm the Founder and CEO of [The Dough Project](#), where we make fresh playdough using all-natural ingredients and color from plant-based sources. I'm on a mission to make playtime easy, enriching and well, fun! I was a preschool teacher for 10+ years (we made and used dough every day in my classroom!) and built The Dough Project on the foundational belief that kid-powered playtime is essential for learning and cultivating creativity—both in the classroom and more importantly, at home.



A Sweet Party

Everyone loves a good party! And everyone knows no party is complete without some cupcakes. This activity is great to set up even when you have a group of little ones of different ages. It's easy to age up or down, plus making playdough cupcakes is definitely as fun as it sounds!

Materials

- The Dough Project's all-natural playdough
- Silicone cupcake holders
- Paper straws (cut in half)
- Feathers
- Stuffed animal (you little one's favorites!)
- Construction paper
- Markers or crayons
- Stickers
- Paper party goods



Scan the QR code or [click here](#) to watch the how-to video.

The Steps

- 1 Start by inviting the little ones to make cupcakes! Have them roll balls of dough, and press each of the balls into a cupcake holder. Silicone holders usually work best for this, but you could also use cupcake tins or anything else you have around the house!
- 2 Then, roll a long snake out of dough, and wrap it around the top of the cupcake to make the "frosting." Pro tip: All that squishing, squeezing and rolling helps little ones strengthen hand muscles and helps develop control and dexterity in their fingers.
- 3 Use shredded pieces of dough (or real sprinkles if you have) to decorate the top of the cupcakes. If you have other loose parts around the house, like buttons or pom poms, you can include them as decorations they can use too.
- 4 Take a paper straw you already cut in half and stick it into the top of the cupcake to act as the "candle." You can "light it" by placing a feather through the center of the straw.
- 5 To extend this activity for a longer period of time, turn making cupcakes into creating a whole birthday party for their favorite stuffed animals. Guide the little ones in deciding on a place, have them make invitations, decorations, party hats and more. Grab their stuffed animals and set up the party with paper plates and, of course, your dough cupcakes!
- 6 To age this activity down, simply present the materials, and let the little ones take the lead. They may craft cupcakes the way you envisioned, or maybe they'll create something entirely different. The most important part here is to let them play and create freely!

PLAY SECTION

Chelsea of the dough project

ACTIVITY 2

Rollin' with the Homies

This playdough provocation is simple, mess-free and so much fun! The biggest tip I have for parents is to keep activities as simple as possible, especially for playdates when you have a few kids to wrangle. For any activity, you can have some steps and instructions to help guide the little ones, but go with the flow and try to keep steps simple so the kids can relax and create and not stress over the outcome! The great part about this activity is that you can set it up for the kids and just let them do their thing.

The Steps

- 1 Save a few toilet paper or paper towel rolls ahead of the playdate.
- 2 When the playdate rolls around, set up a tray with a few jars of dough, some toilet paper rolls and a plate of foam stickers in different shapes.
- 3 Prompt the little ones to remove the adhesive backs from the stickers and stick them on to the cardboard rolls.
- 4 Once the rolls have stickers of different shapes secured on, invite the little ones to flatten dough into a sheet.
- 4 After the dough's been flattened, invite the little ones to roll the textured "rolling pins" over the dough to make prints and designs. Pro tip: Use purposeful language prompts throughout this

activity to get them started and keep them going without fully interrupting them. You can say things like, "I wonder what kind of marks we can make..." You can also develop their expressive vocabulary by expanding on their observations and labeling basic concepts, like size, color and texture. For example,

Little one: "Dough ball!"

You: "Yes, that's a big red dough ball!"

(Big = size, Red = color)

- 5 To age this activity down, remove the adhesive backs from the stickers and show the little ones how they stick so they can stick it on themselves. For very young kids, you can place the stickers directly on a plastic or wooden rolling pin that's less flimsy than a toilet paper roll—this will be better for heavier hands to roll on top of dough.



Scan the QR code or [click here](#) to watch the how-to video.

Materials

- The Dough Project's all-natural playdough
- Toilet paper rolls (or paper towel rolls cut in half)
- Foam stickers

“The biggest tip I have for parents is to keep activities as simple as possible, especially for playdates when you have a few kids to wrangle.”



PLAY SECTION

Chelsea of the dough Project

ACTIVITY 3

“I always recommend setting up invitations to play with open-ended materials because it really empowers children to be creative thinkers, makers and problem solvers.”



Silly Sculptures

Dough + tinker trays = endless play! The best part about this activity is that once you set it up for them, you can let them have at it. I always recommend setting up invitations to play with open-ended materials because it really empowers children to be creative thinkers, makers and problem solvers. Tinker trays are the perfect jumping off point for limitless creativity! To set it up, collect loose parts, like gems, beads, pennies, buttons and pipe cleaners, and place them on a tray with some dough. Add scissors for some extra fine motor work!

Materials

- The Dough Project's all-natural playdough
- A tray
- A collection of loose parts (pipe cleaners, gems, beads, popsicle sticks, paper straws, keys, buttons, anything you can find around the house!)
- A clean, dry surface to play

The Steps

- 1 Start by setting up the tinker tray for the kids. On the tray, add the loose parts you were able to gather and some jars of dough. You can easily set this up earlier in the day and set it aside for when the little ones come over for the playdate.
- 2 Invite the kids to create silly sculptures using the dough as their base and loose parts to complete it. Give little direction, and let the open-ended materials speak for themselves! Pro tip: Don't micromanage the kids' experience as they create. Let them decide how they want to engage with the materials! Instead of interrupting their flow, you can connect with them later in the day during snack time by saying, "I noticed the sculpture you made earlier. You used playdough, buttons and gems. I was so curious about what you were building!"
- 3 To age this activity up, give the little ones challenges, like finding a way to make two sculptures that connect to each other. After they've created a few sculptures, you can also have them create an "art gallery" to talk about each other's creations or share it with the grown-ups.
- 4 To age this activity down, only lay out materials that can stick easily into the dough, like straws and feathers. Provide lots of the same materials instead of a large variety so they can work on easily sticking them into the dough.

