

The little explorer pack



Illustrations by Laura Hughes from the book *Quick, Barney, Run!*
written by Pip Jones, published by Faber, and gifted with this pack.



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people
supporting parents and
children to learn together

HOME
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Oxford



The toddler-friendly activity ideas in this pack have been developed by researchers, early years experts, and parents.

They are all about exploring, talking and enjoying time with your child. We hope you will adapt them, build on them and have fun with them. To find out more about the Playful Packs project, and to get even more activity ideas, visit playfulpacks.uk

To find out whether there is a free Peep group in your area contact **01865 395145** or families@people.org.uk

If you think you might benefit from free, confidential support visit Home-Start Oxford: homestartoxford.org.uk

For 50 no-cost or low-cost local activities for under-fives download the free '50 things to do before you're five' app



The National Literacy Trust is a registered charity no. 1116260 (England and Wales) and SC042944 (Scotland). Home-Start UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Charity no. in England and Wales 1108837 and in Scotland SC039172. Company no. 5382181. People is a registered charity no. 1144975 in England / Wales and no. SC044031 in Scotland, and a company limited by guarantee no. 7514469.

Build a den

Use the sheet and pegs to make a den with your child. Use chairs, cushions and tables to turn your den into a palace.



Large-scale construction tasks help develop your child's Science Technology Engineering and Maths skills, and are lots of fun too.

Extend



Take your den building skills outdoors. You could make a tent outside with the sheet or build a den out of sticks.

Adapt

Turn the den into an obstacle course. You could use cushions for climbing over, chairs for climbing under, and make a tunnel from the sheet. Just make sure that your child isn't likely to hit their head on a corner or hard surface if they lose their balance.

Nature detective

Go on a bug hunt and use the magnifying glass to examine any minibeasts you find. Piles of leaves, and under logs, are good bug-hunting spots.

Bug hunts are a great way to build your child's observation skills, boost their understanding of the natural world and expand their vocabulary.



Extend

Use the Insect spotter cards to help your child identify the creatures they find.



Adapt

Visit the insect collection at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History.



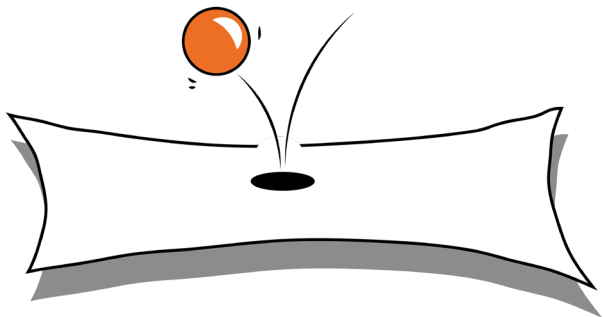
Museum of
Natural History

Oxford University Museum of Natural History,
Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PW

Bounce count game

Get your child to grip on tight to two corners of the sheet and then do the same yourself with the other corners. Bounce a soft toy or ball on the sheet and count together how many times you can make it bounce.

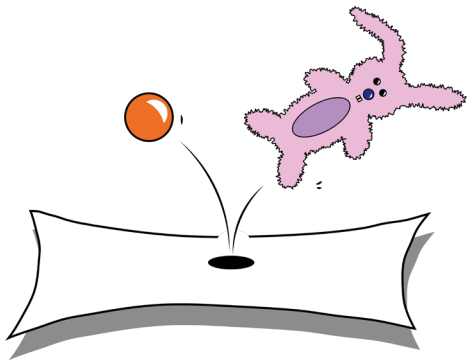
This game will boost your child's numeracy skills and their hand-eye co-ordination at the same time.





Extend

Challenge your child's coordination skills by bouncing multiple objects at once; can they help keep them all on the sheet?

