

32 Ways to Keep the Kids Occupied

By Connie McKenzie

Dedicated to Sara and Chantel.
My two adorable children without whom this book would never have existed.

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The How and Why of this e-book:

Being a mother of 2 gorgeous children and foster mother of several foster children ranging between the ages of 3 and 12 years old, there's quite often times when the kids start to get a little bit bored, and I have to come up with things to keep them happy, entertained, and occupied.

Throughout the years, we've come up with lots of things we can do together as a family that don't cost the earth. A lot of them are even free.

Some things we've thought up ourselves, other things are ideas passed down through generations and yet other things are what we have been lucky enough to learn about from various books, people and situations.

At first I thought it would be hard work coming up with so many ideas for you to use and adapt to suit your own needs, but once I got started it actually turned out to be quite easy. The few times I did get stuck, I just asked the kids what kind of things we usually do, and they were quick enough to remind me.

I'm sure both you and your child/children (or even your grandchildren) will find lots of great things to do together. Discuss the ideas within this book to see if they have any particular wants and needs in the quest to cure their boredom, and they may come up with even more things to do.

I've compiled this book with my two children and foster children in mind, but don't worry if you only have one child. A lot of the things are totally possible for a single child, and you could always invite a couple of his or her friends along to make it more fun.

Happy reading!

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Ready? Let's get started:

Great Ideas for Indoor Activities

1. Story time:

Read and discuss a book or a chapter of a book, make up your own endings. You can even make up your own stories by sitting the kids in a ring and letting them "add a sentence". We've made up lots of really funny stories this way.

2. Giant Easel:

Go to a charity shop or wallpaper shop and buy leftover rolls of wallpaper. Cover a wall with the paper, back to front, stick it up with blu-tac or drawing pins.

Give the kids paints, crayons, chalks pens etc and let them create their own frieze. The little ones reach the bottom, whilst the big ones can reach up to the top.

3. Wax Creations:

Give the kids their old, wax crayon stubs and let them make shavings from them with a butter knife onto a piece of wax paper. When they're done, carefully take their creations to the ironing board, lay another piece of wax paper on top, and briefly press with a warm iron.

Let the kids watch as the colours melt together. Put them on the table to cool down and harden.

4. Old Clothes:

Sort through all of your old clothes. There's bound to be something that doesn't fit, or isn't in fashion and that you're too embarrassed to take to a charity shop. If you haven't got anything at all ask your friends and family.

Get 2 cardboard boxes, one for "dress up" clothes, and one for rags. Fill the "dress up" box with the most outrageous clothes, and cut up the other clothes for the "rags" box. Let the kids play "dress up", or let them create things with the rags.

Hours and hours of fun!

5. Puppet Show:

Let the kids make finger puppets from paper, help them to create a "show" with a script and characters. Build up a few boxes stuck together with packing tape, make the top one have an opening at the front and hang up a curtain (you can use rags from the rag-box for this).

Let the kids practice until they feel really confident then invite a few friends or family members over to watch the "show".

6. Kitchen Fun:

Find some cookery books, let the kids choose a simple recipe and work together on making dinner, desserts, snacks or cakes. The older ones can do the main cooking, and the younger ones can do the measuring or decorating.

7. Mini Worm Farm:

Get a large clear plastic container, some soil, leaves, a little sand, and some bits of vegetables to create the farm. Dig up some earthworms. Fill the container with loose layers of soil and sand, beginning with soil and alternating the layers. Make the soil layers about 4x the size of the sand layers. Also make sure the top layer is soil. 4 or 5 layers should be enough. Drop some small bits of vegetables and leaves on top, and then put the worms in.

Add a lid of some sort, making sure it has air holes. Put the newly created worm farm in a cool dark place for a few days. The worms will tunnel down through the layers, and the kids can see just how good they are at churning up the soil. Please remember to let the worms go when the kids have finished with them.

8. Jewellery:

Collect beads, buttons and string in a shoebox. When the kids are bored, bring out the shoebox and let them make necklaces and bracelets. There's bound to be tons of beads and buttons you can salvage from the rag-box.

9. Create A Picture:

Collect a whole bunch of colourful magazines and some small sheets of cardboard (A4 size is good). Give the kids a sheet of cardboard each, some PVA glue and some magazines.

Let them rip up and tear the magazines to their hearts content and create mosaic pictures or collages.

10. Board Games:

Board games are always a huge hit, so make sure you have plenty of them handy, everything from the simplest to the most advanced.

Come up with new ways of playing the games; under a blanket with a torch, under the table, out in the shed, or even with new “home-made” rules etc. It will add that little bit of excitement to games the kids may be tired of.

