

28 Indoor Activities for Kids

It seems safe to say that many parents are juggling health fears alongside logistical ones. What do you do when kids are at home and stuck inside?

“I’ve been trying to do fun activities with them,” reporter Rebecca Kanthor wrote of being stuck indoors with her kids in Shanghai, “but even with my best intentions, I find my temper running thin.” Comparing the lockdown to an extended snow day, she comforted herself by imagining how her children might remember this time when they’re older. It’s a nice idea, one I’m trying to keep in mind while putting the cushions back on the couch for the 500th time.

My family, which includes two children, ages almost 4 and 8 months, spent the last two weekends mostly housebound, hopefully minimizing some risk — but also wreaking havoc on the living room and burning through our go-to indoor activities. So I asked a few parents with children my kids’ age or a bit older what they do with their kids when they’re stuck inside, plus two women with three adult children each, including my own mom. Though some of these suggestions require adult supervision and oversight, others do not, and may come in handy as more and more workplaces mandate or encourage people who can to work from home.

Below, 28 quick ideas for when you and your kids are in need of easy indoor activities. Each should buy you 10 to 15 minutes (we hope).

ART ACTIVITIES

1. Basic coloring and drawing

“I try to go to this first, because it is a little tough when both are involved. I have a 1-year-old and a 3-year-old, and it has to be age-appropriate. But both can color and draw (sort of).” — Samantha, 1-year-old and 3-year-old.

2. Butcher paper

“Unroll it, then let the kids color on the floor. Or put up on the wall if you have the room. Something about having such a big, unbroken piece of paper to work with feels different and exciting.” — Jennifer, three adult children.

3. Heavy-duty art supplies

“For more detailed craft stuff, I take out heavy-duty supplies: glue, pom-poms. They can either organize the pom-poms by color or just glue them on paper in some kind of organization — by color, in a line. Anything that takes as long as possible.” — Samantha, 1-year-old and 3-year-old.

4. Concoct potions

“Mix all your old unused beauty products together and see what happens! (This is probably slightly skewed by the fact that I have a lot of random swag at home.)” —Izzy, 6.5-year-old and a 3-year-old.

5. \$1 kits

“You can get these from places like Target; they’re boxes that contain things like a wooden cutout with washable paint and a paintbrush. Everything you need is just in it, and I like to keep these on hand. I did try this with the 1-year-old one day, though — and it just escalated into her putting the paint all over her hands and putting (washable!) paint everywhere. I thought it was pretty funny and cute. My husband, not so much.” — Samantha, 1-year-old and 3-year-old.

6. Play-Doh

“Bring out various things of Play-Doh and, I don’t know, get creative with that. Just let them do what they want with it.” — Susan, three adult children (including the author).

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

7. Dance party

“Turn on music! I like dancing around with my grandson.” — Susan, three adult children (including the author).

8. Simulate outdoor scenes

“You know the movie Mannequin, with the elaborate storefronts — a camping one, an island one? I’ll find weird ways to re-create different outdoor scenes in different parts of the house. Here’s camping, for example, with a fort in the living room and playing sounds of rain because we’re in a rainy campground. Dye the bathwater blue and say it’s the ocean.” — Samantha, 1-year-old and 3-year-old.

9. Jumping jacks

“Trust me, this is kind of fun. Everyone who can do them can try to do them.” — Susan, three adult children (including the author).

10. Bathtub

“Just let them hang out in there! (Supervised, of course.) I mean, why not?” — Jennifer, three adult children.

“You can get creative in the bathtub, and the mess just stays in there.” — Susan, three adult children (including the author).

11. Take advantage of outdoor space

“Use what you have — a shared backyard, a patio, a porch. Even opening the window and making up stories about what you see out there.” — Elyse, 4-year-old and 1-year-old.

12. Air-mattress trampoline

“My only real stuck-indoors hack is to blow up the air mattress and let the kids jump on it. They love it.” — Izzy, 6.5-year-old and 3-year-old.

GAMES

13. Stacking toys like Magna-Tiles

“My kids like to build things and then just smash them down. The smashing part, that’s the most important part to them.” — Elyse, 4-year-old and 1-year-old.

14. Workbooks and puzzles

“We once lived in a motel for 10 days. My co-parent was in school, so it was me and my three kids, stuck inside the motel room while it dumped rain outside. I think my kids watched more TV then than they did at any other point in their lives, but I also got a bunch of workbooks and puzzles. I made sure we had a loose structure of when we were doing what.” — Jennifer, three adult children.

15. Variations on Uno

“We started playing Uno with our preschooler, and you know what? It’s fun. We also have a game called Swap that’s similar — except for, you exchange cards with various players.” — Jen, 8-month-old and 3.5-year-old.

FOOD

16. Baking

“We were making sugar cookies, and I thought the baby had gone down for a long nap, but he was fussing. I went into where he was sleeping — I thought I’d be gone just a minute — and left my two preschoolers alone in the kitchen. They had a lot of fun with the flour while I was gone. That was a little discouraging — I remember flour everywhere. And I don’t think I ever got the baby back to sleep. That was a disaster. Other times, though, sure: baking.” — Susan, three adult children (including the author).

17. Snacks in shapes

“My mom taught me this — use cookie cutters to make star-shaped sandwiches or whatever. We hoped it would get my eating-averse son to chow down, but no such luck. He did like using the dinosaur cutter, though, and it felt like an ‘event.’” — Jen, 8-month-old and almost-4-year-old.

18. Baking again

“I think I’m too uptight to do this? My kids and I do it, but it takes forever. I often wonder why I do it.” — Elyse, 4-year-old and 1-year-old.

19. Baking, Part III

“Honestly, why would anyone do this? Not only is it messy, it’s so germey. Does anyone like baking with their kids?” — Jen, 8-month-old and 4-year-old.

20. Baking!

“I love to bake with my kids.” — Anonymous liar.

ENTERTAINMENT**21. Classic TV like Sesame Street**

“Or any kind of TV. I feel pretty confident I’m not the only one who did this.” — Susan, three adult children (including the author).

22. Embrace new offerings on streaming services

“Can I just answer ‘TV’ for this? Netflix and whatnot?” — Elyse, 4-year-old and 1-year-old.

23. Interactive electronic games

“Do kids still play Nintendo? They do, right?” — Susan, three adult children (including the author).

24. Good, old-fashioned reading

“It’s so simple, but read books.” — Jennifer, three adult children.

25. Do your craft failures while the kids watch TV

“I got really excited to make a dollhouse out of cardboard Amazon boxes. I told my 3-year-old that she was gonna love it, that it would be so fun. I took out all the supplies, and she was completely uninterested. I got pretty deep into cutting up a box and using

the glue gun — she still couldn't have cared less. So she watched TV, and I made a very cool cardboard dollhouse. Not a total loss.” — Samantha, 1-year-old and 3-year-old.

26. Dinner and a movie

“Eating in the living room while the TV is on — that's definitely a treat that might happen if we're stuck inside for a while.” — Samantha, 1-year-old and 3-year-old.

27. Movie marathon

“We didn't have other types of screens when my kids were little — we didn't say ‘screen time’ — but I guess that's what we did when they were stuck inside for whatever reason. Make an exception; watch seven movies. There's so much pressure on people to be perfect parents, but I think being stuck inside is a time to try to ease that.” — Jennifer, three adult children.

OTHER

28. Naptime, if you are so lucky

“Count down the hours until naptime. Naptime, that was always a good time.” — Susan, three adult children (including the author).

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