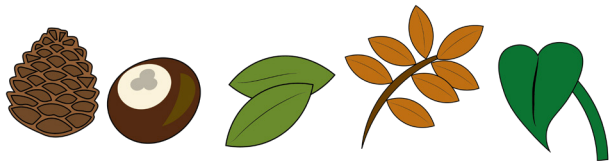


Adapt

If your child isn't yet able to pull the sheet taut, ask another adult or older child to join in to help.

Scavenger hunt

Bring the rucksack out on your next walk and encourage your child to fill it with interesting natural objects that they find on the way (only pick up things that have fallen to the ground, and avoid berries and mushrooms in case they are toxic). At home, lay out the objects and talk about where they were found.



Talking about things that happened recently helps your child to practise using their memory skills.



Extend

Your child could use their found objects in their next art creation: a pinecone or stick rolled in paint makes an excellent stamp, whilst flower heads and seeds can be glued onto pictures.



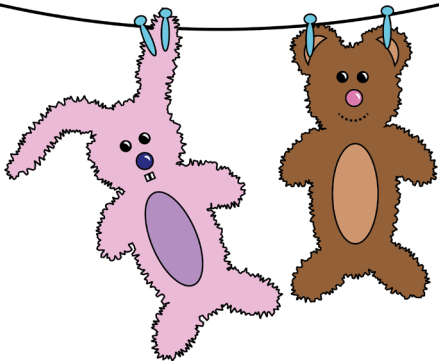
Adapt

Instead of collecting objects, next time you're out and about, challenge your child to spot as many of the objects on the I spy cards as they can.

Hanging washing

Does your child have any soft toys that could do with a wash? Involve them in the job and then encourage them to peg the toys out on a washing line (or string stretched between two chairs).

Using pegs helps strengthen the finger muscles children use for writing.

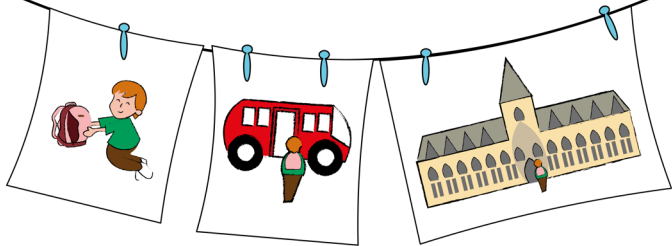


Extend

Boost your child's early numeracy skills by helping them to peg out items (e.g. toys or clothing) in size order.

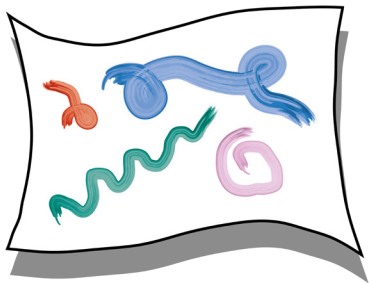
Adapt

Instead of objects, you could peg out pictures from a story, or use visual prompts to plan your next adventure. Encourage your child to think about the order that the pictures should go in.



Decorate the cloth

Using the washable markers, help your child to decorate the sheet. It doesn't have to be a picture - try experimenting with swirls and scribbles. You can always wash the cloth and try something different next time.



It's never too soon to start making a mark: experimenting with lines and squiggles helps children to develop the finger muscles they will need for writing.

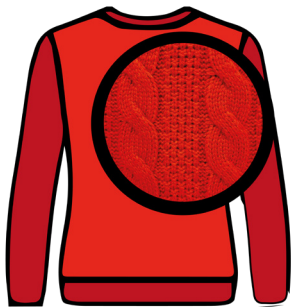


Extend

Collect together fabrics with different patterns for your child to look at. Which do they like, and why?

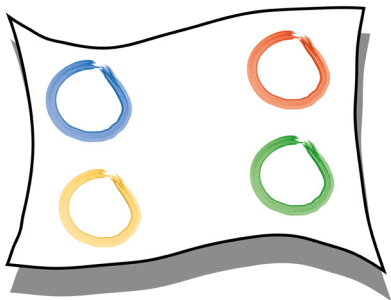
Adapt

Encourage your child to look at different fabrics under the magnifying glass; what patterns and textures do they notice?



