

Activities for Children 48 - 60 Months Old



Play the "who, what, and where" game. Ask your child who works in a school, what is in a school, and where is the school. Expand on your child's answers by asking more questions. Ask about other topics, like the library, bus stop, or post office.	When you are setting the table for a meal, play the "what doesn't belong" game. Add a small toy or other object next to the plate and eating utensils. Ask your child if she can tell you what doesn't belong here. You can try this game any time of the day. For example, while brushing your child's hair, set out a brush, barrette, comb, and a ball.	Let your child help prepare a picnic. Show him what he can use for the picnic (bread, peanut butter, and apples). Lay out sandwich bags and a lunch box, basket, or large paper bag. Then go have fun on the picnic.	On a rainy day, pretend to open a shoe store. Use old shoes, paper, pencils, and a chair to sit down and try on shoes. You can be the customer. Encourage your child to "write" your order down. Then she can take a turn being the customer and practice trying on and buying shoes.	Play the "guess what will happen" game to encourage your child's problem-solving and thinking skills. For example, during bath time, ask your child, "What do you think will happen if I turn on the hot and cold water at the same time?" or "What would happen if I stacked the blocks to the top of the ceiling?"
Play "bucket hoops." Have your child stand about 6 feet away and throw a medium-size ball at a large bucket or trash can. For fun outdoors on a summer day, fill the bucket with water.	Write your child's name often. When your child finishes drawing a picture, be sure to put his name on it and say the letters as you write them. If your child is interested, encourage him to name and/or to copy the letters. Point out the letters in your child's name throughout the day on cereal boxes, sign boards, and books.	Invite your child to play a counting game. Using a large piece of paper, make a simple game board with a straight path. Use dice to determine the count. Count with your child, and encourage her to hop the game piece to each square, counting each time the piece touches down.	Make a person with playdough or clay using sticks, buttons, toothpicks, beads, and any other small items. Start with a playdough (or clay) head and body and use the objects for arms, legs, and eyes. Ask your child questions about his person.	Encourage your child to learn her full name, address, and telephone number. Make it into a singing or rhyming game for fun. Ask your child to repeat it back to you when you are riding in the car or on the bus.
Cut out three small, three medium, and three large circles. Color each set of circles a different color (or use colored paper for each). Your child can sort the circles by color or by size. You can also ask your child about the different sizes. For example, ask your child, "Which one is smallest?" Try this game using buttons removed from an old shirt.	Go on a walk and pick up things you find. Bring the items home and help your child sort them into groups. For example, groups can include rocks, paper, or leaves. Encourage your child to start a collection of special things. Find a box or special place where he can display the collection.	Play a picture guessing game. Cover a picture in a familiar book with a sheet of paper and uncover a little at a time until your child has guessed the picture.	Let your child help you prepare a meal. She can spread peanut butter and jelly, peel a banana, cut with a butter knife, pour cereal, and add milk (using a small container). Never give her a task involving the stove or oven without careful supervision.	"Write" and mail a letter to a friend or relative. Provide your child with paper, crayons or pencil, and an envelope. Let your child draw, scribble, or write; or he can tell you what to write down. When your child is finished, let him fold the letter to fit in the envelope, lick, and seal. You can write the address on the front. Be sure to let him decorate the envelope as well. After he has put the stamp on, help mail the letter.
Play "circus." Find old, colorful clothes and help your child put on a circus show. Provide a rope on the ground for the high wire act, a sturdy box to stand on to announce the acts, fun objects for a magic act, and stuffed animals for the show. Encourage your child's imagination and creativity in planning the show. Don't forget to clap.	Take a pack of playing cards and choose four or five matching sets. Lay the cards out face up, and help your child to find the pairs. Talk about what makes the pairs of cards the "same" and "different."	Make bubbles. Use ¼ cup dishwashing liquid (Dawn or Joy works best) and 2⅔ cups water. Use straws to blow bubbles on a cookie sheet. Or make a wand by stringing two pieces of a drinking straw onto a string or piece of yarn. Tie the ends of the string together to make a circle. Holding onto the straw pieces, dip the string in the bubble mixture. Pull it out and gently move forward or backward. You should see lovely, big bubbles.	Make a bean bag to catch and throw. Fill the toe of an old sock or pantyhose with ¾ cup dry beans. Sew the remaining side or tie off with a rubber band. Play "hot potato" or simply play catch. Encourage your child to throw the ball overhand and underhand.	Pretend to be an animal. Encourage your child to use her imagination and become a kitty. You can ask, "What do kitties like to eat?" or "Where do kitties live?" Play along, and see how far the game can go.



