

***As with any toy, please use proper supervision at all times.**

Ker-Plunk Can

- Collect several plastic milk-jug lids or use cheap flat poker chips
- Cut an "X" into the plastic lid of an empty coffee can.
- Decorate as desired.

You and a baby or toddler can take turns pushing the plastic milk-jug lids through the X in the coffee can. Ker-plunk! When you have used all of your milk-jug lids, remove the coffee can lid, empty the can, and start again!

Building Blocks

Take empty boxes of a variety of sizes and wrap them in colored duct tape. Types of boxes might include spaghetti, macaroni and cheese, frozen dinners/breakfasts, tea, tissue, cream cheese, small gift boxes, etc. Adding newspaper or other stuffing will help the boxes last longer.

Nesting or Stacking Tins

- Gather several aluminum or tin cans of various diameters such as coffee, soup, tomato paste, and large juice cans (you can also use plastic containers).
- With one end removed, clean and soak off labels from each can.
- Hammer down the edges until they are flat and very smooth; use cloth or vinyl tape to cover the rims and edges.
- With this colorful tape, makes stripes around each can (primary colors work well).

Clothespin Color Matching Game

- Get a paint chip samples strips from a paint store. Choose many colors and be sure to take 2 of each strip you'd like to use.
- Cut a thin rectangle of each color and hot glue it the top of a clothespin. Have children match the colors by attaching the clothespin to the color strip, which aids in practicing fine motor skills and learning colors.

Shape Matching Puzzle

- Gather several small household items, such as a jar lid, comb, plastic spoon, old key, clothespin, and unsharpened pencil.
- Take a piece of poster board and simply arrange these items on top.
- Trace around each item with a marker.
- Help the child match each item to its matching silhouette on the cardboard.



Jump Rope

This can be as simple as getting a length of clothesline and making large knots in the ends for handles. You can get the big wooden beads (unpainted) at craft stores with large openings and paint them yourself. Then feed the rope through them for a weighted jump-rope.

Bean Bags

These can be sewn from various fabrics such as denim (old jeans) and cotton flannel (old shirts). Cut 2 squares, sew around 3 sides and turn right side out. Fill with beans or rice and sew the final side together.

Checkerboard

Cut a large square of plywood and paint the checkerboard on it using a stencil for best results. Use something for checkers, making sure that there are two definite groups of checkers that can be sorted by color, size, or type such as polished stones/rough stones, red buttons/black buttons, walnuts/pecans. This makes a wonderful toy for older children!

Matching Cards

Use 3x5 cards and glue pictures to them. You could use old magazines to have things like parent animals/baby animals, or animal homes/animals or numbers/items. After you have made the cards, laminate them if possible.

PVC Pipes

Older preschoolers love connecting PVC pipes together!

A Fishing Game

Cut out paper or felt fish and attach a paperclip to the mouth area. Make a fishing pole from a long thin stick, a string and a magnet. If it is for a child under the age of 3 please be sure the magnet is big enough that it cannot be swallowed.



Felt Food

Use bits of felt and stuffing to create cookies, cakes, breads, pizza and other pretend foods.

Sorting Toys

Make a sorting toy by filling small containers with objects to be sorted by color or size, shape or type. Save large lids from milk jugs, water bottles, sports drink bottles, etc. Draw several shapes on a piece of cardstock. Cut pieces of the same shape and have the children match the pieces to the drawn shape on the cardstock.

Plastic Containers

Clean plastic containers make great toys. Babies and toddlers love nesting containers, placing things inside, and throwing them around. Make sure that the containers are the appropriate size and weight, are not too small and don't have sharp edges. These can also be used in your sensory table or in your dramatic play area as realistic food.

Clothes and Accessories

Fill up a small laundry hamper with your older scarfs, purses, shoes, necklaces, etc and make this a mini role playing station for children.

Cooking Toys

Gather a box of old cooking utensils you don't use or find them at a local thrift store. Let the children play with them in a dramatic play kitchen area.

Scoop Ball

Make a scoop by cutting out the non-handle portion of a milk jug. Use the scoop to catch a ball.

The Timeless Toy - A Cardboard Box!

It's a well-known fact that young children would often rather play with the box than the toy that came in it. Save cardboard boxes for free toddler games.

- Let them explore a large box. They'll probably be really happy to climb in and out and may enjoy just sitting inside one.
- If you're feeling energetic you could push a child around in one.
- You could let children decorate the box by coloring, painting or sticking things on it. They will probably be more interested in this activity after they have had a free play session or two with it.



