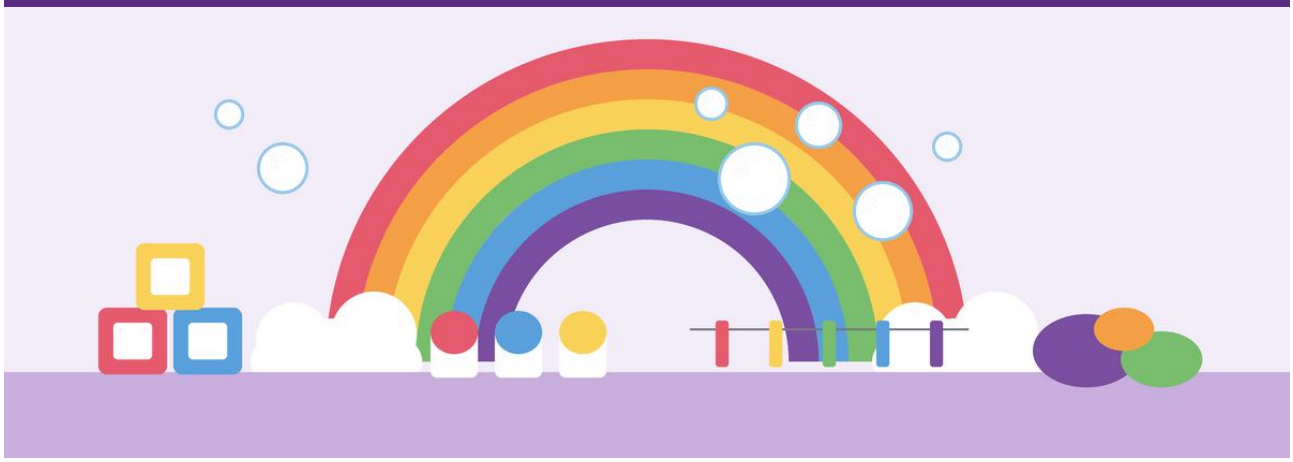
ACTIVITY SHEETS FOR FAMILIES

Play & Learn at Home

Simple, low-cost ideas for sensory play, movement, communication and more



Every child learns through play. These activity sheets are full of easy ideas that use everyday things you already have at home. Pick one that suits your child today, follow their lead, and have fun together.

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Sensory Play at Home

Easy, colourful activities to make, explore and enjoy together

Sensory play invites children to investigate texture, colour, sound and movement. These simple ideas use everyday materials and can be adapted to suit the space, time and supplies you have.

Safe play first: Stay close and supervise throughout. Choose appropriate materials, avoid small parts for children who may put items in their mouth, check allergies, and stop if anything irritates the skin. Keep dry rice, pasta, water beads and homemade mixtures away from mouths, eyes and drains.

1. Rainbow Rice Scoop & Pour

You will need: Dry rice, food colouring, a small splash of vinegar, a sealed container or bag, a tray, cups and spoons.

Make it: Shake rice with a few drops of colouring and vinegar, spread it out to dry completely, then tip it into a shallow tray.

Play: Scoop, pour, sort colours and hide larger toys to find. Listen to the rice as it falls.

2. Soft Cloud Dough

You will need: 4 cups plain flour, ½ cup vegetable oil, a bowl and washable tools.

Make it: Mix until the flour holds its shape when squeezed. Add a little more flour if needed.

Play: Press, mould, crumble and make tracks with toy vehicles. Use a tray or washable cloth underneath.

3. Calming Sensory Bottle

You will need: A clear plastic bottle, water, clear glue, glitter or sequins, and strong tape.

Make it: Half-fill the bottle with water, add clear glue and a small amount of glitter, then top up with water. Secure the lid firmly with strong tape and check it before every use.

Play: Turn, roll and gently shake the bottle. Watch the glitter swirl and settle while taking slow breaths.

4. No-Cook Playdough

You will need: 2 cups plain flour, ½ cup salt, 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, food colouring and about 1 cup warm water.

Make it: Mix the dry ingredients, then gradually add the oil, colouring and enough water to form a soft dough. Knead until smooth.

Play: Roll, pinch, stamp and cut shapes with child-safe tools. Store in a sealed container in the fridge and discard if it changes smell or appearance.

5. Foamy Bubble Play

You will need: A shallow bowl or tray, warm water, a small amount of child-friendly washing-up liquid, a whisk, cups and sponges.

Make it: Whisk the water and liquid into a mound of foam.

