

Vroom Activities



Whether it's mealtime, bath time or anytime in between, there are so many great ways to help build your child's brain. This PDF has a few brain building activities for ages 0-5. Print them out, put them on your fridge, cut the cards out and put them in your purse - whatever helps to remind you that these great moments are all around you in the things you already do.

Check out the pages that are relevant to you and your child, and print the ones you want. For example, ages 0-1 are on pages 2-5, etc. And if you have a friend, family or community member that might like a few "brain builders", please share this with them too!



Activities for Children 0-1




Playtime
Babble On

Don't be afraid to babble. When your child starts to make noises, treat it like a real conversation and mimic the sounds right back to them. See how many times you can go back and forth!

Brainy Background

All kinds of "conversations" help to build babies' brains - even when they're still learning how to talk. By following your child's lead and responding, you're sparking the connections he/she needs for language and communication later on.




Playtime
Dance Party

Your child may not be walking or talking yet, but with your help, they can definitely boogie. So turn on some music and hold your child as you dance around. When you're sitting down together, shake your arms to the music and see if your child can do the same!

Brainy Background

Paying attention to sounds and movements is an early step in listening for sounds—a reading skill.




Playtime
Peek-a-Boo

Grab whatever is nearby, like a blanket, a book or your hands, and use it to play Peek-a-Boo with your child. First you hide behind it and then say "Peek-a-boo!" Next, get your child to be the hider.

Brainy Background

Peek-a-Boo helps your child learn that you are still there, even when you're hiding. But most of all, it's fun! Your face and voice are your child's favorite toys.





Activities for Children 0-1



Bedtime
Weather Report

At bedtime, talk to your child about the weather today and what it meant for you. "Today was COLD. I wish I wore a heavy jacket because I was outside all morning!"

Brainy Background

Talking about everyday activities helps build children's vocabulary, communication skills, and their brains!




Bedtime
Copy Cat

Like you, children experience many different emotions every day. Make faces that mirror how your child seems to be feeling. Talk to him/her about why you're making those faces. "You are smiling and seem happy and I am smiling and happy too."

Brainy Background

When you imitate the face that your child is making, you're helping them express what they are thinking and feeling even though they can't speak yet. These "conversations without words" begin to help your child learn about others' feelings and emotions!




Mealtime
Feeding Memories

When breastfeeding or giving your child a bottle, use that time to tell them a story about something happy you remember from your childhood. When your child has finished eating and responds to your voice, make the same sound back to him/her.

Brainy Background

Your voice is your child's favorite sound. Even though your child can't say words yet, he/she is listening and learning what sounds go together in words, which is an important foundation for language later on.





Activities for Children 0-1



Getting Dressed
Dressing Play

Even if your child doesn't seem to understand, tell him/her everything you're doing as you get him/her ready in the morning. Start with how you picked your child's clothes and go from there. Make eye contact and respond back to the sounds he/she makes.

Brainy Background

Think of yourself as a sports announcer—one who responds back with sounds and faces. These back and forth conversations are helping your child bond with you and begin to associate words with his/her experiences.




Diaper Changing
Changing Chats

When you're changing your child's diapers, make funny noises and see if you can make her giggle or coo, then giggle and coo back at him/her. See how many times you can go back and forth. Follow your child's lead and have a conversation with faces and sounds.

Brainy Background

By following your child's lead and also responding, you're building the connections his/her brain will need for conversation and language later on.




Diaper Changing
A Tall Tale

At your child's next diaper change, tell them a silly story about the tallest little child in the world while stretching their arms over their head.

Brainy Background

Your voice is your child's favorite sound. Even though he/she can't talk back yet, he/she is already taking in your words and using them to build the foundation for language later on.



Diaper Changing

Singing While You Change



Sing one of your favorite children's songs to your child while you change him/her, but put their name in the song: "Row, Row, Row (your child's name), gently down the stream..." Or "Rock-a bye (your child's name) in the treetop..." Encourage him/her to sing along too.

