

A BETTER BABYSITTER

25 Screen-Free Ideas to Keep Your Little Ones Playing at Home

Enjoy these 25 tried-and-true screen-free ideas I've used with my five kids over the years! They are simple activities that require little planning, time, or money. They might not even seem list-worthy, but I promise they've saved me on long, gray winter afternoons, during the chaos right before dinner, and in a time crunch for a work deadline.

I've found that investing some time with my children first, works wonders. Play with them, read to them, or invite them into your world (emptying the dishwasher together) for even 10-15 minutes. Not only does this help you to bond with your child and put your relationship first, but your child will be more likely to play independently after you've invested time with them!

You'll find several of our favorite items listed below on our [Amazon Storefront here](#).

*Includes affiliate links.



1. **Create a Boredom Basket.** This is your secret stash (and no, not mom's chocolate stash!) of boredom busters to pull out when you need a breather. I often kept "surprises" hidden away in my closet to pull out when I just needed a break and didn't want to rely on a screen.
2. **Rotate the toys.** Put some toys away and rotate through your toys every few weeks or so. It keeps everything fresh and new!
3. **Build a fort.** Gather big blankets, chairs, books, clamps, couches, a card table—whatever you can find and create that secret place for playing a game, legos, or to look at books.
4. **Print out coloring pages.** My kids loved to sit on my lap and pick out a favorite character or animal to color. They loved watching it print out and would run away with it to color.
5. **Sink time!** Fill up the kitchen sink with water (add dish soap for some extra bubble fun!) and pull up a chair or stool. Get out straws, plastic cups for pouring back and forth, squeeze sponges, and a few favorite plastic animals. Be prepared for things to get wet (put an apron on your child if you don't want their clothes to get wet.) It's okay!
6. **A giant cardboard box.** Appliance stores often have leftover boxes they will gladly give you. Pull out some washable markers and you suddenly have a spaceship, a train, a house, or a car!



7. **Audiobooks.** We love [our Yoto Player](#) with story cards, but we also have an old-fashioned CD player with books on CD, and have used a smart speaker.
8. **Dance party with balloons.** Keep a stash of birthday balloons somewhere so you can blow them up on a whim! Let your child pick the music.
9. **Collect rocks, sticks, or bugs!** If you have a fenced backyard this is easier to allow kids out alone, if not, then this is a great task for kids while you are weeding or doing yard work. Give them a bag or bucket and have them come back and show you what treasures they discovered.
10. **Trade kid-watching with a friend for a few hours each week.** Commit to a screen-free playdate!
11. **Have a tea party with real food.** Gather the stuffed animals or dolls, Set up a small table or lay a blanket out on the floor for a picnic.
12. **Induce the library coma.** Take your kids to the library starting now (yes, even if they pull books off the shelves). It will become a familiar place where they get to bring home something new. We always brought home as many books as we could carry and my kids were soon in a library coma (as my friend calls it!) turning pages and the quiet would settle in. It will be shorter when they are little, but it will get longer and longer if you keep at it!
13. **Make a rice, pasta, or kinetic sand bin.** Let the kids pour and scoop. And yes, make a mess! Have them help clean up when they're done.
14. **Musical instruments.** This can be as simple as a small pot and a wooden spoon. Little ones love to create a reaction, and making music is just that. Keep some fun music toys (non-battery operated) in your toy rotation.
15. **Magnetic toys.** We love Magna-tiles, Tegu wooden blocks, or magnetic dressing dolls. Also, big magnet letters on the fridge or a white board. My kids also love the Mindware Imagination Magnets with magnetic shapes and templates.
16. **Toy kitchen.** Little ones love to do what big people do! Kid-size pots and pans with pretend food, plates, and utensils make playing in the kitchen a favorite.
17. **Outdoor play.** Dig in dirt or sand, draw with sidewalk chalk. Use kid-size shovels and sand toys.
18. **Simple art activities.** We love paint sticks and dot paint! Grab some construction paper or simple activity books and you're good to go.
19. **Playdough!** This is always a winner. Have the kids keep it in a certain area and let that area get messy. Using cookie cutters, straws, plastic knives, and mini rolling pins to make it even more fun! Sometimes I would make playdough with the kids (let them pick the colors) first. It's that formula of investing time with them first, then let them play!



20. **Make a light table** with a long clear plastic tub, filled with Christmas lights. Use Magna-tiles on top!
21. **Stack blocks** or food boxes/cans out of the pantry.
22. **Play store.** Get a simple cash register and some inexpensive “play” food and “play” money. Get a grocery basket/cart or just use some reusable shopping bags!
23. **Puzzles!** There are so many great “big-size” puzzles for younger kids. Keep these in your toy rotation.
24. **Play dress-up.** Make a dress-up bin with old clothes, Halloween costumes. My kids used to love to wear high-heels so throw in a pair of those!
25. **A simple treasure hunt.** Kids of all ages love treasure hunts. Have your child go around the house and pick out 5-10 items for you to hide, go hide them, give them a basket or leftover ice cream bucket to go collect the items and bring them back to show you.