Play: Squeeze sponges, make bubble peaks, wash toy animals and compare full and empty cups. Keep the mixture away from eyes and rinse hands afterwards.

6. Kitchen Sound Shakers

You will need: Several sturdy lidded containers, strong tape, and different fillings such as rice, pasta or lentils.

Make it: Put one filling into each container and secure every lid completely with strong tape.

Play: Shake softly and loudly, copy simple rhythms, and guess which shakers sound alike. An adult should check every seal before play.

Make It Work for Your Family

- **Follow the child's lead:** joining in is optional; watching is sensory learning too.
- **Offer simple choices:** try two tools, two colours or two textures rather than presenting everything at once.
- **Adapt the texture:** use a spoon, gloves or a sealed bag if direct touch feels uncomfortable.
- **Keep it manageable:** a baking tray, shower curtain or outdoor space makes clean-up easier.
- **Talk as you play:** use words such as smooth, rough, squashy, heavy, quiet and fizzy.

Start small, explore together and enjoy the mess!

Our play notes

What did we try? What did my child enjoy? What will we try next time?

Fine Motor Fun at Home

Simple activities for busy fingers, growing confidence and everyday independence

Fine motor skills help children use the small muscles in their hands and fingers for dressing, drawing, cutting and much more. Short, playful practice at home can build strength, coordination and confidence.

Safe play first: Supervise throughout. Use large, age-appropriate items; avoid small parts for children who may put objects in their mouth. Choose child-safe scissors and check for allergies or sharp edges.

1. Peg Around the Circle

You will need: Clothes pegs and a sturdy cardboard circle or paper plate.

Set it up: Show how to squeeze a peg open and clip it around the edge.

Try this: Match coloured pegs, make a repeating pattern or count them as you go.

2. Pasta Threading

You will need: Large tube pasta, thick string or a shoelace, and tape.

Set it up: Tape one end of the string to the table so the pasta stays on.

Try this: Thread slowly, name colours, or copy a simple pattern. Adult supervision is essential.

3. Playdough Pinch & Roll

You will need: Playdough and child-safe cutters or a blunt modelling tool.

Set it up: Roll the dough into balls and long snakes.

Try this: Pinch tiny spikes, squash with fingertips, hide large objects to find, or snip dough with child-safe scissors.

4. Tong Transfer Challenge

You will need: Kitchen tongs, two bowls and large soft items such as pom-poms or scrunched paper balls.

Set it up: Put all the items in one bowl.

Try this: Squeeze, lift and transfer each item. Sort by colour or race against a favourite song—not another child.

5. Tear, Snip & Stick

You will need: Scrap paper, a glue stick, card and child-safe scissors.

Set it up: Draw a large simple shape on the card.

Try this: Tear or snip paper into pieces, then dab and stick them inside the shape to make a colourful collage.

6. Post, Sort & Drop

You will need: A clean box or reusable container with adult-cut openings, plus large lids, cards or blocks.

Set it up: Make openings that match the objects and cover rough edges securely.

Try this: Post one item at a time, turn pieces to fit, sort by size or colour, then open the box and begin again.

Little Ways to Build Hand Skills

- **Keep it short:** five to ten enjoyable minutes can be enough.
- **Use both hands:** encourage one hand to hold while the other hand works.
- **Practise everyday:** zips, buttons, pouring, stirring and opening lunch boxes all count.
- **Make it easier:** begin with larger objects and softer materials, then gradually make them smaller or firmer.
- **Praise effort:** notice careful looking, persistence and trying a new movement.

🎉 **Small movements today help build big independence tomorrow!** 🎉

📝 Our play notes

What did we try? What did my child enjoy? What will we try next time?

Gross Motor Fun at Home

Easy ways to build balance, strength, coordination and confidence through play

Gross motor skills use the large muscles of the body for running, jumping, climbing, balancing and throwing. These playful activities need little equipment and can be adapted for indoors or outdoors.

Safe movement first: Clear a roomy area and remove trip hazards. Use a non-slip surface, keep away from stairs and sharp furniture, supervise throughout, and choose movements that suit the child's age and ability. Pause for water and stop if there is pain, dizziness or unusual breathlessness.

1. Cushion Obstacle Course

You will need: Cushions, folded blankets, masking tape and sturdy chairs.

Set it up: Make a simple route to step over, crawl under, walk around and balance along. Keep chairs stationary and away from windows.

