

# Learning with Toys and Games

“Let’s play!”

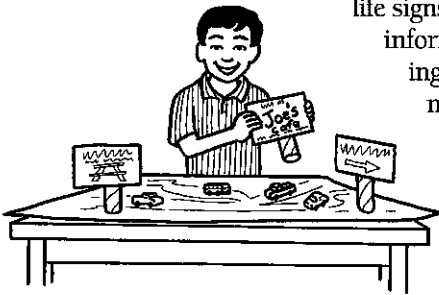
Did you know that those two simple words can help your child do better in school? Power up your youngster’s playtime with these ideas for adding language, math, and science to the toys and games he already enjoys.



## Toy vehicles

### Road signs

When your child sets up imaginary highways, suggest that he include road signs and billboards. For inspiration, read real-life signs together and discuss the information they share (warnings, directions, attractions, names of cities). Your youngster can write his own signs on index cards—perhaps “Rest area, next right” or “Eat at Joe’s Cafe. Best food in town!”



Let him tape them to toilet paper-tube “posts” so they will stand up as his cars zip around.

### Free parking

These pretend parking lots will encourage your child to sort, group, count, and compare. Suggest that she think of ways to sort her vehicles (by type, color, number of doors) and count each group. Then, she can create parking lots on separate sheets of paper and draw matching numbers of spaces for each group. *Idea:* Have her explore different numbering systems by making more lots. In one, she might start at 100 and count on (101, 102, 103). Another lot could feature even-numbered spaces on one side and odd on the other. Now it’s time to park her cars and trucks where they belong!

### Construction ahead

Building tunnels and bridges is a creative way for your youngster to dabble in engineering. Let him get duct tape and recycling-bin items (boxes, tubes, cups). Then, have him sketch a design and label the materials he will use. He can build a model and test it by rolling cars and trucks across or

through. To solve any problems (say, the bridge collapsed), encourage him to redesign and test again. He’ll learn all about the engineering process: design, build, test, redesign.

## Toy figures, dolls, stuffed animals

### A-Z compliments

Boost your child’s vocabulary with this descriptive game. Have her pick an action figure or a doll, choose an adjective beginning with A, and compliment the toy: “This superhero is amazing.” She’ll pass the toy to the next person, who adds a “B” compliment: “This superhero is amazing and brave.” The next player continues with C, and so on. The last player able to add an adjective picks a new toy to describe and starts another round with the next letter of the alphabet. If the last round ended on F, for instance, she begins with G.



### Longer or shorter

Select any toy figure, and ask your youngster to point to another one that he thinks is longer (or shorter). After he picks, help him line up the two items side by side to check. If he’s correct, he “captures” both and sets them beside him. Otherwise, they go back in the toy box. Swap roles, and let him give you a size challenge. Whoever captures the most after five rounds wins. *Variation:* Name a length (say, 3 inches), and have him choose a toy figure he thinks is longer or shorter.

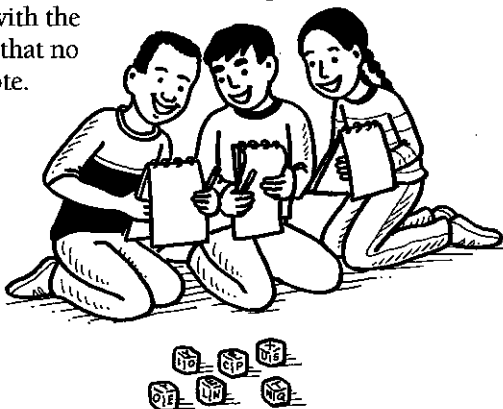
## Home sweet home

Together, explore animal habitats in library books or online. Then, ask your child to find toy animals that would share a habitat in the real world. She might get a stuffed monkey and a stuffed leopard and say, "They both live in the jungle." Let her create a habitat for them using household materials. She could construct a jungle with trees made of paper towel tubes painted green and add vines of yarn, for instance. What else would the animals need? (food, a source of water)

## Games

### Word spill

Cover the faces of six dice with pieces of masking tape. Write a letter from A to Z on each side, adding an extra D, L, R, S, T, A, E, I, O, and U. Set a timer for 1 minute. Your youngster rolls the dice, and everyone writes words that include at least three of the letters rolled. For T-Y-E-F-X-T, he may write *textile* because it includes T-E-X-T from the dice. When time is up, compare lists, and cross off duplicates. The winner is the person with the most words that no one else wrote. Play 10 rounds.



### Two-player baseball

For this game, each player needs a shuffled deck of cards (face cards removed, ace = 1). Let your child be the batter. Flip over your top cards, and she adds the two numbers together (older children could multiply). An even sum is a hit, and an odd sum is a strike. Three strikes is an out, and four hits is a run. Keep track of your hits, runs, strikes, and outs with paper and pencil. After three outs, shuffle the cards and swap roles to complete the inning. Score the most runs to win.

### How the ball rolls

Try this wacky bowling game to experiment with force and motion. Use 10 empty water bottles for the pins and an assortment

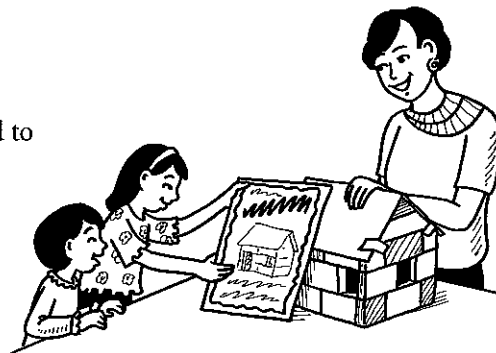


of balls (football, Wiffle ball, soccer ball). Bowl as usual—except use a different ball for each frame. Have your youngster compare how the size, shape, and weight of the balls affect the outcome. He might notice that round balls roll the best or that heavier balls knock down more pins than lighter ones. Each pin knocked down = 1 point. High score after 10 frames wins.

## Blocks

### House for sale

Ask your child to build a dream house out of blocks. Now she needs to write a persuasive ad to sell it! Remind her to



make the home sound tempting—and to think about her audience (the buyer)—as she creates her sales pitch. To appeal to parents with several children, she may write, "A large family will have room to spread out in this *expansive* home." Tip: Suggest that she read real estate ads for ideas.

### Geometry quilts

Let your child examine quilts or pictures of quilts for repeating patterns. He might notice how triangles form pinwheels or see squares and triangles arranged into stars. Encourage him to invent his own pattern using wooden or foam blocks. For instance, he could make a race car pattern from a triangle, a rectangle, and four circles. Then, have your youngster draw the pattern on separate sheets of paper and tape them into a cool quilt to display on a wall.

### Tower challenge

What is the tallest tower your youngster can make with 10 blocks? Encourage her to problem solve and measure heights with this activity. Have her choose 10 blocks, construct a tower, and measure it with a ruler or tape measure. Next, ask her to look at the blocks she used and exchange two of them for ones that could make her tower taller—without toppling over. Which shapes or sizes would make good swaps? After measuring her new creation, let her swap out another pair of blocks and try again.

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