

BRAIN BUILDING TIPS for Early Childhood Environments



TRANSITIONS

SMALL GROUPS

DRAMATIC PLAY

OUTDOOR PLAY

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TRANSITIONS



Even when you have a predictable schedule, those times in the day when children move from one activity to another can be extra challenging. Cleaning up, waiting and preparing for the next activity can all be times when children need extra supports. You can ease children through these transitions by making them fun, interactive and engaging – all while building brain power!



TELL ME A TALE



TIP

Look for something in the room to start a story. It could be a picture or an object. Begin with “Once upon a time, there was a ...” Encourage your child to continue the story. Take turns adding to it. It doesn’t matter if the story makes sense, as long as you’re having fun! with them.

Brainy Background™

Having fun with stories is a great way for your child to learn and use many different words. When you make up the story together, your child is practicing the skills of creativity and of working together. They’re also using their working memory to remember what has already happened in the story.

FOLLOW THE LEADER



TIP

Turn your trip into follow the leader. Ask your child, “Can you do what I do?” while you pat your head. Then switch it up. If you pat your head, have them pat their stomach. Keep switching!

Brainy Background™

The game of doing the same and then opposite actions helps your child remember the rules of the game, think flexibly, and not go on autopilot. This helps them learn to pay attention and exercise self-control—essential skills for school and life success.

WHAT'S NEXT?



TIP

Encourage your child’s independence by asking them questions instead of telling them what to do. If you’re getting ready to leave the house, instead of telling them to put shoes on, try saying something like, “I see your socks are on. What comes next?”

Brainy Background™

Asking questions encourages them to think before acting instead of just responding automatically. This ability takes focus and self-control: your child must stop what they might want to do so they can reach a goal, even something as simple as putting on shoes!

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SMALL GROUPS



Gathering children together for fun group learning experiences is an important part of your day. Finding activities that work well for different temperaments and learning styles can be challenging. Try these tips when planning small group activities for your classroom.

HOT POTATO



Tip

You and your child can play this game anywhere you are. Find a small item to pass back and forth and sing a song as you do. As the song ends, whoever has the object does something special or silly, like blink three times or jump up and down. Take turns.

Brainy Background™

Playing Hot Potato gives your child practice in following the rules and taking turns. It also gives them practice with self-control, a skill that helps them to stick with something long enough to meet their goals.

WOULD YOU RATHER...



Tip

Ask your child questions like, "Would you rather be a bird or a fish? Why?" Have them give you a few reasons from real-life experience like, "I love the water so I want to be a fish!" Then you take a turn answering their questions!

Brainy Background™

Asking your child questions helps develop their reasoning skills—especially when you ask questions that go beyond simple "yes" or "no" answers.

SORT AND SWITCH



Tip

Lay out three to four similar objects—such as boxes or plastic containers of different sizes. Ask your child to line them up from longest to shortest. Then line them up a different way—such as from widest to thinnest or biggest to smallest. Have a conversation about all the ways you can compare them!

Brainy Background™

Children of this age are learning that when you move an object around it is still the same object—an important understanding in children's development. Your child is also learning that when he/she moves objects around, he/she can notice different properties—their length, width, and size.

BRAIN BUILDING TIPS for Early Childhood Environments

DRAMATIC PLAY



You can help children grow their language, problem-solving skills, and inventive thinking when you join them in pretend play. When we encourage imaginative thinking we teach children how to engage in deeper conversations and think creatively for solutions - all while helping them understand the world around them.

BE A FIXER



TIP

Pretend to fix things with your child. With a plastic spoon, pretend to fix a hinge on a kitchen cabinet. "I'm fixing this broken hinge on the cabinet door. Now it's your turn to Be a Fixer." When they have had a turn, hold out your hand. "My turn." Keep taking turns, smiling while you work.

Brainy Background™

Pretending is an important way that children make sense of their experience—that broken things need fixing. And, when children pretend, they learn that one thing (a plastic spoon) can "stand for" something else (a tool to fix a broken hinge). That is the basis of understanding symbols, which is important to literacy and math.

FILL IN THE BLANK



TIP

Fill in the blanks to make up a story: "We're going to _____. When we get there we'll see _____." As your child gets in the rhythm, take turns going back and forth. Is your story realistic? Make believe? There is no right or wrong, just have fun!

Brainy Background™

Creating a fill-in-the-blanks story means your child is thinking and cannot go on automatic pilot. They have to shift their thinking to respond to an unpredictable and changing story line. Thinking in flexible ways encourages problem solving skills.

REPORTING LIVE!



TIP

While waiting at the supermarket, drugstore, or doctor's office, pretend you're a newscaster. Using your pretend microphone, ask your child questions: "What do you see? Who else is here? What do you think is going to happen next?"

Brainy Background™

Giving your child a chance to tell the news provides them with an opportunity to observe what is happening around them and put it into words. They're learning to be an effective communicator. There's nothing like a pretend microphone to get someone talking!

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OUTDOOR PLAY



Outdoor play time is much more than an opportunity for children to burn off extra energy. The outdoor environment offers the space for them to move their bodies to develop skills in all areas of their motor, language and social/emotional development. Children will also grow in their sensory awareness when we talk about the world around them. Check out these tips for ideas on how you can support brain building while outdoors.



FINGER TELESCOPE



Tip

When outside, make a telescope with your hands. Circle your fingers and hold them to your eye and look at your child telling them, "I see you!" Show them how to make their own finger telescope. Take turns looking through the finger telescope and sharing what you see.

Brainy Background™

This simple game is not only fun, it gives your child the chance to pay attention to their surroundings and think flexibly as they see familiar people and things in a new way. Being flexible is a big part of problem-solving and making the most out of life.

UP AND OVER



Tip

Ask your child to find an object like a stick or rock and place it on the ground near you. Encourage them to explore different ways of moving over it: Can they jump? Hop over on just one foot? Run and then jump? Take turns jumping with them and talk together about how far you both go.

Brainy Background™

It takes focus and self-control for your child to manage how their body moves, as well as flexible thinking to come up with different ideas. Fun experiences with math ideas like space and distance help them develop a foundation for learning now and in the future.

FAST-SLOW RACE



Tip

Invite your child to have a Fast-Slow Race. Find a starting line and count, "1, 2, 3!" together, then GO! As you get going, call out "slow!" Can they adjust their speed? Give them a turn calling out "fast" or "slow." How fast can you go? How slow?

Brainy Background™

During a Fast-Slow Race, your child is practicing how to listen to directions, how to switch what they're doing, and do what the game calls for. This lays the foundation for being able to manage feelings and actions, now and in the future.





Visit **GrowYoungBrains.org** for more information on brain building resources for child care programs.