Try this: Move like a giant, tiptoe quietly or carry a soft toy to the finish.

2. Animal Walk Adventure

You will need: A clear floor space and your imagination.

Set it up: Choose animal movements such as bear walking, frog jumping, crab walking or slithering like a snake.

Try this: Call out an animal, travel to a marker and return in a different way.

3. Keep the Balloon Up

You will need: A balloon or a very light scarf.

Set it up: Stand in a clear area and tap the balloon gently into the air.

Try this: Use alternate hands, tap with an elbow or knee, count the taps, or work together to stop it touching the floor. Keep balloon pieces away from young children.

4. Sock-Ball Target Toss

You will need: Rolled-up socks, a laundry basket and floor markers.

Set it up: Place the basket nearby and mark two or three throwing spots.

Try this: Throw underarm, step farther back, aim with either hand or count how many land in the basket.

5. Freeze Dance

You will need: Music and a safe space to move.

Set it up: Play a favourite song and pause it at unexpected moments.

Try this: Dance fast, slow, high or low, then freeze like a statue. Add actions such as marching, spinning once or reaching across the body.

6. Balance Trail

You will need: Masking tape, paper shapes or small cushions.

Set it up: Make a straight, curved or zigzag trail on the floor.

Try this: Walk heel-to-toe, step between markers, pause on one foot while holding support, or carry a beanbag or folded sock.

Make Movement Work for Your Family

- **Start gently:** warm up with reaching, marching and shoulder rolls.
- **Offer choices:** let the child choose the activity, music or route.
- **Adapt the challenge:** shorten distances, use a wall or chair for support, or complete movements while seated.
- **Join in:** taking turns and copying each other keeps movement playful.
- **Celebrate effort:** focus on having a go, practising and noticing progress rather than winning.

Move, play and grow stronger together!

Our play notes

What did we try? What did my child enjoy? What will we try next time?

Communication & Interaction at Home

Playful ways to connect, take turns and share meaning—with or without words

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Communication begins long before spoken words. Looking, reaching, pointing, moving, making sounds, using facial expressions and taking turns are all meaningful ways to connect. Follow the child's interests and make interaction relaxed, playful and pressure-free.

⚠️ **Connect first:** Get down to the child's level, reduce background noise and allow plenty of time to respond. Accept every communication attempt—words, sounds, gestures, signs, pictures, eye gaze or movement. Never insist on eye contact or spoken words.

1. Ready, Steady…Go!

You will need: A favourite moving toy, bubbles, a ball or a scarf.

Set it up: Hold the item still and say, "Ready, steady…" then pause expectantly.

Try this: Treat any look, sound, movement, gesture or word as "go" and immediately start the fun. Repeat so the child learns that their communication has an effect.

2. Copy Me, Copy You

You will need: Just yourselves, or simple instruments and toys.

Set it up: Copy one action or sound the child makes.

Try this: Pause to see whether they notice or respond, then add one easy action such as tapping, clapping or banging. Keep the exchange playful rather than testing.

3. Bubble Turns

You will need: Bubbles and a clear space.

Set it up: Blow a few bubbles, then close the bottle and wait.

Try this: Notice how the child asks for more—perhaps by reaching, looking, vocalising, signing or saying a word. Model "more" with a word and gesture, then respond straight away.

4. What's in the Bag?

You will need: A bag and a few familiar objects or toys.

Set it up: Place the objects inside and take turns choosing one.

Try this: Name or show what it does, make a matching sound, and give the child time to explore. Offer a choice of two objects by holding both where they can see or reach them.

5. Pause-the-Song

You will need: A familiar action song or rhyme.

Set it up: Sing slowly with simple actions, then pause before a favourite part.

Try this: Wait for any signal to continue. The child might move, smile, look, make a sound, sign or say a word. Add actions, objects or pictures to make the song easier to join.

6. Chat Through a Book

You will need: A sturdy picture book or family photo book.

Set it up: Sit side by side and let the child turn pages or choose where to look.

Try this: Comment more than you question: "Big dog!" "Splash!" Point, copy sounds and wait. It is fine to enjoy only one page or read the same book again.

💜 Especially Helpful for Pre-Verbal Children

Remember: Pre-verbal does not mean "not communicating." Respond warmly to body movements, eye gaze, facial expressions, reaching, pointing, sounds, signs and use of pictures or communication aids.

People Games

Try peekaboo, gentle tickles, bouncing or "round and round the garden." Pause during the game and wait for a signal to continue. Stop immediately if the child turns away, pushes away or shows they have had enough.