"Don't micromanage the kids' experience as they create. Let them decide how they want to engage with the materials!"



Meet Laurie!



Sticky Paper Collage

ART SECTION

Laurie of KID MADE MODERN

Hey, I'm Laurie! I'm the resident crafter over at [Kid Made Modern](#), where we're on a mission to create the next generation of creative thinkers. Since 2012, we've been making unique products designed to inspire children to push the boundaries of their imaginations while developing invaluable skills that shape them as little humans. We believe in the power of creating an environment free from judgments, rules, and boundaries where children are limited by nothing but their imaginations.

Sticky Paper Collage

Collage is one of my very favorite art activities for toddlers! It is such a wonderful way to encourage their creativity without focusing on a specific final product. This sticky paper collage method is a real hit with little ones. I love that it gives them flexibility to make changes and try things out and the best part is that it's completely mess-free! I found that the "My First Arts and Crafts Library" was the perfect craft kit for this project because the materials were so toddler friendly and lightweight!

Materials

- Kid Made Modern's "My First Arts and Crafts Library"
- Clear contact paper
- Scissors
- Painters Tape

Use code LALO15
for 15% off your
Kid Made
Modern order!*

*Offer is valid through 12/31/21.
Excludes already discounted items.

The Setup

- 1 Start by cutting a large piece of clear contact paper. Carefully remove the paper backing and lay the contact paper, sticky side UP, flat on the floor near a large open space of wall. Place painters tape gently along the four edges of the contact paper. Carefully lift up the tape and contact paper and stick the tape to the wall. The sticky side of the contact paper should be facing out. Pro tip: It's easier to set this up before you have little ones running around during the playdate!
- 2 Open your My First Arts and Crafts Library. Select lightweight items from the kit for the kids to use in their collage. You can use the felt circles, paper straws, googly eyes, sticky gems, pipe cleaners, sparkly paper shapes and craft sticks! Set all of these materials up on a divided tray for the kids.
- 3 Invite the little ones to stick the materials to the sticky paper to create a collage! This is super engaging for toddlers and even older kids can join in. There are no rules with this collage - the kids can place items anywhere they like!
- 4 When they are finished, you have a few options to finish the project. You can leave the sticky wall as is to display their art, take the pieces back off to use again for future projects, or cover their art with another piece of clear contact paper to preserve it!

ART SECTION

Gabriella of POSTER HOUSE

ACTIVITY 1

“At Poster House, we believe that every single person is capable of having big conversations, taking a stance and working to change our world for the better.”



Gabriella + our Co-Founder Michael with their little one Jemma!

Hi, I'm Gabriella! I'm a Brooklyn mama to 1.5 year old, Jemma Bea, and a freelance museum educator for early childhood, school, adult and accessibility groups at museums across NYC. One of my favorite places of work is [Poster House](#), the first museum in the United States dedicated to the art, history, and impact of posters. Through interactive programs for youth of all ages and a dedicated kids space, the museum provides layered opportunities for young minds to engage with graphic design from around the world. One of our highlight family experiences is called Poster Kids, a free gallery tour and art making workshop that takes place both virtually and in-person on the last Sunday morning of every month. My goal with Poster Kids, and all of the other programs I teach, is to offer families challenging and fun experiences with observation, interpretation, and art making that deepen imaginations, build empathy and inspire dreams of new possibilities for the world.

Design a Poster

This activity is great for little ones ages 4+! A poster is a way to sell a product, advertise an event or communicate a message to the public. Posters usually combine images and words on a large scale to clearly and quickly persuade others to do something. Some posters are used for social justice initiatives like protests and rallies—powerful catalysts for change that even our youngest citizens are aware of right now. Though social justice is a complex term, Poster House believes that every person, regardless of age, is capable of having big conversations, taking a stance, and working to change our world for the better. We hope you'll use this activity to inspire your young learners!

Materials

- Large heavy paper such as cardstock
- Thick markers
- Dowel, paint mixer, ruler, or branch (to use as a poster handle)
- Strong tape

Design a poster!

