

Learning in a (Cereal) Box

Your child sits at the breakfast table, enjoying a bowl of her favorite cereal. If she looks closely at the cereal box, she'll see letters, words, and numbers. And if she peeks inside, she'll find cereal pieces not only for eating, but for counting, sorting, graphing, measuring, and making patterns.

Here are fun activities she can do with cereal that will help her learn. (Note: Remind your youngster to wash her hands before playing with and eating cereal.)



Make an "adding machine"

A cereal box and cereal rings are the perfect ingredients for a homemade "machine" that your child can use to work on addition and number sense.

First, cut off the front panel of a cereal box. Stand the box up on a table, and help your youngster use a single-hole punch to make five matching holes down each side panel. Then, cut five pieces of yarn or string. Each piece should be about three inches wider than the cereal box. Tie one end of each piece through a hole on the left side, let your child slide on 10 cereal rings, and knot the other end through the opposite hole.

Your youngster can use her machine to show different ways to make 10. If she slides 1 cereal ring to the left and 9 to the right, the machine shows $1 + 9 = 10$. If she slides 2 to the left and 8 to the right, she has $2 + 8 = 10$. How many ways can she make 10?

Cereal box measurement



Which household items are shorter than a cereal box? Which are longer? Your child can find out with this measurement activity.

Have him walk around the house

with an empty cereal box. He can hold it up to various objects to compare their sizes. Ask him to find three things that fit into each category: shorter, longer, thinner, wider. For example, a key is shorter, the couch is longer, a candle is thinner, and a pillow is wider. *Idea:* Can he find anything that is the exact same length or width as his box?

Find the letter



Bingo night never tasted so good! Here's a version of alphabet bingo that will help your youngster recognize letters and read words.

To make each player's bingo card, divide pieces of paper into five rows and five columns. Help your child write "free space" in the center square and put a different letter in each of the other 24 squares (leave out Q and X).

To play, put a cereal box in the middle of the table (or a different box in front of each person). Take turns calling out a letter (C). Everyone tries to find a word on the box that begins with that letter (*cereal*, *corn*, *calcium*). When your youngster finds a word, help her read it aloud. Then, she can cover up the letter on her board with a cereal piece. The first one to get five pieces of cereal in a row (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) calls, "Bingo!" Clear your boards by eating your cereal, and play again.

continued

Roll and count

Here's a fun way for your child to practice counting and identifying numbers. Place a cereal box on the floor, and let each player put a handful of the cereal in a bowl. On each person's turn, he rolls two dice, removes that many pieces from his bowl, and places the pieces on a napkin. Then, he tries to find the number somewhere on the box.

For instance, if your youngster rolls a 3 and a 3, he would put 6 cereal pieces on his napkin and point to a 6. He might see "6 grams of protein" or spot a 6 below the bar code.



Design a cereal box

If your child could invent her very own cereal, what would it be like? Give her creativity a boost and let her work on writing and drawing with this project.

In the grocery store, look at cereal boxes and talk about what's on them (cereal name, description of the product, pictures, nutrition facts, activities). Then, have your youngster think of a new cereal she'd like to see on the shelves. What would she name it? What would it taste like? What size and shape would the pieces be? Perhaps she would create "XOXO Cereal" with pieces shaped like Xs and Os.

At home, help your child cut white construction paper to fit over the front, back, and sides of an empty cereal box. She can use her ideas to decorate each sheet and then glue them on the box. Help her write the name of her cereal, and suggest that she add a game. For instance, she might draw a tic-tac-toe board on the back for playing the game with cereal pieces. *Idea:* Take a photo of her eating the cereal so she can star on her own box!

Make patterns

This colorful cereal project will let your child practice making patterns.

Remove the front panel from a cereal box. Help him make a picture frame by carefully cutting out the center to leave a 2-inch border. He can drizzle glue on the frame and add cereal pieces in a pattern. He might use different shapes (circle, square, square, circle, square, square) or colors (red, green, yellow, blue, red, green, yellow, blue). Then, let him use his frame to display one of his drawings or paintings.



Cereal recipes

Does your youngster like her cereal in a bowl with milk, in a bag of trail mix, or combined with yogurt to make a parfait? She can work on writing, sequencing, and reading skills by making healthy "recipes."

Ask her to tell you her favorite way to eat cereal. Let

her write (or dictate to you) each step in the process. *Example:* 1. Slice a banana. 2. Slice strawberries. 3. Put cereal in a bowl. 4. Pour milk on top. 5. Lay fruit on cereal. When you finish, help her read her recipe as you prepare it together.

Sort and graph

To make this edible graph, give your youngster four kinds of cereal and two ice cube trays or empty egg cartons. (*Note:* If you don't have four cereal brands, you can use other small food items such as raisins, nuts, or marshmallows.)

First, have him scoop 1 tablespoon of each cereal into a bowl. Then, let him place the ice cube trays side by side (vertically) to create four "columns." He can sort each type of cereal into a separate column, with one piece per cube. For example, he might put bran flakes in the first column, oat rings in the second column, corn puffs in the third, and wheat squares in the fourth.

Finally, help your child compare the columns in his graph. Take turns asking questions, such as "Which column has the most pieces?" or "How many more rings are there than puffs?"

Word collection

Young children often like to read words that appear on their favorite product.

Let your child use cereal boxes to collect words that she can read.

Place the boxes on the breakfast table. Ask her to point to words that look familiar, and help her read them aloud (*milk, nuts, fruit*). Then, let her write each word on a separate index card and draw a picture to go with it. Once she has several words, staple the index cards together to make a "word book" that she can read all by herself.