Brainy Background

Your child is learning new words and sounds when you sing. The more meaningful and playful words he/she hears, the more he/she will appreciate language. This will help your child learn more words to use when he/she begins to talk.



Playtime

Peek-a-Boo Box



Everyday items make great toys. Give your child an empty tissue box and a spoon. Let him/her see you put the spoon into the box. Does he/she watch? Shake the box. Reach in and take the spoon out. Giggle. Now it's your child's turn. Give him/her the spoon. What does he/she do?

Brainy Background

It's a simple game. Yet your child is exploring a big idea: Objects and people still exist even when they are out of sight. Although it will take until your child is around 2 to really learn this, the practice is fun! Play this game often.



Playtime

Blanket Box





Put a spoon or one of your child's toys inside a box. Cover it with a blanket and say, "Bye, bye." Then pull the blanket off and say, "Hello." Do it again. Now it's your child's turn. What does he/she do? What do you think your child is thinking?



Brainy Background

Your child is learning that something exists even when he/she can't see it, and is learning to hold a picture of something in his/her mind. This thinking skill is necessary for imagination, creativity and using letters to stand for sounds in reading.



 An icon of a sponge on a brush with two small stars, set against a white circle with radiating lines. <p>Cleaning Up Sponge Sensations</p> <p>When you're doing the dishes, let your child play with a clean sponge in a place where he/she won't get everything wet. Your child will love the texture. Show him/her how they can squeeze and absorb water with the sponge. Ask your child to describe this experience.</p>	<p>Brainy Background</p> <p>When your child feels new things and hears new words in conversations like these, he/she is building connections in his/her brain that are the foundations for reading and math. Your child is learning from your words and actions, especially when he/she is having fun!</p>  An icon of a red brain inside a white circle with radiating lines.
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 An icon of a sponge on a brush with two small stars, set against a white circle with radiating lines. <p>Cleaning Up Dirty Dishes, Goofy Giggles</p> <p>While you clean up the dirty dishes, show your child a dirty dish and say, "yuck" with a funny face. Your expression should make your child giggle. With each new dish, use a new word, such as "sticky" or "goopy." See what funny words he/she can come up with too.</p>	<p>Brainy Background</p> <p>Your child learns communication skills from your tone of voice, facial expressions, body movements and words. He/she also learns to love the sound of words when you use funny words.</p>  An icon of a red brain inside a white circle with radiating lines.
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 An icon of a fork and spoon crossed, with a small orange circle above the spoon, set against a white circle with radiating lines. <p>Mealtime Baby Chef</p> <p>Making meals offers amazing things for your child to see, smell, hear, touch and taste. Sit him/her safely in their highchair and talk back and forth about what you are cooking. Give him/her a piece of banana to mush and eat, or some cereal to munch.</p>	<p>Brainy Background</p> <p>Having your child there when you cook may not seem like doing much. But you are building on his/her natural curiosity when you talk about what you are doing. Inviting your child to explore new things will serve him/her well in school – and for the rest of his/her life.</p>  An icon of a red brain inside a white circle with radiating lines.
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Activities for Children 1-2