The Steps

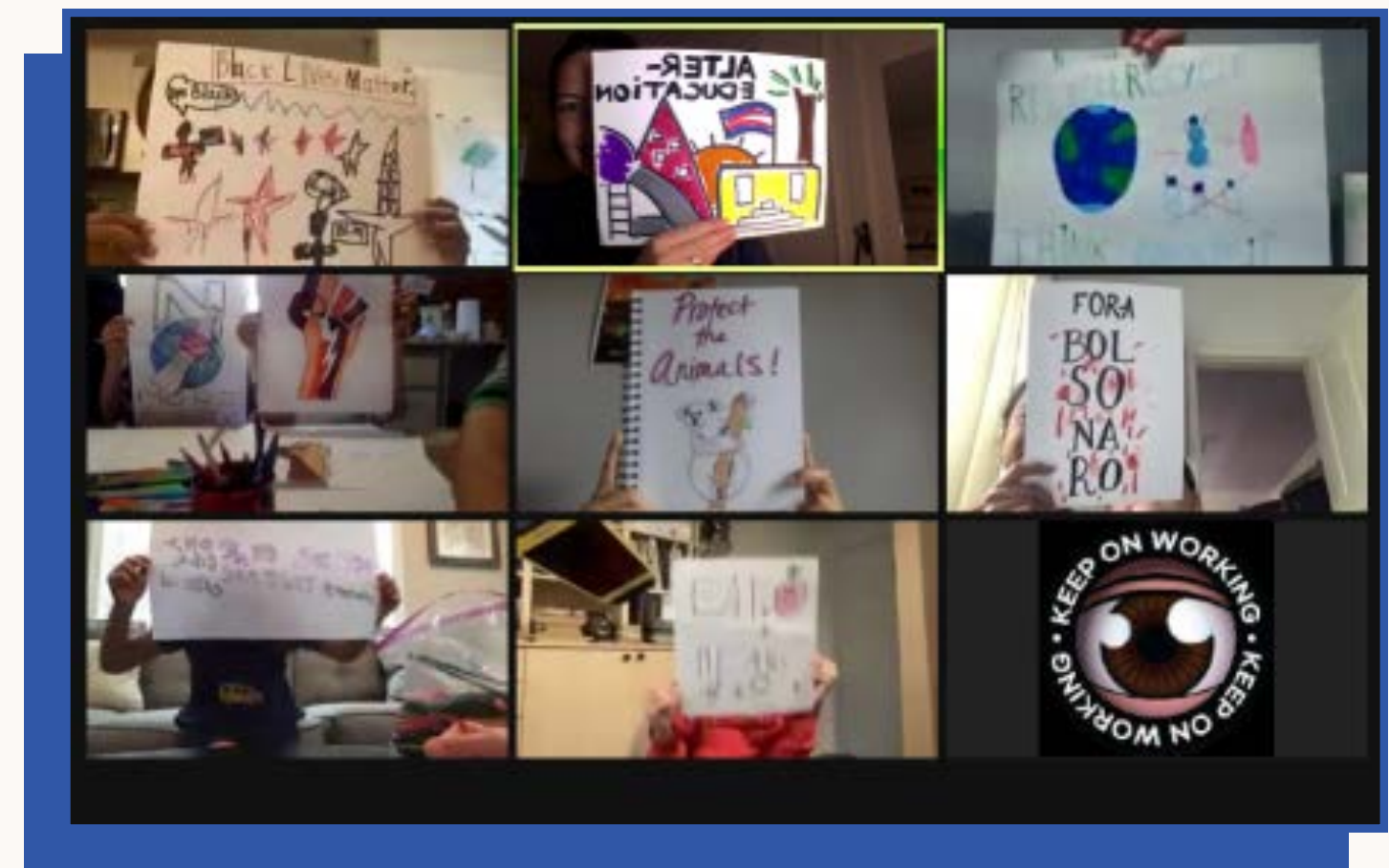
- 1 Start off by looking at this poster:



Then, ask your children these open-ended questions (there are many possible answers; there is no “right” answer to these!):

- What do you notice?
- How do you think the bird feels? How do you know the bird feels that way?
- What is the rabbit doing? Why is the rabbit doing that?
- What do you do to care for others? Pro tip: Model a response to this question first, by explaining something you do to show care. For example, “I care that everyone has enough food to eat, so sometimes I make sandwiches to give to people who are hungry. What do you do to care for others?” Or “I care that everyone gets presents on their birthday, so sometimes I donate new toys to families who can’t afford gifts for their children. What do you do to care for others?”
- What are other ways we can make the world kinder or more fair? Make a list of their answers.

- 2 Invite the little ones to choose one action from the list and illustrate it on a large piece of cardstock or other thick paper. Don’t worry if the drawing isn’t realistic. “Scribbles” are the first stage of artmaking, an empowering form of self expression and important fine-motor practice! For inspiration, take a look at this photo from our Poster Kids Activist Voices session:



- 3 Encourage the kids to take up the whole paper with their drawing, using bright colors and thick outlines. These are techniques that make images more eye-catching, an important facet of poster design.
- 4 Discuss with the kids the message they hope to convey through their poster. Prompt them by saying, “Tell me about your poster.” or “What do you want other people to know about your poster?” With their permission, transcribe their messages clearly on their posters.
- 5 Then, use strong tape to affix your children’s posters to handles, so that they can carry their posters outside.
- 6 Go outside for a walk with the posters and see how others react! Discuss the experience with the little ones afterwards.

ART SECTION

Gabriella of

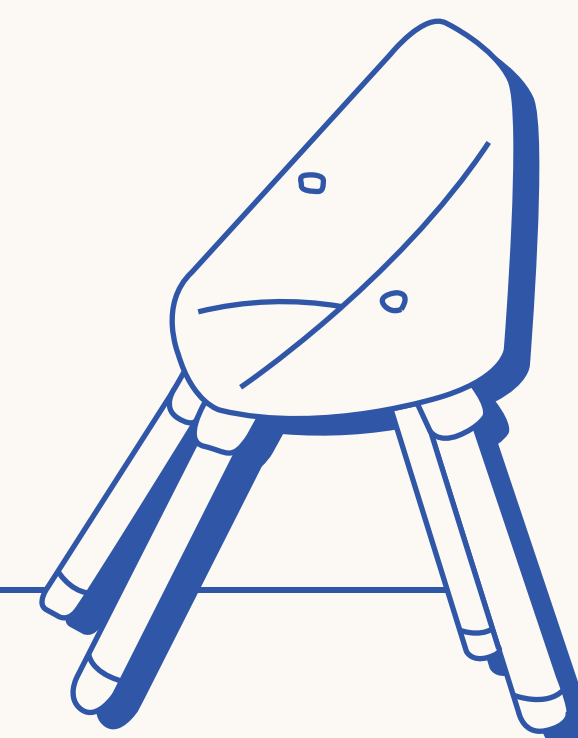
POSTER

HOUSE

ACTIVITY 2

Materials

- Cardboard (bonus points if you reuse from a recent package you got!)
- Scissors
- Gluestick
- Inkpad
- Paper



