
Fun Learning Activities for You and Your Grandchildren

Have you ever heard, “I’m bored!” from your grandchildren? What can you do with your grandchildren that will keep them entertained and learning at the same time? Watching television or movies and playing video games are easy distractions, but not the best solutions for boredom.

What children want more than anything else is time with you. There are plenty of things to do that are entertaining, teach important skills, and give you and your grandchildren a chance to spend some fun time together.

The Importance of Play

Children learn best through play. Adults tend to think of play as unimportant, but actually it’s one of the best ways for children to explore and experience new things.

Here are just a few of the skills that children can learn through play:

- Figuring out how things work and solving problems
- Comparing and contrasting different objects
- Learning to understand and use language
- Building muscle strength and coordination
- Practicing control of their bodies
- Developing imagination and expressing creativity
- Learning about themselves, others, and the world
- Expressing their feelings in healthy ways
- Increasing their ability to concentrate

Be sure to include plenty of time for free play in your grandchildren’s lives. Give them chances to choose what they want to do, how to do it, for how long, and when to move on to another activity. This gives them control, helps them make choices, and keeps them engaged in the play.

Simple Toys for Young Children

Toys for children can be expensive. But play doesn’t have to be expensive to be a good learning experience. Some of the best toys can be bought at yard sales, borrowed from other families, or made from objects around the house. Here are some great low-cost toys and activities for children:

- **Homemade play dough and finger paint** can be made from simple ingredients such as flour, salt, cornstarch, and water. Play dough and finger paint are great materials for encouraging creativity. Rather than buying commercial play dough, why not make your own at home? It’s cheaper, and children get to practice skills such as measuring and mixing. UW-Madison created a PDF resource with some [easy, fun play dough recipes to try](#) with your grandchildren.
- **Old clothes, shoes, purses, and scarves** are ideal for playing dress-up. Use old

clothes from your closet, ask friends if they have old bridesmaids' dresses in their closet, or buy fancy party clothes very cheaply at thrift stores. Be sure to wash clothes from thrift stores before children play with them.

- **Crayons or washable markers and paper** encourage budding artistic skills. Encourage children to draw on the back of junk mail and other scrap paper; explain that they are helping protect the environment by reusing paper.
- **Musical instruments** can be made easily at home. Oatmeal canisters and empty plastic containers with lids make great drums. Bells can be purchased at craft stores and tied on a string. Make shakers and rattles by putting dry beans or rice in a sealed container (or between two paper plates sealed together).
- **Blocks** help children practice their building skills. Make simple wooden blocks by sawing old wood scraps into small pieces and sanding them smooth. Empty milk cartons and cereal boxes also make good blocks.
- **Puppets** can be made from old socks, pieces of felt or fabric, or paper bags. Encourage your grandchildren to help decorate the puppets with markers, buttons, sequins, fabric, or any other scraps you have around the house.
- **Bean bags** are a safe and inexpensive way for children to practice throwing skills. You can make bean-bags from old clothes or fabric scraps. If you don't have fabric around the house, you can buy small pieces cheaply in the remnants section of fabric or craft stores.

Fun Learning Activities for Your Grandchildren

Looking for more fun activities to share with your grandchildren? Most children are eager learners, and are excited to try new activities. They tend to be interested in everything around them, which makes finding new games easy. Here are some fun and easy activities that you can do with your grandchildren. After your grandchildren learn these activities well, try varying them to add more excitement.

Preschool–Grade 2

Sorting and Stacking



Teach math skills by encouraging children to classify as they set the table. Help them match and stack plates of similar sizes and shapes. Have them sort flatware, placing forks with forks and spoons with spoons. Teach your grandchildren how to make a “restaurant style” place setting at the table with two forks to the left of the plate and butter knife, spoon, and glass to the right.

Hidden Letters

Build letter recognition by encouraging children to be “letter detectives” around the house. Send them to find specific letters of the alphabet (e.g., five As or three Cs) anywhere in the house. Help them examine the letters on cereal boxes, soup cans, magazines, newspapers, game boxes, and other objects. Start with easy-to-find letters and build up to harder ones. This game also works well in the car, using letters on signs and billboards.

Weigh Me

Teach estimating skills by asking your grandchildren to guess the weight of household objects, such as a wastebasket, a coat, or a full glass of water. Use a scale to check their guesses.

What Does it Take to Grow?

Teach cause-and-effect relationships with two similar, healthy plants. Have your grandchildren water one plant every other day and ignore the other. Keep both plants in the same area so they get the same amount of light. Ask your grandchildren to predict what will happen and see if they are right after several weeks.