Offer Real Choices

Hold up two snacks, toys or songs and name each one. Accept looking, reaching, touching, pointing, signing or vocalising as a choice. Give the chosen item so the child learns that communication works.

Mirror Sounds & Movements

Copy the child's babble, mouth movement, tap or sway, then wait. If they respond, copy again. This simple back-and-forth builds shared attention and the rhythm of conversation.

Show, Point & Name

Use real objects, photos, symbols or simple gestures during routines. Show the cup while saying "drink," point towards the door while saying "outside," and use the same word or sign consistently.

Action Songs Without Words

Use actions, objects and repeated movements so the child can join without speaking. Copy any movement they make and pause before the next action to invite a turn.

Make Communication Easier

- **Wait:** pause for up to ten seconds so the child has time to notice, plan and respond.
- **Comment, don't quiz:** say what the child is doing instead of asking lots of questions.
- **Add one step:** if the child gestures, add one word; if they use one word, model two.
- **Repeat favourite games:** familiar routines make it easier to anticipate and join in.
- **Follow their interests:** talk and play with what already captures their attention.
- **Keep all communication available:** continue using gestures, signs, pictures or communication aids alongside speech.

Notice every signal, respond and enjoy the connection!

Water Play at Home

Simple splashing, pouring and exploring activities for playful learning

Water play encourages coordination, curiosity, early maths and language through filling, emptying, squeezing and experimenting. A washing-up bowl, shallow tray or bath can become an inviting play space using items already at home.

Water safety first: An adult must stay within arm's reach and watch continuously—even with very shallow water. Never leave a child alone or in the care of another child. Empty containers immediately after play, store them upside down, wipe spills promptly and keep electrical items away. Use comfortably warm water and check the temperature before play.

1. Scoop, Fill & Pour

You will need: A shallow bowl of water, plastic cups, spoons, jugs and a funnel.

Set it up: Place the bowl on a towel or use it outdoors.

Try this: Fill and empty containers, pour through the funnel, compare full and empty, and count scoops. Begin with lightweight containers that are easy to hold.

2. Squeeze the Sponges

You will need: Two bowls, clean sponges or flannels and water.

Set it up: Put water in one bowl and leave the other empty.

Try this: Soak, lift and squeeze the water into the empty bowl. Compare big and small squeezes or see how many squeezes fill a cup.

3. Float or Sink?

You will need: A bowl of water and a few large, washable household objects such as a wooden spoon, plastic lid, sponge, toy boat or stone.

Set it up: Choose one object at a time and guess what will happen.

Try this: Gently place it in the water, notice whether it floats or sinks, then sort the objects into two groups. Avoid small objects for children who may mouth items.

4. Ice Rescue

You will need: Ice cubes, a shallow tray, warm water, spoons and a dropper or small cup.

Set it up: Put the ice in the tray shortly before play.

Try this: Drip or spoon warm water onto the ice, watch it melt and describe how it changes. Use plain ice only, supervise closely and stop if hands become uncomfortable.

5. Toy Wash Station

You will need: Washable plastic toys, two bowls, a small amount of child-friendly washing-up liquid, a cloth and a soft brush.

Set it up: Make one bowl bubbly and keep the other for rinsing.

Try this: Wash, scrub, rinse and dry the toys. Talk about clean and dirty, wet and dry, and take turns choosing the next toy.

6. Paint with Water

You will need: A pot of water and chunky paintbrushes, rollers or sponges.

Set it up: Choose a safe outdoor surface such as a wall, paving slab or fence panel.

Try this: Make lines, circles, hand-sized marks or pretend letters. Watch the marks grow lighter as the water dries—colour disappears without any paint.

Make Water Play Work for Your Family

- **Start small:** a baking tray with a little water can be less overwhelming than a large tub.
- **Offer tools:** use a spoon, cup, brush or gloves if direct touch feels uncomfortable.
- **Build communication:** model simple words and signs such as more, stop, pour, splash, wet and finished.
- **Follow the child's pace:** watching, dipping one finger or playing beside the water all count.
- **Protect the space:** place a towel or non-slip mat underneath and keep a dry towel nearby.
- **Finish safely:** empty the water straight away, dry the floor and wash the equipment before storing it.

Pour, splash, discover and learn together!

Our play notes

What did we try? What did my child enjoy? What will we try next time?