Simple Prints

This activity is great for little ones ages 1+! There are many different techniques used to make posters; however, posters are often printed so that they can be quickly produced in multiples and then widely disseminated. Some popular processes are lithography, letterpress printing, and screen printing, all of which require sophisticated systems and materials. Stamping, however, is a form of printing that is accessible to everyone. We hope you'll use this activity to create your own stamps and experience the excitement of printing at home.

The Steps

- 1 Start by cutting out at least two 2x2 inch squares of cardboard. Pro tip: Depending on the little ones' developmental stage, you may prepare the stamps for the kids in advance of their playdate. However, if they're capable of cutting, you can involve them in every step of the activity!
- 2 Then, cut out a shape from one of the cardboard squares.
- 3 Glue the shape onto a remaining cardboard square, and wait for it to dry. This is the stamp!
- 4 Invite the little ones to press the stamp, shape side down, into the inkpad so that the entire shape gets covered in ink.
- 5 Stamp your paper in different areas.

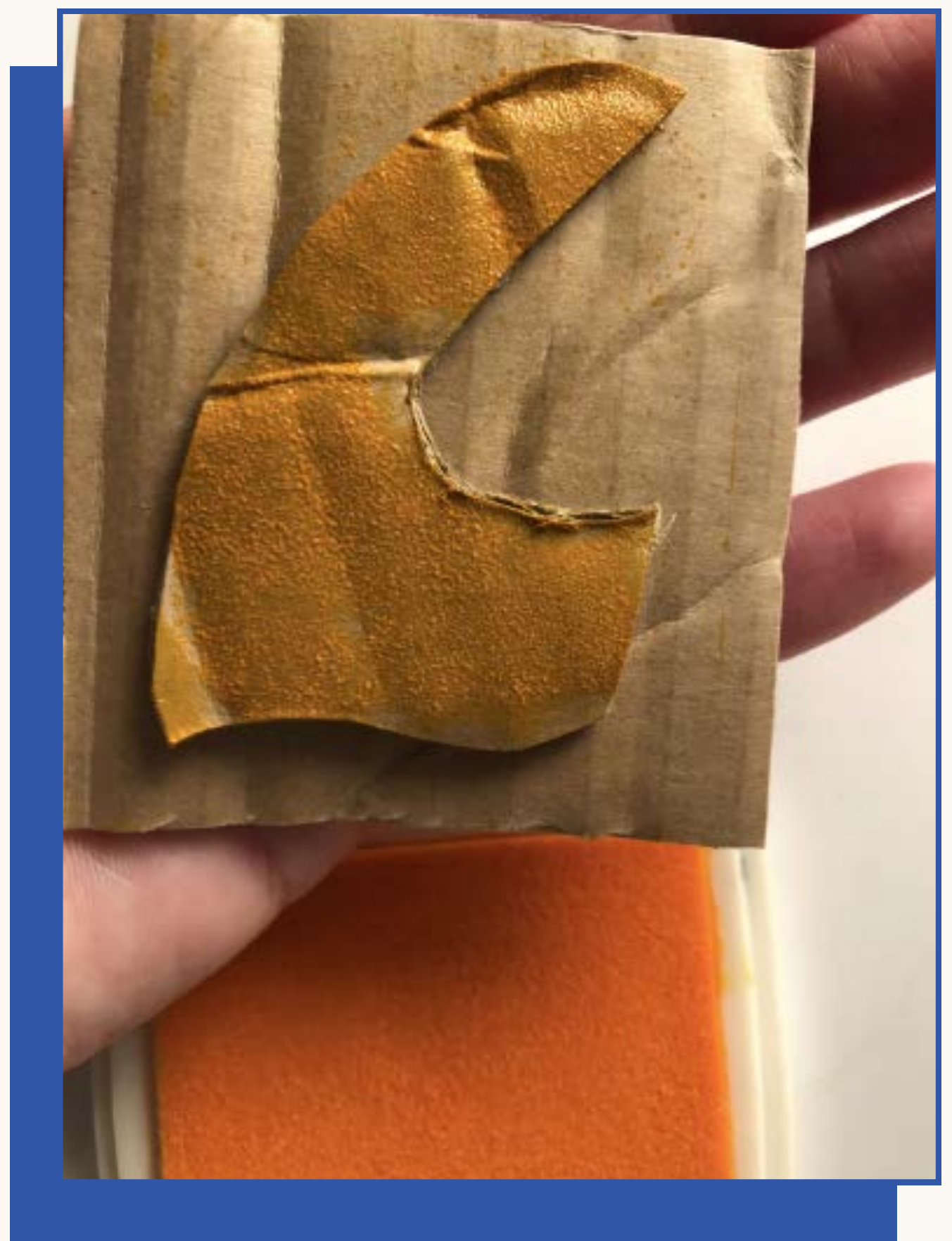
- 6 You can also invite the little ones to create more stamps, and try the process again in different colors and shapes.

