

Screen-Free Activity Menu

100 alternatives to screens organized by age group and category

100 Screen-Free Activities

The most effective way to reduce screen time isn't willpower — it's having better alternatives readily available. This menu gives you 100 specific activities organized by age and category. Post it on the fridge. When your child says "I'm bored," point them here. Boredom is the birthplace of creativity — but sometimes they need a launchpad.

Babies & Toddlers (0-3 Years) — 25 Activities

Sensory & Motor Play

- 1. Water table or bath play with cups, funnels, and spoons
- 2. Sensory bins (dried rice, pasta, beans with scoops and containers)
- 3. Finger painting on paper or in a zip-lock bag (mess-free option)
- 4. Playdough — make your own (flour, salt, water, cream of tartar, food coloring)
- 5. Stacking and knocking down blocks (over and over — this IS learning)
- 6. Peeling stickers off a sheet and sticking them on paper
- 7. Tearing paper and crumpling it into balls (fine motor powerhouse)
- 8. Exploring textures — fur, sandpaper, silk, bumpy balls, smooth stones

Active / Gross Motor

- 9. Dance party (put on music and move)
- 10. Obstacle course with couch cushions, pillows, and tunnels
- 11. Ball rolling, throwing, chasing
- 12. Bubble chasing and popping
- 13. Climbing at a playground or on safe indoor furniture
- 14. Wagon or push-toy walks around the neighborhood

Quiet / Cognitive

- 15. Board books — reading together or "reading" independently
- 16. Shape sorters and nesting cups
- 17. Simple puzzles (3–12 pieces)
- 18. Singing songs with hand motions (Itsy Bitsy Spider, Wheels on the Bus)
- 19. Hide-and-seek with toys ("Where did the bear go?")
- 20. Sorting objects by color, size, or type

Outdoor

- 21. Nature walk — stop and examine leaves, rocks, bugs, flowers
- 22. Sandbox or dirt digging
- 23. Puddle jumping after rain
- 24. Watching birds, squirrels, or ants (narrate what you see)
- 25. Garden watering with a small watering can

Preschoolers (3–5 Years) — 25 Activities

Creative

- 26. Drawing and coloring (with crayons, markers, or colored pencils)
- 27. Painting — watercolors, tempera, or finger paint
- 28. Cutting and gluing collages from magazines
- 29. Building with cardboard boxes (rocket ship, fort, car)
- 30. Dress-up and dramatic play (costumes, pretend restaurant, doctor's office)
- 31. Play kitchen cooking with real (uncooked) ingredients
- 32. Making necklaces or bracelets with large beads and string

Active

- 33. Freeze dance (dance when music plays, freeze when it stops)
- 34. Red Light Green Light / Simon Says / Follow the Leader
- 35. Tricycle or balance bike riding
- 36. Hopscotch (chalk on driveway)
- 37. Pillow fights (yes, really — gross motor + social regulation)
- 38. Yoga for kids (simple poses: tree, cat, dog, butterfly)

Learning Through Play

- 39. Matching and memory card games
- 40. Counting objects around the house ("How many red things can you find?")
- 41. Letter and number magnets on the fridge
- 42. Simple board games (Candy Land, Hi Ho Cherry-O, The Sneaky Snacky Squirrel)
- 43. Puzzles (24-48 pieces)
- 44. Measuring and pouring in the kitchen (baking together)

Outdoor

- 45. Catching bugs and examining them (magnifying glass if you have one)
- 46. Sidewalk chalk art
- 47. Sprinkler or hose play
- 48. Planting seeds and watching them grow
- 49. Going on a scavenger hunt ("Find something rough, smooth, round, red")
- 50. Flying a kite

School-Age (6-9 Years) – 25 Activities

Creative & Building

- 51. LEGO free-build or by instructions
- 52. Origami (start with simple animals – YouTube tutorials for learning, then do from memory)
- 53. Comic book or story creation (draw and write your own)
- 54. Friendship bracelet making
- 55. Building with recycled materials (marble run from paper towel tubes, robot from boxes)
- 56. Perler bead designs
- 57. Learning to knit or finger-knit

Active

- 58. Bike riding (neighborhood loops, trails)
- 59. Jump rope – learning tricks and rhymes
- 60. Backyard sports (soccer, catch, basketball, badminton)
- 61. Roller skating or rollerblading

- 62. Building a fort or treehouse (with supervision for tools)
- 63. Swimming

Cognitive & Social

- 64. Board games — Chess, Checkers, Blokus, Ticket to Ride Junior, Uno
- 65. Card games — Go Fish, War, Crazy Eights, Spot It
- 66. Jigsaw puzzles (100–300 pieces)
- 67. Science experiments (baking soda volcano, invisible ink, crystal growing)
- 68. Reading independently (graphic novels count — Captain Underpants, Dog Man, Amulet)
- 69. Writing letters to grandparents or pen pals
- 70. Learning a magic trick and performing it

Outdoor & Nature

- 71. Geocaching (treasure hunting with a GPS — parent's phone used as a tool, not entertainment)
- 72. Bird watching with a field guide
- 73. Creek exploring, rock collecting, or fossil hunting
- 74. Building a fire (supervised) and roasting marshmallows
- 75. Stargazing — learn constellations

Tweens & Teens (10–18 Years) — 25 Activities

Creative & Productive

- 76. Learning an instrument (guitar, ukulele, piano, drums)
- 77. Sketching, painting, or digital art (with a stylus and tablet — still creative, minimal passive screen)
- 78. Journaling or creative writing
- 79. Photography (use a real camera or phone in airplane mode)
- 80. Cooking or baking a full recipe independently
- 81. Sewing, embroidery, or crochet
- 82. Woodworking or model building

Active

- 83. Skateboarding or BMX
- 84. Rock climbing (gym or outdoor)
- 85. Martial arts practice
- 86. Running or jogging (Couch to 5K programs work well for beginners)
- 87. Yoga or stretching routine
- 88. Pick-up sports with friends (basketball, soccer, frisbee, volleyball)

Cognitive & Social

- 89. Complex board games (Settlers of Catan, Pandemic, Wingspan, Azul)
- 90. Escape room puzzle books
- 91. Reading (actual books — the physical kind)
- 92. Learning a new language (flashcards, conversation practice)
- 93. Volunteering (animal shelter, food bank, community garden)
- 94. Starting a small business (lawn care, pet sitting, craft sales)

Outdoor & Adventure

- 95. Hiking — increase distance and difficulty over time
- 96. Camping (backyard counts for beginners)
- 97. Fishing
- 98. Kayaking, canoeing, or paddleboarding
- 99. Gardening — plan, plant, tend, harvest
- 100. Simply being outside with nothing planned (this is where the magic happens)

TRANSITION TIP

The transition off screens is hardest in the first 15–20 minutes. Expect resistance. Once children engage with a real-world activity, they almost always prefer it. The parenting move: tolerate their frustration during the transition. Say "I know it's hard to stop. What sounds fun from the activity list?" Don't give in. The boredom will pass.

HOW TO USE THIS LIST

Post this list where everyone can see it. Let your child highlight their favorites. Add your own family-specific activities to the margins. The best screen-free activity is the one they'll actually choose.

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