 <p>Mealtime Name That Dish</p> <p>While you put away the clean dishes, hold each one up and ask your child to “Name that Dish!” Plate! Bowl! Fork! And so on. Make it fun like a game show. You hold up the item, your child tells you what it is or you say what it is, then on to the next one!</p>	 <p>Brainy Background</p> <p>Your child learns to make connections between words and objects when he/she can see it and hear them at the same time. These connections are important to developing talking and reading skills.</p>
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 <p>Bedtime Funny Faces</p> <p>After brushing your child’s teeth at night, play a silly game together in the mirror. Ask your child to make a funny face and then imitate him/her. Then switch and have your child imitate your silliest face. There’s no limit to how much fun you can have together!</p>	 <p>Brainy Background</p> <p>Taking turns imitating each other gives your child practice paying attention to your silly face so that he/she can copy it. Paying attention helps him/her concentrate and focus – important skills when it comes to learning and solving problems.</p>
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 <p>Bedtime Toothy Wonder</p> <p>When you’re brushing your child’s teeth, look in the mirror together. Talk about how your teeth are the same and different from his/hers. For example, you have more teeth, and bigger teeth, but you both can make funny faces. Follow your child’s lead and talk with him/her about what he/she notices.</p>	 <p>Brainy Background</p> <p>Comparing things that are same and different will help your child sort his/her experiences into categories and make connections—skills that are important in reading, math and science in the future. This also builds him/her connections with you!</p>
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Activities for Children 2-3



Getting Dressed
Pocket Cleaners

Let your child help you empty your pockets at night. Take out the items that are safe to share with him/her one at a time. As you do, tell your child about your day and where the item came from. For example, "This card is how I get on the bus to go to work."




Brainy Background

Children love to hear about adults' days—especially the good things that happen. By sharing stories, you are helping your child learn about your world and building his/her vocabulary too!




Getting Dressed
His Hair, Her Hair

When you are brushing your child's hair, talk to him/her about how his/her hair compares to others. "Who has hair that's curly like yours? Who has hair that is the same color as yours? Who has hair that is the same color as mine?"



Brainy Background

Back and forth conversations about how your child's hair compares to others helps him/her learn to pay attention to what he/she sees, to use his/her memory and to group things into categories—all important in the development of vocabulary and math skills.



Playtime
Tune Time

Turn playtime into music time. What is one of your child's favorite songs? Sing a line for him/her and then pause. Can he/she sing the next few words? Take turns back and forth, and clap to the beat. You and your child make beautiful music together!



Brainy Background

Music time becomes learning time. By helping your child pay attention to the words of songs and the beat, you are helping him/her learn to listen carefully. Remembering the words and tunes of songs also strengthens your child's memory.



Activities for Children 2-3




Playtime
Cup Tower

You don't need much to build fun things around the house. Grab a few plastic cups and stack them into a tower and then show your child how fun it is to knock them all down. Hand the cups over and let him/her have a go. Take turns building all kinds of new towers!

Brainy Background

Supporting children as they explore and discover will help them become learners for life. This game also helps your child discover how the physical world around him/her works. Have a back and forth conversation about his/her discoveries!




Laundry
Laundry Sense

Give your child a chance to explore textures when you're putting away laundry. Before you fold, pass them to your child first and ask him/her how each feels. Is it soft, rough, thin, heavy? What else feels that way?

Brainy Background

This game helps your child "think like a detective," because he/she is using his/her senses (including touch) to understand the world around him/her.





Mealtime
Bowl Half Full

When your child is eating out of a bowl, have a back and forth conversation about how full the bowl is. Is it a little full? Half full?

Brainy Background

When you have a back and forth conversation about how full the bowl is, you are helping your child gain basic ideas about math. It can also help him/her learn new words!





Activities for Children 2-3




Mealtime
Cooking Lessons

No matter what you're cooking, your child can be a helper. Give your child a play-by-play of the ingredients you're using and if it's safe, let him/her touch smell or taste them. Have a conversation about what you're making: "Red pepper makes the beans spicy."

Brainy Background

Talking about everyday activities as you do them helps build children's communication skills - and their brains! Be sure to point to objects as you say their name to help your child learn new words.







Bathtime
Bathtime Weather Man

Use your child's time in the tub to talk about the weather. Sprinkle water on his/her arms and talk about rain. Let him/her take a turn sprinkling rain on your arms. When you're draining the tub, show your child how the water looks like a tornado. Take turns opening and closing the drain, to let the water swirl around.

Brainy Background

Having conversations help to build children's brains—your child is learning new words, and learning about cause and effect when he/she sees the water go down the drain.