“My goal is to offer families challenging and fun experiences with observation, interpretation, and art making that deepen imaginations, build empathy and inspire dreams of new possibilities for the world.”

Step 1 & 2



Step 3



Step 4



Step 5



FOOD SECTION

Amy of @yummytoddlerfood

RECIPE 1 & 2

Hey, I'm Amy from [Yummy Toddler Food](#)! I'm a mama to three kiddos and a writer, editor, and recipe developer for magazines, books, and brands—like Lalo! Feeding toddlers is a huge challenge and it can be so, so stressful. But I love to offer reassurance, encouragement, easy recipes, and tips that make feeding a family feel more manageable.

Snack Necklaces

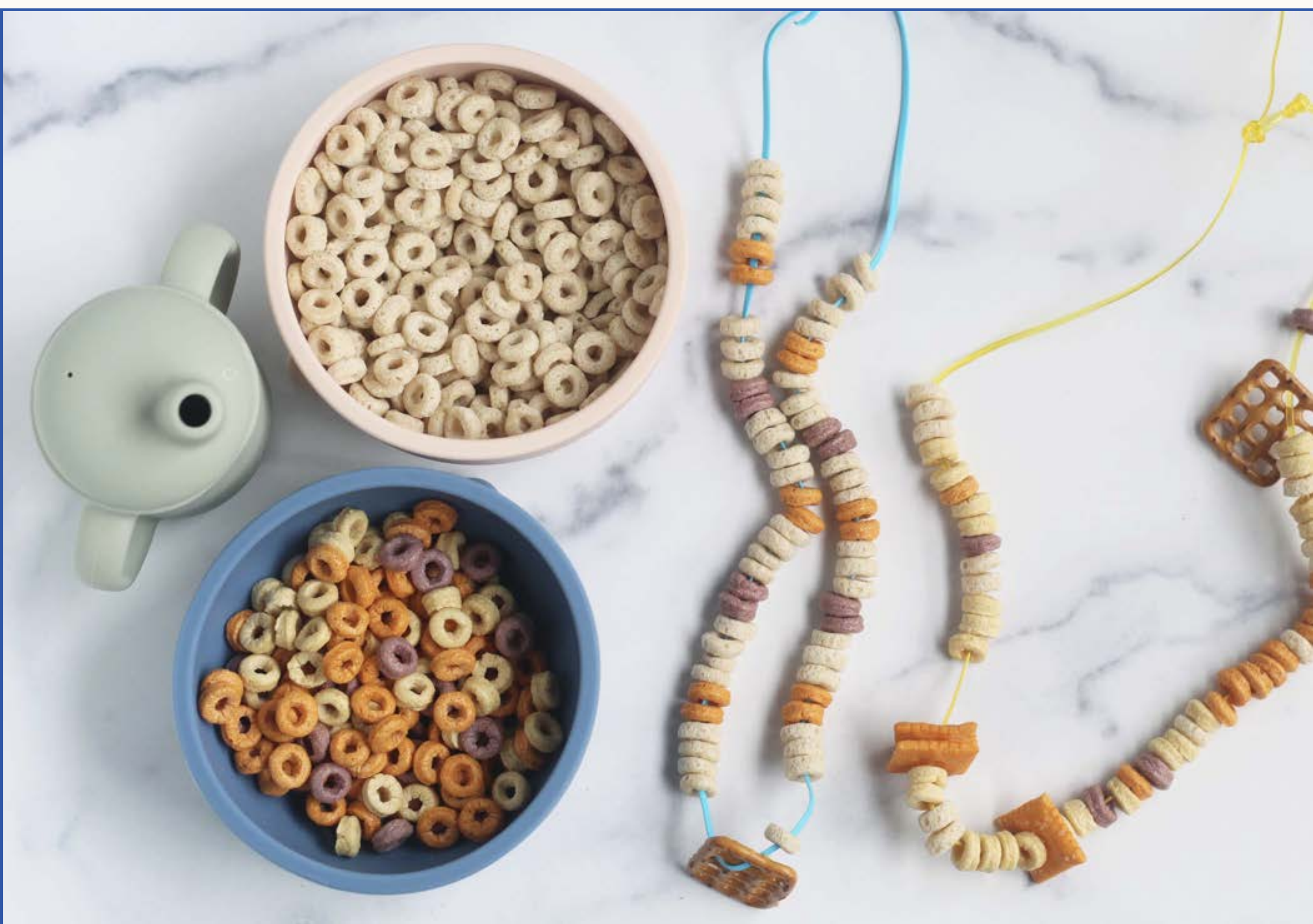
Make snack time more fun with this simple snacking activity that's great for all ages. These snack necklaces are so fun to make and eat and are easy to adjust based on what you happen to have on hand.

Ingredients

- “O” shaped cereal, pretzels, diced snack bars, and/or crackers
- Dried fruit (such as pineapple or dried apples)
- Plastic cording

The Steps

- 1 Make a hole in the dried fruit or snack bar pieces if needed using a paper lollipop stick.
- 2 Cut a long length of cording and tie a knot in one end.
- 3 Put out bowls with the assorted foods so the kids can add them to their cording.
- 4 Once the kids have filled their necklace, tie the ends together, place over their heads and let them nibble away!