Toddler twister

Using the washable markers, draw coloured circles on the cloth then call out instructions like 'put your hand on the red circle... put your foot on the blue circle... sit on the green circle'.



Talking about colours and shapes with your child builds their vocabulary. Don't worry if they get their colours mixed up – this is common for toddlers – just gently point out the correct colour each time.

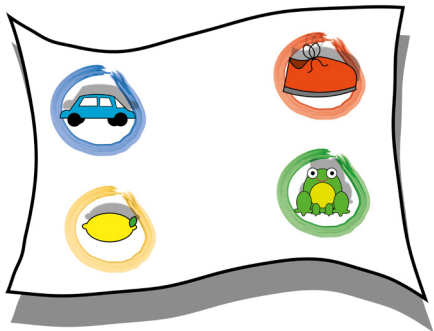


Extend

For older toddlers, make the game extra challenging and full of giggles by using body parts like 'elbow' or 'nose', getting them to touch 2 colours at once or using different shapes like 'square' or 'triangle'.

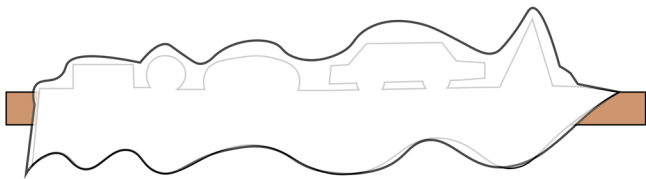
Adapt

Turn this into a colour sorting game by collecting together objects and putting them on the matching colour circle.



Memory game

Put 5 objects that your child knows the name of in a row on the floor. Name them one by one then cover with the cloth. As you lift the cloth, lift away one of the objects. Can they tell you what's missing?



Hiding games let your child practise their memory skills.

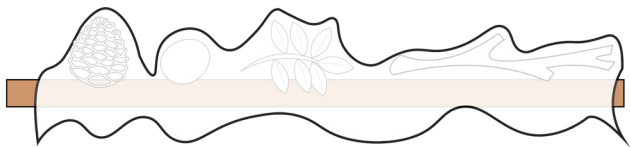


Extend

You can make the game harder by changing the position of the objects on each turn.

Adapt

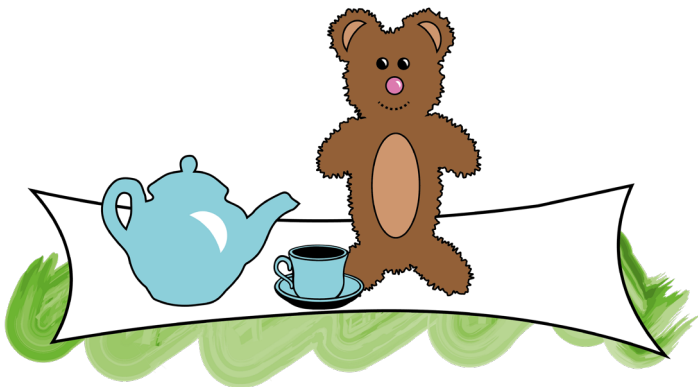
Play the memory game using objects that you found whilst out exploring (e.g., leaf, feather, twig, stone, conker).



Teddy bear's picnic

Spread out the cloth like a picnic blanket and invite your child and their favourite teddy or doll to a make-believe picnic.

Pretend play can help build confidence, flexible thinking and vocabulary.