Bathtime
Splish, Splash, Pour

Grab 2 cups before bath time. Give your child a cup and pour water from your cup into his/hers. Then ask your child to pour the water from his/hers back into yours. Count the number of times out loud and see how many times you can go back and forth!

Brainy Background

Supporting children as they explore and discover will help them become learners for life. Counting out loud also helps your child build a stronger sense of numbers.





Activities for Children 3-4



Getting Dressed
I Pick, You Pick

When you are getting your child dressed in the morning, pick out his/her pants and then ask him/her to find a shirt that matches the color of those pants.




Brainy Background

This game helps your child make connections and group like things. Your child might have a good reason for why things go together. So listen to his/her ideas. If your child's idea won't work, explain why.



Playtime
Light Show

Turn playtime into a lightshow with your child. Lift your child so he/she can reach a light switch, or let him/her stand on a steady chair (stay close to keep him/her safe). Say "on" or "off" and see if your child can flip the switch to match your words. Then let your child take a turn calling out directions to you!



Brainy Background

This game teaches your child about how one action causes another (cause and effect). When one of you flips the switch, talk about how the lights turn off and on. It's also the chance for your child to hear new words like "flip" and "electricity."



Playtime
Dance Moves

Playtime can become a dance party. Turn on some tunes on your phone or radio and start doing a silly dance. Shake a leg, wiggle your hips. Can your child copy your moves? Next song, it's his/her turn to lead. Go back and forth until you're danced out!



Brainy Background

Believe it or not, dancing games can be great brain builders! This one in particular teaches your child to pay attention to sounds and rhythm and to imitate you using his/her body. It also gives him/her the chance to be the leader and that's a good feeling.



Activities for Children 3-4

Laundry


Big Foot, Little Foot

When you're doing laundry, have your child help you with simple sock matching. As you do, talk about who has big feet and little feet in your family. Have a conversation about which socks go together and why. Do they have the same color, pattern or size? Help your child hold the socks next to his/her feet, then your feet and talk about the differences.



Brainy Background

Grouping objects into categories (figuring out what's the same and what's different) and having a back and forth conversation about them helps your child to understand the world around her.



Laundry


Clean Clothes

When you are putting away laundry, have your child find the places in the drawers or shelves where the clean clothes go. If your child guesses something different than where you would put it, talk about your reasons for putting it somewhere else.



Brainy Background

Grouping objects into categories (figuring out what's the same and what's different) is an important exercise that sparks connections in your child's growing brain. Having a back and forth conversation makes the learning so much richer.



Mealtime


Mini Chef

When you're cooking, have your child help with simple tasks like adding an ingredient. Ask your child what he/she thinks will happen when you add the ingredient (like pouring a cup of milk into flour) and then talk together about what actually happens.




Brainy Background

This is a real-life science experiment. Guessing about what might happen promotes your child's curiosity, which is critical to learning.






Activities for Children 3-4



Mealtime
Bite Sized

Use mealtime to talk about what's on your plates. After you've cut up both your child's food and yours, take a bite and count how many pieces you have left. Have your child then take a bite and count what's left. Take turns back and forth until you are full!




Brainy Background

Back and forth conversations about what you are doing spark new connections in your child's growing brain. Counting the pieces on your plate as you eat them helps him/her learn about counting while having fun.



Bathtime
Bath Count

When your child is in the tub, think of all the things you can count together. For example, the number of splashes your child makes, the number of times you pour water on him/her. Take turns counting and talk about what you are doing.




Brainy Background

Counting small numbers of things helps your child understand that numbers go in a sequence, from little numbers to big ones.



Bedtime
Daily Recap

Turn bedtime into a reflection of your child's day. Ask your child if he/she got dressed or ate breakfast first. Tell what you remember too. If you want to be playful, switch the order—"you went outside and then you got dressed" and have your child correct you.



Brainy Background

Helping your child describe parts of his/her day helps build his/her communication skills.