Apple Pie Bites

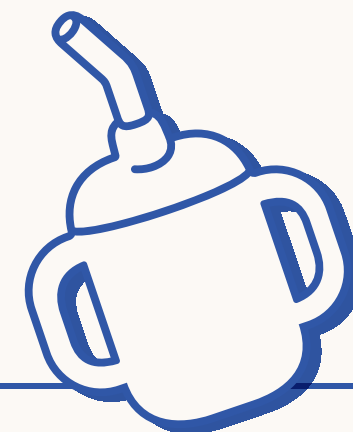
This simple energy bite recipe uses just 3 ingredients to make a satisfying and naturally sweet snack. Plus, it's an easy snack to make ahead of time and keep stored and ready for whenever you have playdates. We like to pop them into mini cupcake liners to raise the fun factor! This recipe makes about 20 servings.

Ingredients

- 1 cup dried apples
- 1 cup pitted Medjool or Deglet Noor dates
- 1 cup unsalted almonds (or cashews)
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon



Scan the QR code or [click here](#) to watch the how-to video!



The Steps

- 1 Place the ingredients into a medium bowl. Cover with boiling water and let sit for 30 minutes.
- 2 Drain the water from the bowl.
- 3 Add ingredients to a food processor and blend well. Pro tip: It may take a minute or more, so stop and scrape down the sides as needed until you have a thick paste.
- 4 Measure out rounds with a tablespoon measuring spoon. Then, roll into balls.
- 5 Top with a few sprinkles if desired.
- 6 Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 1 month.



FOOD SECTION

Amy of @yummytoddlerfood

RECIPE 3



Scan the QR code or [click here](#) to watch the how-to video!

Cinnamon Graham Crackers

These are crispiest (and most delicious!) on the day they are baked. Pair with a simple side of fruit and milk or water for a fun snack. This recipe makes about 2 dozen servings.

Ingredients

- 1 cup whole-wheat flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter softened at room temperature and diced into cubes
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Optional topping: 1 tablespoon milk, 1 teaspoon sugar, 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

The Steps

- 1 Preheat the oven to 375°F and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
- 2 Place all ingredients into a bowl and use your hand to mix together to form a dough. Pro tip: If the dough is a little crumbly, be sure that it's thoroughly combined. If it's still crumbly, add 1/2-1 tablespoon additional milk until it comes together.
- 3 Make a flattened disc of dough.
- 4 Roll the dough 1/4-inch thick between two pieces of lightly floured pieces of parchment paper. The flour will ensure that the dough doesn't stick to the rolling pin.
- 5 Cut out with a square cookie cutter. Transfer to the prepared baking sheet.
- 6 Bake for 8-10 minutes, until lightly browned around the edges. (**Optional:** Brush dough with milk. Sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar. Use a fork to make holes).
- 7 Remove from the oven, let cool on the baking sheet for a minute, and transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.
- 8 Store in an airtight container for up to 3 days. (The crackers may soften slightly during storage.)

“Feeding toddlers can be so, so stressful, But I love to offer easy recipes, and tips that make feeding a family feel more manageable.”



FOOD SECTION

Dini of @prepandrally

RECIPE 1 & 2

“When it comes time for dinner, simply pull out those stored Sunday staples and assemble fun and unique dinners in just minutes!”



Hey, I'm Dini! I'm a food host, recipe developer, former private chef, creative junkie, wife, and mama to some cute and very energetic kids. [Prep + Rally](#) is my solution to getting a wholesome dinner on the table on those busy weeknights when juggling mommy-ing and work life feels almost impossible. There is a simple weekly meal prep to get your staples for the week cooked, and when it comes time for dinner, simply pull out those stored Sunday staples and assemble incredibly fun, flavorful, and unique dinners in just minutes. Goodbye stress! I'm extremely excited to be launching my own Prep + Rally Cookbook out in Fall 2022—look out for it!

Oatmeal Peanut Butter Balls

It's super easy to whip up a batch of these Oatmeal Peanut Butter Balls since all you need to do is throw 4 ingredients into a bowl and mix! The kiddos love to help form the peanut butter balls, so you can even make this easy recipe with them.

Ingredients

- 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups oats
- 2 tablespoons chia seeds
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup natural peanut butter
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup maple syrup or honey
- Optional chocolate chips, melted or coating

The Steps

- 1 Place all ingredients into a medium bowl and mix well with your hands.
- 2 Form 20, 1-inch balls and leave them as is, or dunk them into melted chocolate for an even more delicious treat!
- 3 Once you have all of your oatmeal balls, store in a resealable bag either in the fridge or freezer until ready to eat.

Pink Lemonade Granita

Here's a tasty, refreshing treat for both you and the kids! I like to make the mixture beforehand and have the kids join to help me scrape it to achieve the fluffy granita-like shaved ice. Once you scrape the mixture, it's time to eat!

Ingredients

- 10 strawberries, stems removed and mashed
- 4 scoops vanilla ice cream, slightly softened
- 4 cups water
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Country Time Pink Lemonade mix

The Steps

- 1 Place strawberries in a 7x11 inch pan and mash with a fork.
- 2 Next, add in the water and pink lemonade mix. Stir to combine.
- 3 Add ice cream to the pan. Stir everything together to create one cohesive mixture. Then, place in the freezer to set until it's solid.
- 3 Once completely frozen, scrape the mixture with a fork, creating a slushy granita. Transfer to a bowl and enjoy straight away!