Educational iPad Apps

Useful digital tools for autistic children at home

The best app is one that matches the child's interests, communication style, sensory preferences and current learning goals. Apps can support learning and communication, but they do not need to replace shared play, movement, conversation or favourite offline activities.

Choose thoughtfully: Preview an app first, begin with a short session and watch how the child responds. Reduce sound, animation or visual clutter where possible. Prices, subscriptions and features can change, so check the App Store before downloading.

1. Reading & Early Maths

Khan Academy Kids

Play-based activities for ages 2–8 covering phonics, reading, counting, shapes, early maths, books and problem-solving. It is free, without adverts or subscriptions, and offers read-aloud content.

App Store: View in the App Store

2. Matching, Language & Concepts

Otsimo | Special Education

Customisable games using visual and auditory cues to practise vocabulary, letters, numbers, colours, emotions, matching, drawing and sequencing. Some activities are free; additional content requires an in-app purchase.

App Store: View in the App Store

3. Routines, Waiting & Feelings

Choiceworks

Create personalised visual schedules, waiting boards and feelings boards with pictures, text, audio and timers. This can make routines and transitions more predictable. It is a paid app with no adverts or account required.

App Store: View in the App Store

4. Symbols, Choices & Visual Supports

Twinkl Symbols AAC System

A free symbol-based tool for making communication boards, flashcards, visual timetables, timers and "now and next" boards. Families can use ready-made templates or personalise resources with their own photos.

App Store: View in the App Store

5. Personalised Schedules & Social Stories

Visual Schedule & Social Story

Create visual routines and simple personalised stories using pictures, text, audio and video. Useful for showing what will happen, breaking tasks into steps and preparing for unfamiliar events. The app is free to download with in-app purchases.

App Store: View in the App Store

6. Robust AAC Communication

Proloquo2Go AAC

A highly customisable symbol- and text-based communication app for people who cannot rely on speech alone. It supports a wide vocabulary that can grow from single words to full sentences. This is a higher-cost specialist app, so seek advice from the child's speech and language therapist or AAC team before buying or changing an established communication system.

App Store: View in the App Store

Help Apps Work Well at Home

- **Start with a purpose:** choose one goal, such as requesting, matching, phonics or following a routine.
- **Keep sessions predictable:** use a short timer or a simple "iPad, then play" visual.
- **Follow the child's cues:** pause if the app causes distress, overload or repeated frustration.
- **Learn together:** sit nearby, model how to use the app and celebrate communication rather than perfect answers.
- **Protect communication:** an AAC app should remain available throughout the day and should never be removed as a consequence.
- **Review privacy:** check adverts, in-app purchases, data collection and whether the app works offline before use.

Important: No app suits every autistic child. For communication support, a personalised approach matters: the National Autistic Society explains that AAC should be flexible and matched to the individual's needs. Read its AAC guidance.

iPad apps disclaimer

- Sycamore Trust UK has no connection with the apps listed and does not endorse them. They are included as examples only, and we receive no payment for including them.
- Apps are made and managed by other companies, who are responsible for their content, accuracy, safety and privacy practices.
- Prices, subscriptions, features and availability were checked in September 2026 and may change at any time.
- Before downloading, read each app's description, age rating, reviews and privacy policy. Use parental controls such as Screen Time on iPad to manage purchases and screen time and supervise your child's use of devices and the internet.
- Apps do not replace professional advice. Speak to your child's speech and language therapist or AAC team before introducing or changing a communication app.
- Sycamore Trust UK accepts no liability for any cost, loss or harm arising from downloading or using these apps.

Choose, explore and learn together—one useful app at a time!

Our play notes

What did we try? What did my child enjoy? What will we try next time?

Important information

These activity sheets are provided by Sycamore Trust UK as general ideas for play at home. They are not a substitute for individual advice from your child's health, education or therapy professionals, such as a speech and language therapist or occupational therapist.

Every child is different. Please choose activities that suit your child's age, development, sensory needs and interests, and stop any activity your child does not enjoy or that causes discomfort or distress.

An adult should supervise all activities at all times. Check materials for allergies, choking hazards and sharp edges before use, and never leave a child alone with water, however shallow.

App details, prices and features were checked in September 2026 and may change. Please check the App Store before downloading, and review each app's privacy settings, adverts and in-app purchases.

Sycamore Trust UK accepts no liability for any injury, loss or damage arising from the use of these activity sheets.

Share your ideas with us!

Have you found an activity your family loves? Let the Sycamore Trust Family Services team know, and we may include it in a future edition.