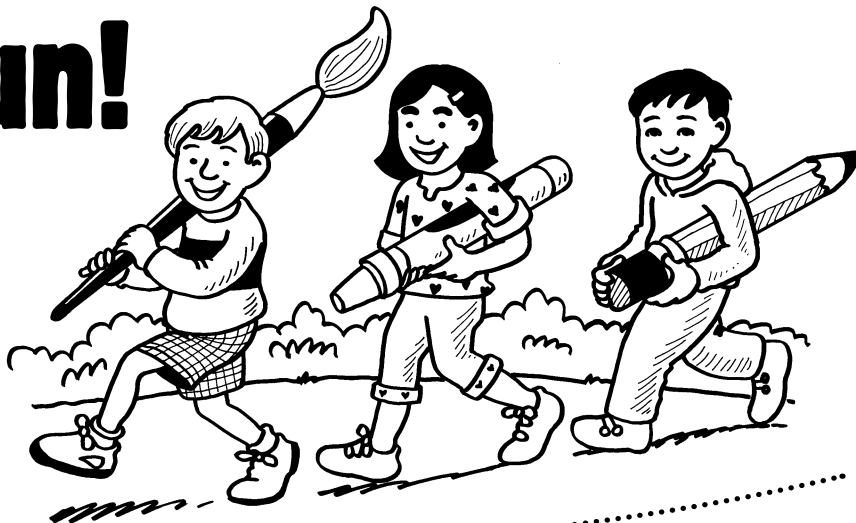


3, 2, 1... Learning Fun!

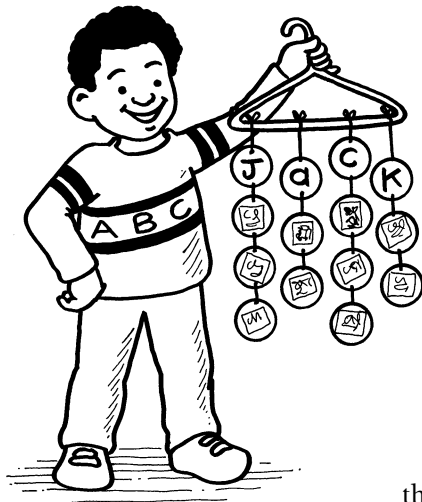
Mobiles, puzzles, and rainbows are fun to make—and your youngster can learn from them, too. Try these craft projects together, and he'll practice early reading, writing, and math skills while strengthening his hand muscles.



Name mobile

Your child will enjoy creating this colorful mobile. He'll learn to recognize letters, spell his name, and hear beginning sounds in words.

You'll need: can, pencil, poster board, scissors, yarn, hole punch, plastic coat hanger, old magazines, glue



Have your youngster count the letters in his name. Then, he should trace around the can to draw that many circles on poster board (four circles for J-a-c-k). He can cut out the circles and write one letter on each. Help him punch a hole at the top of each circle and use yarn to hang it from the coat hanger.

Next, let him flip through magazines and cut out a few pictures that

start with each letter in his name. Jack might cut out photos of a jaguar, a bag of jelly beans, and a jump rope for the J. Help him make more poster board circles and glue a picture on each.

Finally, he can punch holes and use yarn to hang the picture circles below the matching letter. (Pictures of an apple, an appliance, and an athlete could hang from the A, for instance.)

Counting puzzle

Making a number puzzle is a hands-on way to practice counting and number recognition.

You'll need: two pieces of cardboard (front and back panels cut from a cereal box), crayons, scissors, glue

Start by helping your youngster draw large outlines of the numbers 1–9 on one piece of cardboard. Let her color them in. Carefully cut out the numbers for her. Then, she can glue the first piece of cardboard on top of the second—it's a puzzle board!

Before your child solves her puzzle, she could decorate it by drawing a matching number of objects inside each spot where a number will fit. For example, she might draw one heart in the space for the 1, two houses in the spot for the 2, and three fish in the space for the 3.

Now she's ready to complete her puzzle by putting each number into the correct spot.



continued

3-D shapes

Make these shapes with your youngster to explore basic geometry.

You'll need: *toothpicks, marshmallows*

Have your child count out three toothpicks and put a marshmallow on one end of each. Can he stick them together to form a triangle?

With four toothpicks and four marshmallows, he could make a square. And with six of each, he might form a rectangle (two toothpicks for each long side and one for each short side).

Together, enjoy experimenting. See who can make the shape with the most sides. Introduce words like *pentagon* (five sides), *hexagon* (six sides), and *octagon* (eight sides). Ask your youngster how many toothpicks and marshmallows he'll need for each. Then, he can check by making each shape.