FOOD SECTION

Heather of @heather.happykidskitchen

RECIPE 1

“A snacktivity is a snack-sized amount of food eaten between meals that includes an fun element to keep a child engaged and create positive food associations”



Hey, I'm Heather! I'm a mom, cooking instructor, and recipe developer dedicated to getting kids into the kitchen. After culinary school, I worked for many years at a recreational cooking school teaching kids camps and workshops for ages 3 to 16. Currently, I run my own business and online platform where I share recipes, lunch box ideas, and cooking knowledge on my website HappyKidsKitchen.com and on [@heather.happykidskitchen](https://www.instagram.com/heather.happykidskitchen). A few years ago, I also published a cookbook, Little Helpers Toddler Kitchen, with over 40 healthy recipes written with specific instructions for toddlers to help make but for everyone to enjoy.

I'm all about snacktivities for playdates! But what exactly is a “snacktivity” you ask? A snacktivity is a snack-sized amount of food eaten between meals that includes an interactive, fun element to keep a child engaged and create positive food associations. Snacktivities are perfect for playdates because they allow children to sit down and enjoy a snack together while also providing a learning opportunity.

Don't worry if your child's snack is messy or doesn't come out just like the picture. The photographs are only meant to be guides. Let the kids have fun and create their own snack just as they'd like it. Also, don't worry if kids are hesitant to try certain foods. Encourage food play—ask the kids to stack the cucumbers or count how many blueberries are on the plate. All these interactions create positive associations with food and make kids more likely to try new foods in the future!

DIY Banana on a Stick

Food is so much more fun on a stick! This easy, nutrient dense snack gives kids the opportunity to practice fine motor skills and interact with food in a pressure-free way. This snack would work well with apple wedges too.

Ingredients

- 2 bananas
- 2-3 tablespoons of natural peanut butter, almond butter, or sunflower seed butter
- Toppings options: sprinkles, hemp seeds, crushed freeze-dried fruit, graham crackers crumbs, or finely chopped nuts

The Steps

- 1 Cut each banana in half. Carefully insert a popsicle stick into the bottom of each half then remove the peel.
- 2 Place about a tablespoon of nut/seed butter on each child's plate along with a small spoon for spreading. Set out your chosen toppings in small bowls or muffin cups for kids to share.
- 3 Encourage each child to drizzle/spread nut butter on the banana. Then, the fun part—sprinkle on the toppings. Enjoy!



FOOD SECTION

Heather of @heather.happykidskitchen

RECIPE 2

Green Toad Toasts

Inspired by the Green Toad in the children's book, *Little Blue Truck*, this snack is a great way to let kids explore fruits and veggies together. Kids love creating characters or smiley faces in food, but remember, it doesn't have to look perfect or like the picture at all. Just let them have fun and eat what they want from what's offered.



Ingredients

- 2 slices whole wheat or other preferred bread
- ½ avocado
- ½ lime or lemon
- Toppings: 1 small cucumber, baby carrots, sliced black olives, strawberries, and blueberries



Scan the QR code or [click here](#) to watch the how-to video!



The Steps

- 1 Toast bread, then cut into a large circle using a cookie cutter or the rim of a large glass.
- 2 Get the kids involved, and have them mash avocado either in a bowl with a fork/masher, or place avocado in a small zip-top bag and let them mash it by squishing the bag. Pro tip: Squeeze a little lime or lemon juice into the avocado and mix it in to prevent browning.
- 3 If you used a bag to mash the avocado, have the kids squeeze the avocado into a bowl.
- 4 Place mashed avocado and toppings in the center of the table. Give each child a toast round, and let them spread mashed avocado on top and then place fruits and veggies as desired. Enjoy!

EMOTION SECTION

Michelle of @thriving.toddler

“The secret to a successful playdate is in the play you do at home on a regular basis.”



Hey, I'm Michelle! I'm a mom of two, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. I give parents science-led tools to support a thriving family. I have a private practice located in Los Angeles where I see children and families. I am also the Founder of Thriving Toddler where I provide digital parenting resources. In 2021, I co-founded Parenting Understood, a podcast where we offer a mix of child development and parenting research and real-life parenting stories. Connect with me at michelletangeman.com or on [@thriving.toddler](https://twitter.com/thriving.toddler)!



What are ways to encourage ongoing play during a playdate?

Avoid This

Hovering + over prompting

Try This

Using toys and materials that your child likes and what the other child might like. Model how you might play, and allow for independence.

There are various stages of play beginning with unoccupied play (birth to 3 months), to solitary play (birth to 2 years), parallel play (2+ years), associate play (3-4 years), and cooperative play (4+ years). As a parent or caregiver, it's helpful to know where your child is at developmentally so you can meet them where they are at and support their play. The secret to a successful playdate is in the play you do at home on a regular basis.

Michelle's Tips

- ① Take the time to play at home regularly with them. It can be broken up in several small segments of the day; 5 minutes here and maybe 10 minutes there. If you don't feel like playing, don't force it. Let it feel easy and natural to you. During this playtime, model how you use the toy, describe the toy using simple language. Relax and explore with them.
- ② If your toddler is throwing or grabbing, redirect them and calmly show them what to do instead. The younger your child, the more you'll model and behave, like opening your hand as a gesture to take a turn with the toy.
- ③ In any play routine, follow their lead, make sure you have their attention when making requests, reinforce attempts at using language and/or sharing, provide choices if they don't seem interested in the toy or materials. And if they are just not into it, take a break. Again, don't force it!

“When you arrive at your playdate, bring items that you know your child enjoys that they will engage with.

Then, sit back and let them naturally explore on their own and enjoy their playmate.”

What do you do if the kids aren't sharing or playing nicely?

Avoid This

Forcing to share
"It's not nice to share."

Try This

"You don't have to share right now, but when you're done, can you give it to your friend?"

"Maybe you can offer your friend this toy?"

"Is there something we can trade?"