First 'Shape Sorters'

Most commercial shape sorters are rather hard for a one-year-old to master. A toddler will most likely go through a phase where he enjoys taking objects in and out boxes. Find a container and some smaller objects so toddlers can fill it with things.

- Get an empty tissue box and some small food package boxes or lids from jars that will fit through the hole in the top. This is brilliant for making this game slightly more challenging.
- Wash out large coffee or infant formula cans, cut a long slot in the plastic lid and cover any sharp edges with duck tape. Coasters posted through this slot make a very satisfying 'clung'.
- Bring out a pack of playing cards and cut a slot for them in the lid of a shoe box.
- Put thin scarves into empty wipe, tissue boxes or shape sorters for her to pull them out. This is a perfect activity for distracting her from emptying a whole box of tissues.

Matching Fabric Square Games

These homemade toys can turn fabric cuts offs from projects and old clothes or rags into an educational resource. Textured squares also make excellent toys for blind children.

There are several games you can make using fabric squares.

- Color matching
 1. Start off with two or three pairs of squares then gradually add more.
 2. After mastering this game an older toddler could match two different shades of the same color.
- Matching by sense of touch
 1. Choose one color that you can find lots of different textured fabric in (e.g. white). And make two squares of each fabric.
 2. Introduce this activity by giving your toddler 4 pieces (2 pairs of contrasting textures.)
 3. Encourage your child to stroke the pieces to feel the difference in texture.
 4. Ask your toddler to make pairs that feel the same.
 5. Gradually increase the amount of pairs.

Feely 'Bean Bag' Socks

Fill new or clean socks with lentils, tapioca, pasta, shredded paper, plastic bags and pompoms. Seal them by sewing the opening or tying the socks tightly. And viola another homemade toy! If you use socks all the same color, you can fill two socks with the same contents and your toddler can match them up by feel. How many feely socks can a toddler stack, fit into different sized containers or toss on to a tray? Be sure to supervise children due to the small parts. Feely socks are brilliant toys for blind children as well.

Bottled Fun

Take empty, clear, plastic single-serving bottles and remove the labels. Fill at least two-thirds full with water, mix in a little food coloring, soap and/or vegetable oil. Add things like glitter, plastic confetti flakes, plastic beads or small plastic party favors. Using a glue gun, seal the cap and let it dry. Let the children roll the bottles on the floor, or shake them up to watch all the stuff float around inside.

Shake, Rattle, and Roll

Small plastic containers with lids, like Crystal Light canisters or yogurt cups, make great shaker toys. Fill with any cereal and seal the top with a glue gun. You can cover the outside of the container with colorful contact paper. Use a variety of “fillers” in separate containers to make different sounds.

Touchy-Feely Book

Make of book of interesting textures to feel like a soft, squishy sponge, sandpaper, and pieces of different fabrics. Attach each texture sample to a piece of poster board. Use cheap, heavy duty fabric or vinyl to back each page. With a key ring to hold the book together, you can add or take off pages easily.

Cloth Can

Take several types of fabric and tie them together. Stuff the fabric into a can – Pringles cans work well. Cut a large slit in the can lid. Pull the end of the “fabric rope” through the hole and let the children pull out the long string of fabric. See-through scarves tied together work great for this.

Sensory Cards

The cards are made of cardstock or thick cardboard to make them stronger. In choosing textures, go through the house and find interesting textures that would be fairly easy to attach to the cardstock. You can use puffy stickers and foam stickers (especially easy to make!), buttons, sponge, styrofoam, post it tabs, duct tape flaps (create windows and place a sticker behind the window), fabric, clear plastic, net, Velcro, etc.

Prop Boxes

A prop box is a box with a variety of themed dress up items and props. Some ideas for a prop box theme: a doctor box, farmer box, firefighter box, camping box, etc.

Bird Feeders

Homemade bird feeders are a great idea for teaching your children to interact with nature. Bird houses and feeders can be made out of empty juice cartons and other common household items. Children will enjoy watching the birds come and go.



Cubby Houses

Just about anything can be made into a small shelter, whether it is sheets, boxes, or couch cushions. Cubby houses provide children with a place that is all their own.

More “Non-Toy” Toys:

- Coasters in a stackable holder
- Plastic container lids and damp washcloths for teething
- Small flashlights
- Trowels or a small folding shovel
- A basket with a handle and a lid
- A gently used purse and/or wallet with pictures inside
- “Treasure” boxes, like plastic tool or tackle boxes or lidded cardboard boxes