

Creative Thinking Activities for Kids At Home

by H. Giblette

These times call for greater creative thinking than ever, especially in education. Activities aimed at developing creative thinking will help your kids exercise their minds and fight boredom while at home.

Ages 18 months-3 years/Toddler

Music Time

Purpose: helping young children “freewheel” in experimenting with sound

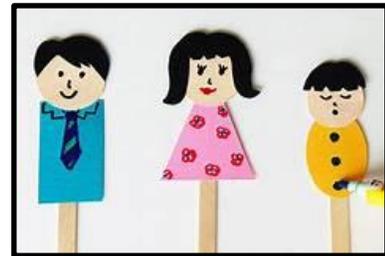
1. Gather a variety of objects with a good potential to make sounds such as pots, pans, bowls, kitchen utensils, and buckets
2. Lay out the objects on the floor where the child can freely play with them
3. Guide your child in trying out new sounds
4. Allow them to experiment in creating different sounds, with your support. Perhaps “dance” to the beat to support their efforts.
5. This works best when the child can be as loud as they want and can improvise with you.



“Restaurant” or “House”

Purpose: supporting toddlers in “real-life” pretend scenarios that help them begin to develop an understanding of pretend and narratives.

1. Provide the toddler with a few objects that resemble either food, cleaning equipment, or another scenario at home
2. Perhaps encourage them by modeling the pretend behavior, such as cooking and serving pretend food
3. Respond to and support the child by playing off of their behavior and interaction. Run with the ideas they come up with.



Create a Puppet

Purpose: helping child begin to “freewheel” and support pretend play

1. Use popsicle sticks, empty bottles, or paper bags to begin to make a puppet with toddler present. Model and explain to the child what you are doing in a way they can understand. “I’m making a puppy. These are his eyes.”
2. As you begin to create a face of an animal or person, ask for the child’s help. “Where is his nose? Can you find a nose for him?”
3. Run with child’s ideas as he/she gives them and allow them to participate fully as you create the puppet together. Refrain from judgement regarding the child not doing things quite right as much as possible. The idea is to encourage as much participation as possible
4. After the puppet is finished, pretend play using the puppet. Perhaps talk to the child using the puppet and let them respond.



Age: 3-5 years/Preschool

Word Play

Purpose: encouraging child's budding language ability by supporting their explanations

1. Allow your child to draw a picture of whatever they wish to without any guidance.
2. As the child is drawing, or right after they finish, ask what they drew.
3. Continue to ask questions that encourage the child to explain themselves or come up with a story. For instance, if you ask "what is this?" and the child says, "that's mommy!" Ask, "What is mommy holding?" or "Where is mommy going?"
4. Seek to defer judgment and continue the conversation for as the long as the child wants to.

Expressing Feelings

Purpose: inviting child to recognize and creatively express feelings

1. This can be done with either a puppet, doll, or just using facial expressions
2. Ask the child or children to either show the face they would use to express a feeling or show what they doll would do when they feel "mad," "sad," or "excited"
3. Have the children turn around and reveal their faces on the count of three. This works best with several children, as it will help them see that there can be many ways to express the same emotion. Children can learn from other children's creativity and kids have fun dramatizing their different feelings.



Dress-Up

Purpose: encouraging pretend play and creative storytelling



1. Provide access to mom, dad, sibling's closet, or dress up clothes, to allow children to come up with their own outfit

2. Once child has dressed up, ask questions that help create a storyline for the child to play along with. For instance, "Oh hello, what is your name?"

Are you going to the jungle? What are you going to do there?"

3. For best results, participate along with the children and come up with a character of your own for more ideas to combine during play.

Ages 5-7/Childhood

The Finding Game

Purpose: aiming to come up with as many ideas as possible

1. Ask children to find as many items of a certain color within a specific space as possible. This could be on a car ride, in a specific room, or just visible items within a house

2. Set a timer for 3 minutes and let the child know that they really need to try to find as many of this type of item as possible. Either have the child write the list, or, for children with limited writing ability, write the list for them.