Grades 3–5

Street Smarts

Find online maps and schedules for a special place in your area, such as a zoo, a museum, or a sporting event. Let your grandchildren plan a trip for the family. Ask them to figure out how long it will take to get there, how much it will cost, and when is the best time to make the trip. This activity challenges children to use their reading and problem-solving skills in a practical situation.

Learning About the World

Help your grandchildren use TV news or websites to track world events they hear about. Review website reports with your grandchildren, and have them mark world news spots on an online map. Encourage children to look up answers to their questions when their curiosity is high. Note: Be sure to choose news stories carefully; avoid stories that are likely to be upsetting to children or cause nightmares.

On the Move

Sharpen math skills on trips. At the gas station, ask children to estimate how much gas you need and the total cost. When on the road, help them use apps or websites on your phone to find the gas station with the lowest price. On the highway, ask your grandchildren to read the

signs and check the speed limits. Have children estimate distances between cities and check the estimates on an online map.

Picture Stories

Encourage children's imagination and creativity. Have them choose four or five pictures from magazines or websites and put them together to tell a story. Ask your grandchildren to number the pictures 1, 2, 3, etc. Have them tell the story with the pictures in numerical order. For variety, rearrange the pictures, and encourage your grandchildren to tell a new story about the rearrangement.

Grades 6–8

Let Your Voice Be Heard

Promote good citizenship by helping your grandchildren write letters to the editors of local newspapers about an issue that affects them. They might want to suggest that a bike path be built near the school or that a city event be planned for youth. Look for essay or drawing contests in the local media or community that your grandchildren could enter. Encourage them to email state legislators about issues that matter to them. Your grandchildren are citizens and their ideas are worth hearing.

Read All About It

Introduce your grandchildren to the many kinds of information in an online newspaper. Log into a local newspaper where you have a subscription. Encourage them to find the pages containing news about government leaders, editors' opinions, weather reports, car sales, house and apartment rentals, and want ads. Talk about who might need each type of information. Discuss special topics they read in the newspaper, such as presidential elections or world affairs.

How Much Does It Cost?

Put math skills to work. Help your grandchildren understand living costs by discussing household expenses with them. Make a list of monthly bills. Fold the paper to hide the costs and have your grandchildren guess the cost of each item. Check the estimates with the actual costs. Help them learn how to prepare a budget, set up and add to a savings account, and compare prices when shopping.

Kind Words

Encourage your grandchildren's vocabulary and social skills. Write each family member's name on a separate sheet of paper. Put the sheets in a folder or drawer and have each member of the family write kind words to describe that person. Encourage your grandchildren to use an online dictionary or thesaurus to come up with unique words. Place the notes where family members can find them and then watch the smiles!

Activities Outside your Home

Sometimes you and your grandchildren need a break from the routine of being at home. Check

out the activities offered in your community. You may be surprised at the variety of fun activities available that are free or low cost. Here are some examples:

Community Classes

Swimming, art, music, golf, tennis, and karate are just a few of the programs offered in many communities. Check your local park or recreation center, your grandchildren's school, or the local arts center for ideas. Libraries often have special programs at low or no cost for children of all ages.

Recreational Activities

Local parks departments may sponsor organized sports activities. Often there are local youth leagues for soccer, baseball, basketball, and volleyball, among other sports. Search online, ask your local religious organization or parks and recreation department for information, or ask other parents for their ideas.

Arts and Entertainment

Local arts councils often sponsor plays, concerts, and "arts in the park" activities to promote cultural awareness. Check the calendar in your local newspaper or online for announcements.

Tourism Promotions

Many state parks and other tourist attractions offer free entertainment and activities during tourist seasons. Contact your local tourism commission to find out what activities are available in your area and ask for a schedule of season highlights.

Historical Attractions

Check out the history of your area. Often there are tours, festivals, and programs celebrating historical events. The local newspaper and the tourism commission should have listings of these activities.

Camps

Summer camps are a great way for your grandchildren to make new friends and develop their talents. Both day camps and overnight camps are available in most areas. When choosing a camp, find one that fits your grandchildren's interests. Some camps are geared toward specific skills and talents, such as music, arts, or sports. Other camps offer a wide variety of activities. Schools, religious organizations, 4-H, the YMCA, and other civic organizations often have camping opportunities available. For more information on selecting a camp, visit the American Camp Association website: www.acacamps.org.

In Summary

There are many different ways to keep you and your grandchildren busy and learning all year long. Make time for play, and carve out time to do fun activities together. Remember that fun

doesn't have to be expensive—spending time together is the best thing you can do for your grandchildren.

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