Activities for Children 4-5


Getting Dressed

Name That Clothing



Try getting dressed a new way this morning! Lay your child's clothes out, but instead of asking him/her to find his/her pants, ask your child "Can you find the clothes you wear on your legs? On your feet?" Keep playing until your child is dressed.

Brainy Background



This new way of dressing gives your child practice using information he/she is holding in his/her mind--what scientists call your child's "working memory." Using information you know in different ways helps lead to success in school and success in life!


Playtime

Playtime Picks



Pick a color or letter with your child and together, go on a scavenger hunt to find as many things as you can in 3 minutes. How many things in the house are blue? Count out loud together as you find each item. You can also play with letters: How many things do you see that start with T?

Brainy Background



I Spy games like this one are great brain builders. They make your child aware of his/her environment and teach him/her to make connections between similar things. You can try this game with letters, colors, shapes - anything really!

Laundry

Sock Sorters



When you're doing laundry, have your child help you match the socks. Ask him/her to help you match them by size. Then change the rules and ask your child to match them by color. Have a back and forth conversation about what you are doing.


Brainy Background



Grouping objects into categories helps your child understand the world around her. When you ask your child to change the rules of a game (from colors to size), you are helping him/her think flexibly and not to go on auto-pilot.



Activities for Children 4-5




Mealtime
Shake Rattle and Roll

When you are cooking, let your child create an instrument using a plastic container with measuring spoons or keys inside. Clap a certain rhythm and ask your child to try and copy your beat with his/her homemade instrument. Then have your child take a turn at leading, and follow his/her beat.

Brainy Background

Going back and forth in a game like this helps your child pay attention and remember the pattern of noises—it's a great brain-builder!




Mealtime
Salty-Sweet Showcase

When you're in the kitchen, let your child try a few grains of salt and then a few of sugar. Ask how they taste. Which does your child like better? What foods taste like they might have salt in them and what foods taste like they have sugar in them?

Brainy Background

First-hand experiences like these help your child think like a scientist, using his/her senses to understand the world around him/her. Having back and forth conversations about these discoveries together make experiences richer.





Bathtime
Bath Bottle

Give your child a clear plastic bottle to play with in the tub. How many different things can he/she do with it? Push it under the water? Fill it with water? Float it like a boat? As your child tries something new ask him/her, "What do you think will happen?"

Brainy Background

Your child likes to make things happen. And it is even more fun when you watch and share your child's pleasure by having him/her guess what will happen as he/she discovers more about his/her world and impact on how things work. When your child plays this way, he/she is thinking like a scientist.






Activities for Children 4-5



Bedtime
Thankful Tidbits

At bedtime, take turns with your child listing off things you're thankful for. Here's an easy one to start with: "I'm thankful for you!" Then, help your child think of something he/she is thankful to have in his/her life. See how many times you can go back and forth.



Brainy Background

Every back and forth conversation builds your child's brain. After he/she says something, repeat it back in complete sentences. And did you know that paying attention to what's positive in your life has been shown to lead to more happiness and satisfaction? For both of you!



Bedtime
Daily Do-Over

Bedtime is a great time to look back on all the fun you and your child packed into the day. So tonight, ask your child what his/her favorite parts of his/her day were - like stepping in a puddle or popping bubbles at bath time. Then share yours with your child - he/she will love hearing about your day!




Brainy Background

By reflecting on your day together, you are helping your child build his/her vocabulary and memory skills. And by sharing an event from your day you are giving your child a peek into the world of adults.



Bedtime
Tiny Tent

Grab a blanket to make a tiny tent at bedtime. Pretend to be camping outside with your child. Say: Shh.... what do you hear? See? Smell? What do you think is happening outside our tent? Afterwards, snap a picture of your child at your campsite! Share it with others!



Brainy Background

Pretending is very important to learning—it helps your child to imagine, be creative and take the perspective of others. And it's fun!