The toddler's world is all about them or what psychologists call "egocentric." They aren't developmentally mature enough to understand that the objects they love and are attached to could be held by someone else. Sharing is a skill just like all other developmental skills that takes time to develop. One study found that preschoolers (ages 2-5 years) were more likely to share in the future if they were given the space to do so on their own versus being forced to share. Provide opportunities during your one-on-one play time at home and express a job well done if they can share independently. It's equally important not to force or shame any child into sharing.

What do you do or say if the other child (not your kid) is misbehaving?

Avoid This

"They are not being nice.
That kid is bad."

Try This

"It looks like (the child) is having a hard time. What do you think we can do that might help him feel better?"

Avoid labeling a child "bad" or "good" which places judgment on the child's behavior and instead, switch it out with narrating what is happening. Narrating what's happened to the other child helps your child make sense of what might be going on. Providing an action plan or solution allows your child to provide a possible solution. You could say something along the lines of, "What makes you feel better when you're (sad/mad/jealous)?" Around the age of 2 or 3 is when you see children wanting to comfort other children when they are hurt. It's also helpful to label the emotion that a child might be feeling as this is the first step in building emotional literacy which will later support your child's emotional intelligence.

What do you do if your child is being shy?

Avoid This

Forcing your child to say hello + to go play
“Don’t be shy... go say hello.”

Try This

“You can stand here until you're ready.”

“You can join (the child) in play.”

Offer other options for greeting such as a wave.

It’s important for kids to learn to set boundaries, and it’s our job as adults to support children in setting them instead of steamrolling them to meet a social norm. This is part of teaching and practicing consent. Feeling shy is not good or bad. Labeling a child “shy” as a negative thing can impact their sense of self and become part of their identity. A child is not their behavior. Continue to provide opportunities, model social behaviors that are important to you, and make sure to always express a job well done.

“Feeling shy is not good or bad. Labeling a child ‘shy’ as a negative thing can impact their sense of self and become part of their identity. A child is not their behavior.”

EMOTION SECTION

Dr. Bronwyn Charlton of SeedlingsGroup

“The more playdates your child has, the more chances they get to practice and strengthen their social skills.”



Hey, I'm Dr. Charlton, the Co-Founder of [SeedlingsGroup](#)! I received my Ph.D. in developmental psychology from the Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and was a research scientist at New York University's Center for Research on Culture, Development and Education. I'm certified in parent management training from Yale Parenting Center and on the faculty at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in the Department of Pediatrics, where I'm also on the executive advisory board of the not for profit Mount Sinai Parenting Center. Most importantly, I'm the mother of three beautiful children: Olivia, Graydon and Helena.

Take baby steps.

If it's safe to do so, try to reacclimate your child to the social world of being with other kids their age in small steps. You want the experience to not be so overwhelming that they shut down emotionally or wish to avoid playing with peers in general. Let your child ease into social opportunities in small doses (e.g., swinging next to each other at the park, getting an ice cream). Just as you did or would do with your young child in the first days or weeks of starting preschool, expect things to gradually get easier and easier if your child struggles initially.

Talk about what to expect.

Explaining what to expect before your child's first few playdates since the start of the pandemic will help make them feel more prepared, reassured and confident.

Lower your expectations.

Just because your child is much quieter than normal, won't make eye contact or take turns doesn't mean that your worst fears have been realized. Remember, everyone is out of practice when it comes to social interactions and if your child is a toddler, it's possible they've never even had social experiences to begin with. Be realistic when it comes to your expectations since that will influence the lens with which you interpret the situation and how you respond.

Show compassion.

It's only natural if your child voices feeling nervous or unsure that your automatic response might be to reassure them by promising that things will be great or that they'll have a ton of fun. What everyone really needs when expressing doubt, trepidation or any negative emotion is empathy. So, whatever emotion your child expresses, try to resist "fixing it," and instead focus on showing compassion. You might say, for example, "Of course, you're feeling nervous. It's been a long time since you've had a playdate and that's totally normal."

Remember that children tend to be absolutists.

Remember that children tend to be absolutists. One negative interaction with another child may cause them to say, "I never want to have another playdate again!" Try not to take such comments at face value unless you start to see patterns.

**The more playdates,
the better.**

The more playdates, the better. The more playdates your child has, the more chances they get to practice and strengthen their social skills. Have faith in your child's capacity to bounce back from the social challenges posed by the pandemic and get right back on track with their social skills and life.

**Help them leave
when it's time to
say goodbye.**

It's no surprise that many kids have a hard time leaving playdates, but their reticence and even defiance isn't intentionally naughty or disobedient. It's just that their ability to stop doing what they want to be doing and choose to do the opposite (aka self-control) is still very weak. So, show compassion and help them make the transition by following a few simple steps. After an established warning that it's almost time for "goodbyes," when they're clearly not happy about that prospect, empathize with them: "I know you don't want to leave. It's always hard to say goodbye when you're having so much fun," while maintaining the limit: "but we've got to go home now so that we can have dinner." Then, if your child still resists, connect by letting them know you "get it." You can say, "You wish we could stay all night, don't you? That would be so much fun," as you continue to uphold the limit. Now's a great time to offer a choice around leaving (e.g., walking to the car or racing you there) -- particularly if you have a strong-willed child so they can save face and feel some agency -- but if they refuse to choose, it's time to calmly let them know that since they're unable to leave on their own accord, you'll have to help them. Even as your child cries or loses control at this point, try to remind yourself that they're not acting willfully and it's not personal, so you'll be better poised to continue using empathic limits as you carry them out.



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your playdates