

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 “Test 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 another compliment: “This superhero is *amazing* and *brave*.” The next player continues with C, and so on. The last player to add an adjective picks a new toy to describe and starts another round with the next letter of the alphabet. If the round ends on F, for instance, she begins with G.

Longer or shorter

Select any toy figure, and ask your youngster to point to either 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.