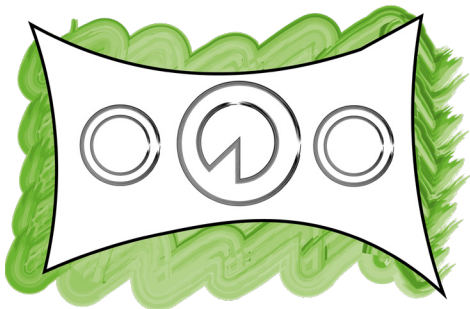


Extend

Take the rucksack on a trip to the shops (real or pretend), and ask your child to help you buy some items for your picnic.

Adapt

Draw plates and cups on the cloth with the washable markers. You could even draw a cake for your child to decorate.



What's in the bag?

Put 3 or 4 child-safe objects (e.g., a toy car, an orange and a sponge) in the bag and challenge your child to reach into the bag and name the objects just by feeling them.



This kind of game builds your child's thinking and vocabulary skills, as well as their awareness of their senses.



Extend

Ask your child to set up the game for you using toys and objects they can reach around the home.

Adapt

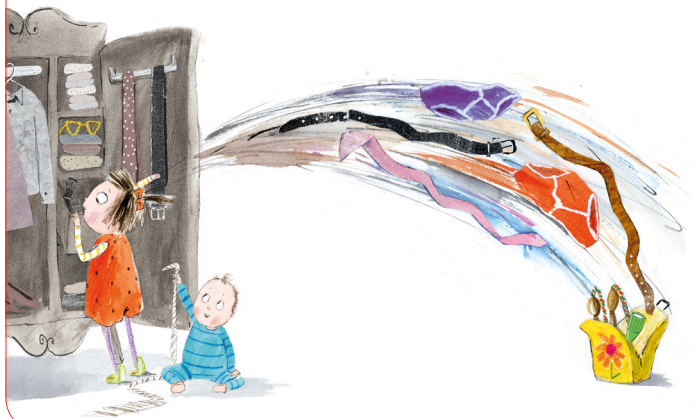
Play the memory game using objects that you found whilst out exploring (e.g., leaf, feather, twig, stone, conker).



Packing for an adventure

Allow some extra time before you leave the house with your child to talk with them about the things they might need (e.g., snack, hat etc). Help them to pack it in their bag to bring with them.

Letting your child plan and carry the things they need builds their self-esteem.



Extend



Turn packing into a game by packing for imaginary adventures, just like in the book provided with this pack. What would they pack for a trip to the beach, or a trip to the moon? If you don't have the items they suggest to hand, you could draw pictures to put in their bag.

When your child has finished using the resources encourage them to help you pack the materials away in the bag.

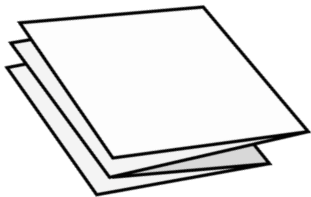
Routines like tidying up after an activity help toddlers feel safe and secure.





Extend

Count how many times you can fold the sheet. Talk about what shape it makes each time you fold it.



Adapt

Your child might want to use their rucksack to store all their treasured possessions. Use this as an opportunity to talk with them about their favourite things.



Brains are built in stages; just as a house needs a sturdy foundation to support the walls and roof, a brain needs a good base to support all future development. Doing activities like the ones in this pack are the bricks that build your child's brain. You can find out more information about the science and how you can build your child's brain here: <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources>

Help us find out even more about the ways that children learn and develop. The babylabs at University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University run studies across the year: Babies and toddlers have fun playing in a safe space, whilst parents gain new insights into their child's development. To find out more and register your interest in taking part in a study visit

www.psy.ox.ac.uk/research/oxford-babylab
and babylab.brookes.ac.uk



For a downloadable version of this pack,
and to hear the activity suggestions in
English, French, Polish, Punjabi, Spanish,
Ukrainian and Urdu visit:

www.playfulpacks.uk/activities



Had fun with these packs? Tell us! We are offering
a second, different activity pack to the first 100
families who share a photo or written description
of how they've used the activities with their child.
To find out more, and take part, visit

www.playfulpacks.uk/share