Communication

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child is learning new words every day, and he enjoys playing with language by rhyming words. He may use very silly language and laugh at his own jokes. He uses a lot of inflection (changes in his voice) when he describes events. He knows the difference between day and night, today and tomorrow. He can carry out three or more simple commands. He also knows that printed letters and words mean something to others.

Puppets Puppets can be made in many different ways. You can use a small lunch bag, an old sock, or a paper circle glued on a Popsicle stick. Your child can make faces with crayons, markers, or paint. She can glue yarn or strips of paper for hair. Put on a puppet show of a familiar story or folktale. Have a conversation with the puppets, taking turns asking and answering questions.

Adventure Pals Take your child on a special trip to someplace new. You could visit a museum, a park or outdoor area, a new store, or a library. Plan it with your child. Talk about what you will be seeing and doing. After you come home, ask him questions about what he saw and did. Encourage him to tell other family members about the outing.

Feely Bag Gather some small objects from outside or around your house and put them in a paper bag. Let your child pick an item without looking, then have her try to guess what it is. If she has a hard time naming the item, help her along. For example, you could ask her, "Does it feel rough or smooth?"

All About Me Have your child make a book about himself. Start by stapling or putting together several pieces of paper with tape or yarn or ribbon. Your child can glue pictures of family members or pictures of things he likes from magazines. He can trace his hand on a page or draw pictures. Have your child "read" you his story or tell you about each of the pictures.

Big Helper Your child will enjoy helping you around the house. When it is mealtime, she could help set the table. Give her a few simple directions and see if she can remember the directions. For example, you could ask her, "Open the drawer, get four napkins, and put one on each plate." She may need some help remembering at first. Let her know what a big helper she is.

Cloudy Friends This activity is fun on a day the sky is filled with puffy clouds. Lay on your back and take turns pointing out different cloud shapes and patterns. Ask your child what the clouds look like. "Does it look like an ice cream cone?" "That one looks like a dinosaur!"



48–54 months



Gross Motor

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child is continuing to develop and refine her gross motor skills. She can ride a tricycle, weaving in and out of obstacles and stopping and turning with skill. She can kick a ball if you roll it into her path. She is learning to run and change direction without stopping and is learning how to somersault and gallop. She can keep herself going on a swing by pumping her legs back and forth and can throw a ball overhand about 10 feet.

- Air Balloon** Play this game with your child and maybe one or two other friends. Keep a balloon in the air by tapping it once to send it up into the air. As it comes down, it's someone else's turn to tap it up once. See how long you can keep the balloon from falling to the ground.
- Target Practice** Cut a few 8- to 9-inch holes out of a big piece of cardboard to make a target. Your child can decorate the target with paints. Prop the cardboard up, and let your child try to throw a tennis ball through the holes. Start by letting your child stand very close to the target, and then let him move back a few feet. Let him try throwing underhand and overhand. You can also pin a target on a tree or tape an X on a wall or fence.
- Ball Games** Your child is ready to practice ball skills. Some games can be changed a little to make them easier. For example, a small trash can on a chair could be a hoop for a basketball. Use a big ball and show your child how to dribble and shoot to make a basket. Play soccer by using any two objects for goals and kicking the ball to get a goal.
- Scarf Dancing** This is a great activity for a rainy day. Just turn on the radio, and your child can dance to the music. If you have scarves (or dishtowels), she can hold these in her hands while she dances. Try different kinds of music, such as rock and roll or whatever music your family enjoys. Encourage your child to listen and move to the rhythm.
- Circle Catch** It's fun to play catch with your child and a few friends. Use a ball about the size of a beach ball or slightly smaller. Show the children how to hold out their arms to get ready for the ball. Stand in a circle and throw the ball to each other. Get ready. Now catch!
- Playground Time** Bring your child to a neighborhood playground as often as possible. He will enjoy climbing, running, swinging, sliding, and learning new skills. Keep a close watch. He can be very daring!



48–54 months



Fine Motor

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child's finger movements are more controlled now. For example, he can place small pegs in holes on a board and build a tower of small blocks (usually 9 or so). He is learning how to draw shapes following a model and may be learning how to write some letters. He can cut out circles and shapes with curved lines using safety scissors. With his controlled hand movements, he is able to do more tasks independently.