3. Once the child comes back and shares their list, defer judgment as they share the number of items that they found.
4. An optional addition would be to combine two of the items on the list to create an invention

Amusement Park

Purpose: finding combinations of ideas with other children, identifying problems, working to find solutions, and communicating or “publishing” creative ideas

1. Let a group of 2-5 children know that they have been chosen to create an amusement park. They will have to use their imagination to envision what rides and attractions will be at the amusement park and where they will be located.
2. Encourage them to use either the space within the house, a space outside, or blocks/legos in a small space to “create” the amusement park. Encourage them to draw a map of their park.
3. Referee as children share their ideas and work together, and as they combine ideas. Encourage them to incorporate everyone’s ideas into their plans
4. When the park is finished, ask for a tour of the park and allow children to be imaginative as they share their ideas or even “ride” their rides with you.



Dance Routine

Purpose: encouraging freewheeling and combining ideas

1. Whether it is just you and your child or several children, select a song that everyone in the group likes to dance to.
2. Create a dance routine using everyone's input for different dance moves. Be careful to defer both positive and negative judgement as each person shares ideas
3. Perform and share the dance routine either in person or over video

Ages 7-10/Later Childhood



Cooking Corner

Purpose: encouraging kids to freewheel with food, yet helping them begin to understand the importance of “usability” in creativity

1. Bring out many different ingredients for a child to use to create a new dish, making the ingredients varied between savory, salty, and sweet (omitting anything dangerous such as uncooked meats, eggs, or anything excessively spicy)
2. Allow the child to freewheel in combining ingredients to create a new dish
3. If the child has combined ingredients that do not go well together, and it comes time to try the dish, let them try it. If they think it tastes bad, ask them about how they might have made it differently to taste better. In other words, let them learn from trying it rather than only following instructions during the creative phase. They might find unexpectedly good combinations!

Invention Station

Purpose: recognizing that creativity involves novel solutions to problems, identifying and clarifying problems, combining ideas

1. Come up with a thought-provoking question such as, “what is the hardest thing about school?” or “what is something you don't like to do?”
2. As kids start to come up with ideas that identify the problem, ask them what kind of invention they could create to help make that problem easier.

3. Give children a specific amount of time to freewheel and let them know that any idea is ok even if it seems like it may be impossible.
4. Allow kids to share their ideas and be careful to defer both positive and negative judgement. Clarify details about their ideas and show interest.
5. If multiple kids are participating, encourage kids to combine one of their ideas with someone else's or encourage them to combine multiple of their own ideas to create an even better invention.

Mini Room Design

Purpose: encouraging divergent thinking and problem-solving

1. Find a box in which to create a room modeled after a specific kind of place (a clothing store, a toy store, a restaurant, a living room, etc.)
2. Paint the “walls” of the box using craft paint or colored paper.
3. Using only materials around the house such as scraps of fabric, left over pieces of metal and pvc pipe, magazine clippings, construction paper, and coloring utensils, build the room into a mini model.
4. Allow children to share their ideas about how to create specific parts of the model, such as tables, pictures on the wall, and rugs. Be careful to defer judgment, and not to overtake the project in trying to make it look “perfect.” Let children freewheel in their ideas and create lots of ideas for how to accomplish different parts of the project.



Ages 11-15/Preteen/Teen

TV Commercial

Purpose: emphasize “understandability” aspect of creativity

1. Give teens video camera to create a commercial for a fake product that they created, whether it be a music album, food product, or a household item
2. Guide them by giving steps like writing a script, casting characters, designing a set, and shooting from different angles
3. Help them understand ideas like “audience” to maximize the impact of who will buy their product



The Story Game

Purpose: encouraging deferment of judgement and freewheeling

1. This game works best with at least three people. One person starts by saying a single word. The next person in line must continue the sentence or phrase as you all work to tell a story.
2. Encourage creative word choices by through your own answers and see where the story goes. There tends to be some silly combinations of words.
3. This game works great in the car or during any waiting period.

Party Planning

Purpose: to emphasize generating unique ideas and focusing on making creative ideas “understandable” and directed toward a specific age-group/theme

1. Have your teen plan a party either for a younger child or for a specific purpose (e.g. Talk like a Pirate Day)
2. Let them take full responsibility for carrying out the plans for the party with your support; including invitations, decorations, food, games, and party favors
3. Talk to your teen along the way and share ideas for support, while still letting them take the lead.
4. Video chat friends or family members in for the party!