11. Ghost Stories:

If you're ready for a sleepless night, try an evening of ghost stories. First, find a couple of torches/flashlights, then cover a table with a heavy blanket. The goal here is for the kids (and you) to make up ghost stories as ghoulish as they dare.

Everybody crouches under the table, with just the lights from the torches and takes turn telling stories. Depending on the age of the kids participating, be prepared to be freaked out!

12. Growing A Seed:

Kids of all ages love this one, because it's not just sticking a seed into soil and hoping it will grow. This way you can tell when it starts rooting.

Get a paper towel, fold it into a medium sized rectangle then dampen it. Put the seed between the 1st layer and the rest of the damp paper towel, and place the whole lot into a small plastic bag. A Ziploc sandwich bag works great for this.

Use a strip of masking tape on the bags with each child's name on it so they can check on their seeds progress. Close the bag and put it kind of dark but in a place where kids can walk up to check on their seeds and see the wonders of nature in action.

13. Indoor Crazy Golf:

Get the kids to sit down together and design a crazy golf course to run throughout the house (or just one room if you might have problems getting them to clean up afterwards). Use toys, bathroom stuff, kitchen utensils or anything else at hand to create the “holes” and routes.

Small plastic golf sets are easy to come by in most toy shops, and they're usually extremely cheap. Have treats ready for whenever a child reaches the end of the golf course.

Great Ideas for Outdoor Activities

14: Ribbon Sticks:

For this you need nothing more than some strips of wide ribbon and some bamboo sticks. A few 4ft sticks will do. Snap them in half and tie a length of ribbon to one end. Make the ribbon length no longer than what the kids can handle.

Let the kids loose with the sticks and tell them to try to make shapes, circles, and snakes etc just like the gymnasts do on T.V.

15. Garden Fun:

Buy a cheap plastic double sided sandbox for the garden. Fill one half with sand and the other half with water. Add a whole lot of kitchen utensils and containers, and the kids will occupy themselves for ages.

Make sure you always cover the sandbox when the kids are done, or you might find that your neighbour's cats may think it's their litter box...

16. Picking Berries:

Find a place with lots of berries, be it blackberries, strawberries, redcurrants, raspberries or whatever and go berry picking for the day. Sometimes you may have to pay for the berries, but there are a lot of places where berries grow in the wild and are free to pick and use.

Kids LOVE picking berries, so take this chance to make it into an educational thing by bringing along a book about berries. This way you can teach them which berries are safe to pick and which ones they need to stay away from. Use the berries you pick to make desserts, jams and cakes. Scrumptious fun!

17. Organize a Treasure Hunt:

This can be done in the house, garden, park or even on a short walk. Hide some small items, toys or sweets in various places. Draw up maps with "X Marks the Spot" and easy to follow directions.

Let the hunt begin!

18. Vegetable Patch:

If you have a garden, or access to one, see if you can get the kids involved in making a vegetable patch of their own. Seeds are pretty cheap and a lot of vegetables are extremely simple to grow and cultivate.

Try with carrots, lettuce leeks, spring onions and pumpkins for starters. Herbs are also really easy. Some extra simple ones are watercress, parsley, chives and basil.

19. Nature Walks:

Nature walks are one of the most inexpensive boredom busters ever created. All you need is energy and wide-open eyes. Of course, you can make the whole walk a lot more interesting by having something specific to look for.

Luckily for townfolk and city people, nature isn't just about being out in the country. Wherever there are trees, there's going to be birds. Where there's grass growing, flowers and weeds grow etc.

Borrow a book about wild flowers, birds or animals from your local library and refer to it every time the kids see something of interest. Take along a notepad and pencil for each of the kids to write down what they saw on the walk.

20. Borrow A Pet:

A great way to beat boredom in the school holidays is to get the kids involved with animals. If you don't own a pet of your own, you could offer to look after the schools gerbils and rabbits, or for that little bit "extra", why not offer to take your neighbours dog along with you on your nature walks?

21. Camping Out:

One thing kids never tire of is camping out somewhere. The easiest and cheapest place for that is in your own back yard or back garden. You can buy tents pretty cheap these days, and you don't need something huge. If you don't want to go to the expense of buying a tent, you can always make your own "temporary tent" by using a few sticks, sheets and tarpaulin.

Give the kids lots of snacks, a few flashlights and some sleeping bags. Warn the neighbours that there could be some noise. (If MY kids are anything to go by, there WILL be noise). Please make sure that don't lock ALL of your doors when you go to bed, as even though the kids may seem ready to "camp out" they might possibly get a bit wary late at night when the rest of the gang is asleep or it might even get a bit chilly and then it's good for the kids to be able to snuggle up in real beds.