Produce placemat

Here's a yummy-looking placemat that will let your child review her colors every time she eats.

You'll need: *fruits and vegetables, finger paints in matching colors, white paper, crayons, safety scissors, cardboard, glue, clear laminate*

Gather different-colored fruits and vegetables (strawberry, carrot, green pepper), and cut them lengthwise. Have your youngster dip the cut sides into paint that matches the fruit or vegetable's color and stamp them onto white paper. Leave small items (blueberries, grapes) whole so she can lightly press several times to make a "bunch." *Note:* Discard the painted fruit so your child doesn't eat it.

Let the prints dry. Below each one, help your youngster write the name and color of each food in the same color crayon (for example, use green to write "kiwi"). She can cut them out, along with their labels.

Finally, help your child glue the prints and labels onto cardboard and add her name. Cover with clear laminate, and serve a snack on her new placemat!



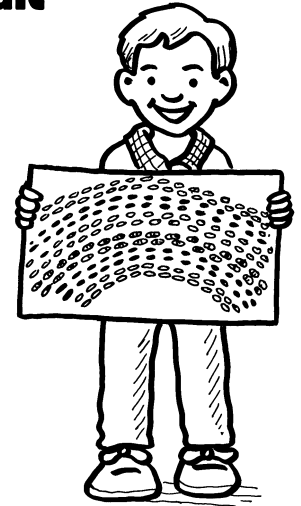
Rainbow rice mosaic

Build your youngster's small-motor skills and help him learn about mixing colors with this colorful mosaic.

You'll need: *6 small bowls with 1/4 cup water in each, food coloring (red, yellow, blue), 1 1/2 cups uncooked white rice, strainer, paper towels, construction paper, pencil, paintbrush, glue, spoon*

Ask your child to squeeze 3–4 drops of food coloring in the water to make one bowl each of red, yellow, and blue. Then, he can combine colors to make three more bowls (equal parts red and blue food coloring for purple, red and yellow for orange, and yellow and blue for green).

Next, help your youngster add 1/4 cup of rice to each bowl. Wait 10 minutes. Let him drain the rice in a strainer and dry it on paper towels for about an hour. Then, he can draw the outline of a rainbow on construction paper and brush on glue. Have him spoon each color of rice evenly onto a stripe: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple. The result will be a beautiful rainbow of color!



Shoelace box

This project teaches your child to tie her shoes—and strengthens the muscles she needs for handwriting.

You'll need: *shoebox, construction paper, shoe, crayons, ballpoint pen, shoelaces*

You and your youngster can make a shoe-tying board using a shoebox lid. Help her cover the lid with construction paper, trace the sole of the shoe on top, and color it. Then, carefully use a pen to poke two rows of holes on the shoe where lace holes would be.

Now you're ready to lace a shoelace through the holes and show your youngster how to tie her shoes. She can use her new shoebox to practice over and over.

Idea: Keep different-colored shoelaces inside the box to add variety.

Early Years

I Can Do It

At this age, nothing makes your child feel more independent than accomplishing everyday tasks all by herself. And children who are self-reliant at home are more independent in school.

The following activities will help put your little one on the path to self-sufficiency. Suggest that she check off each skill as her “I can do it!” list grows.



Skill: Put away toys

Activity: Build “homes” for toys

Motivate your youngster to organize her room and keep it neat by making houses for her toys. Let her collect cardboard boxes and use crayons to draw windows and doors. Next, have her choose toys to “live” in each house. For example, she might decide a small appliance box makes a good “garage” for parking her miniature cars and that an oatmeal-can “tower” could store her blocks. Help her label each house with the name of the toys that live there. *Example:* “Tori’s Car Garage.” When playtime is over, she’ll be excited to send her toys home by putting them away in their houses.

Skill: Fix a snack

Activity: Make a menu

Together, create a menu of snacks your child can prepare on his own. Ask him to flip through grocery circulars or magazines and cut out pictures of snack ingredients. Encourage him to choose combinations that he can put together himself, like yogurt and berries, cheese and crackers, and cereal with milk



and a banana. Then, have him fold a large piece of construction paper in half, open it up, and glue on his pictures to make a menu. At snack time, he can look at his menu and choose a snack to make. *Idea:* Order from his menu, and let him prepare the snack for you.

Fostering independence

It’s tempting to leap to the rescue when your youngster is learning a new skill. But he will gain more confidence if you offer to be his helper instead of the “doer.” Try these tips.