22. Toy Sail Boats:

This one is a really old pastime, but tons of fun. Get a plastic bottle and cut it in half lengthways. Make the sail from a wooden Kebab stick and some paper. There are tons of other household items that can be used, so look around and use your imagination.

Make sure you hang some weight to the bottom of the boat to make sure it doesn't keel over. A lollypop stick with some oil based play dough will work for a short while. (Practice in the kitchen sink to see what works best for you.)

Once the boats are ready, walk to your nearest pond or stream, or even fill up the bathtub and go sailing. Hours of fun for free!

23. Neighbourhood Walk:

Believe it or not, most kids like to actually learn about the area where they live. Take them out for a walk in your neighbourhood and let them explore the houses, parks and shops in the area. Talk about the older buildings and imagine what life might have been like in the "olden days"

A trip to the local library can be good fun and useful for researching "the way it was" in your area, and it can use up a lot of otherwise fruitless hours of kids having nothing to do.

24. Ring Toss:

You need a few plastic bottles filled with water, sand or small stones (2 litre bottles are best) and some paper plates. Buy a packet of at least 20 cheap paper plates. Glue 2 paper plates together and cut out the middles to make a ring. When you glue 2 together it will add weight to the rings.

Paint the newly created rings in bright colours and hand them out to the kids. Make a line with chalk or rope for them to stand behind and place the bottles at various intervals and distances away from the children.

Anybody who manages to get a ring over a bottle takes one step back and tries again. See how far away they can get and still manage to ring the bottles.

Great Ideas for Travelling Activities

25. 20 Questions:

Everyone writes down a secret word which must be a noun (the name of an object). The others try to guess your word by asking questions about it.

Take turns until everyone has tried their word. You could have playoffs between the ones that stumped the lot, until only one was left.

26. Word Play:

This one is really good for older kids who are learning to read, write and spell. Take it in turns to say a word. Any old word will do, the next person then has to take the last letter of the first word and think up another word and so on.

So say person one said “engine” person 2 would need to find a word beginning with the letter “e”, let’s say “elephant” next person in line would then have to find a word beginning with the letter “t”, such as “toys”. The winner is the last person to be able to think up a word.

27. I Went To Market:

This is another memory game which is really popular with my kids. Everybody takes it in turn to say “I went to market and I bought....” and add what they bought. Next person has to say “I went to market and I bought.... And...”

This carries on until nobody can remember the list of things that got bought at market. Again, the last person to remember the whole list is the winner.

28. Find the Place:

Make a map of where you are going, but make it simple for the kids to understand. Write down names of cities, towns and villages that you will pass through on the way to your destination. Give the kids a pen/marker so that they can check off each place as you reach it. It’ll make the journey seem a lot shorter for them.

29. Car Colours:

Give each child a pen and piece of paper and tell them to choose a colour. From then on they have to mark down every time they see a car of the colour they have chosen. The first person to spot say 15, or 30 cars of their chosen colour is the winner.

30. Alphabet Soup:

This is a game where everybody takes it in turns to come up with words beginning with the various letters of the alphabet. First person comes up with something for the letter "A" (apples), next person finds something with the letter "B" (boat) and so on.

X, U and Z are the most difficult, so it might be an idea to drop those letters. You can make the game harder by choosing categories such as famous people, or places or even animals and fruit.

31. Personal Bags

Let each child pack a small bag of their favourite toys and games to take with them. Make a rule that they are only allowed to take out one thing at a time, and they can only play with it for a certain amount of time, depending on the length of your journey.

Also encourage the kids to swap their toys/games if the journey is a long one so that they get a bit of variation in what they're doing.

32. Travel Diary:

This one is extremely good for longer journeys, especially when you stop off at various places on the way. Each child will need a notepad and pen. The older ones can have disposable cameras and the younger ones can have art books and crayons.

Let them document the trip by taking pictures (or drawing) and writing notes about where they are, what they've seen and what they have done on the journey.

Not only will this keep them occupied, but it will also give YOU something to read on reflect on in time for the next journey.

No matter what the weather may be, rain, snow or shine, there's something here for kids of just about all ages. 32 great activities and ideas to help you keep the kids occupied AND keep your sanity intact.

Enjoy!

Connie

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Desire More to Achieve More

A motto to live by, in ALL aspects of life, quoted from Napoleon Hill's book "Think rich, grow rich".

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