- **Be patient.** Give your child time to work at his own pace, even if that pace seems to be s-l-o-w motion. If you’re on a tight schedule in the morning, consider setting your alarm a few minutes early to build in extra time for him to get dressed.



- **Encourage persistence.** Does your youngster give up before he completes a task? Be a cheerleader to motivate him to persevere. (“Look at how much you’ve already done!”) Or offer to assist with part of the job. (“You tie the left shoe, and I’ll tie the right.”)

- **Recognize frustration.** If your child is reaching his limit, gently suggest that he take a break. You might say something like “You worked hard and did a lot on your own. Let’s try again later.”

continued



Skill: Clean up messes

Activity: Make a child-sized cleanup kit

Oops! Your youngster got muddy footprints all over the kitchen floor. Rather than cleaning up his messes, teach him to handle them himself by creating a supply box together. Have him write his name and “My cleanup kit” in permanent marker on a bucket. Then, help him fill the kit with kid-friendly cleaning supplies like a spray bottle of water, rags, paper towels, sponges, and cleaning wipes. Store the kit within easy reach. When he makes a mess, he can grab his kit and clean it up!

Skill: Pick out clothes

Activity: Hold a fashion show

Make picking out clothes easy for your child by helping her assemble outfits ahead of time. Go through her closet together, and have her choose combinations of tops and bottoms. Have her include shoes, socks, belts, and hair accessories that complete her outfits. Then, let her model the ensembles for you. Take a photo of her wearing each one, or she could draw pictures of herself wearing them. Afterward, put the pictures into a “catalog” (a photo album). Each night before bed, she can browse through the pictures, select an outfit to wear the next day, and lay it out herself.

Skill: Make the bed

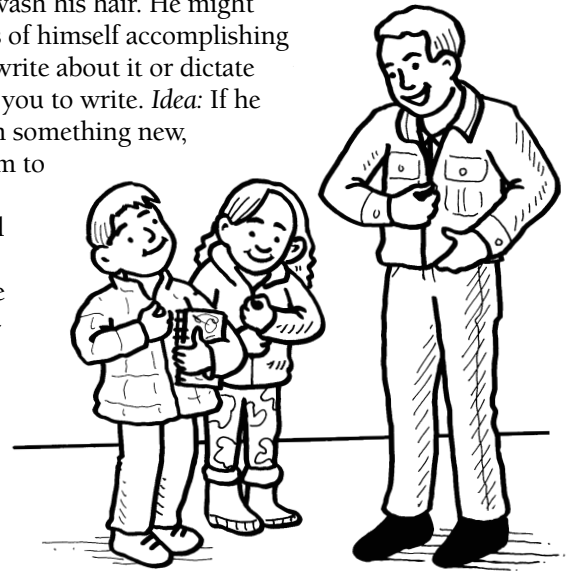
Activity: Sing a song

Singing a playful tune gives your youngster a simple way to remember how to do a job like making her bed. Let her pick a familiar song, and help her change the words to match the steps. For instance, instead of “Row, row, row your boat,” she could sing, “Smooth, smooth, smooth the sheets.” She’ll enjoy making up a new verse for each step and singing her song as she works. *Tip:* Resist the urge to fix things for her when she’s done—if you redo her work, you send the message that her efforts weren’t good enough. Instead, show your pride: “Wow! You made your bed all by yourself!”

Skill: Take care of yourself

Activity: Keep an “I did it!” diary

Celebrate your child’s personal-care accomplishments by letting him record them in a diary. Let him write “I did it!” on the front of a notebook and personalize the cover with a drawing. He can add entries as he learns to zip his coat, floss his teeth, or wash his hair. He might draw pictures of himself accomplishing the task and write about it or dictate sentences for you to write. *Idea:* If he struggles with something new, encourage him to look at his diary—it will provide an instant source of encouragement. Plus, it will be a great keepsake of his milestones.



Overcoming “I can’t”

Q: I know my daughter is capable of doing many things for herself, but often when I ask her to try, she insists that she can’t. What should I do?

A: When you encourage your daughter to try something new, start by letting her know you believe she’s capable of doing it. Often, simply saying something like “I’ve got a big-kid job that’s perfect for you” is enough to make her strive to meet your expectations.



If your child struggles, try demonstrating how to do each step and asking her to repeat your actions. Continue through each step until she feels confident.

Remember that while she is learning, it is best to focus on and praise her attempts. Children who feel that their efforts are recognized are more likely to keep trying.

Early Years