Pudding Fun Make a batch of pudding in a bowl. Place a few spoonfuls on a cookie sheet or on a plate. (You may want to cover the table with newspaper first.) Have your child first wash her hands and then finger-paint in the pudding. Your child can draw pictures and practice drawing shapes or letters in the pudding. The best part is cleaning up! Yum!

Book Making Books can be made from any type of paper. Just staple, tape, glue, or sew together a few pieces of paper. Then your child can make up his own book. On the pages, your child can draw pictures or paste in cut-out pictures from magazines to illustrate a story. Encourage him to tell you his story. Help him by writing down his words on each page.

Signed by the Artist Have your child paint with watercolors at home or draw a picture with crayons. When your child finishes a picture, help her write her name. She may need your help at first. Then she can try to do it by herself. Encourage her in making the marks on the paper, even if they don't look just right. Doing activities by herself is how your child will learn.

Paper Chains Paper chains can be made by cutting any type of paper into strips about 1 inch by 5 inches. Show your child how to make a loop by gluing or taping the ends together. Create a chain by inserting the next strip through the first loop and so forth. See how long you can make the chain.

You've Got Mail When the mail comes to your home, let your child open the junk mail. He can exercise his fingers opening the mail, and he may find some little surprises inside. Help your child write and mail letters to family members or to a favorite performer or athlete.

Water Painting On a dry, warm day give your child a plastic bucket of water, one or two paintbrushes, and an old sponge. Find a safe paved driveway, fence, or sidewalk and let him paint large pictures or patterns with the water on the cement or wood. Watch the pictures disappear.



48–54 months



Problem Solving

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child's attention span is growing, and she can attend to an activity she enjoys without supervision. She is starting to sort according to shape, size, and length and can match items that look alike. She is also learning how things go together on the basis of function; for example, she can point to "all things that are tools" in a picture of multiple objects. Your child loves to read stories and is learning how to make up stories or story endings by herself. Wild stories and exaggerations are common.

Rhyme Time When you are in the car or on a bus, play a rhyming game with your child. Think of a word, and have your child come up with a rhyme. Then, have your child think of a word and you find a rhyming word. For example, you say, "star," and your child says "car." Your child says, "train," and you say, "rain." If your child is having a hard time thinking of a rhyming word, help him out a little.

Grouping and Sorting Gather together a lot of little things in a small container. You might already have a box in your home with buttons, coins, or odds and ends. Sit with your child and try to come up with ways to group the things together. For example, the two of you might sort buttons by color, size, or numbers of thread-ing holes. Find the biggest button and the smallest button. Line up five items, and point to each one as you count. Now let your child try.

Waiting Game When you and your child are waiting for something, try counting together to see how long it will take for the event to happen. For example, when you are in the car and waiting for the light to change to green, count how long it takes to change. She will learn how to count, and it may help her become more patient.

Broadway Baby Read a story to your child, and then encourage him to act out the story. He can pretend to be different characters. For example, you might read a story about farm animals and he could pretend to be a cow, chicken, piggy, or horse. Encourage him to act out the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story.

Number and Letter Search When you are at stores with your child, play number and letter searches. Encourage her to find numbers or letters on the walls, pictures, and signs. When she spots one, say, "You found the number 5. Good for you!" Point out numbers between one and 9 or single letters of the alphabet. Ask your child to find something specific: "Now we're looking for the letter C."



48-54 months



Personal-Social

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child is becoming more independent in dressing and has refined his skills. He can put his shoes on the correct feet. He uses the toilet without needing help and can brush his teeth. He is eating different types of foods and can serve himself at the table, pouring and scooping with no spilling. He plays cooperatively with other children and will comfort a playmate in distress. He plays games with rules and can follow directions.

- Game Time** Your child may enjoy learning games that have rules. You can play card games with your child, such as Go Fish, Old Maid, or Animal Rummy or other games such as Candy Land or Don't Spill the Beans. If other children come over, you may need to play at first to help them learn about rules and taking turns.
- Super Chef** Your child will love to help you cook or make her own snack. She can learn how to pour, stir, spread, and cut soft foods with your help (and careful supervision). You might try muffin pizzas. Your child can scoop spaghetti sauce on an English muffin, sprinkle on some cheese, and add toppings that she likes. Cook the muffin pizzas in the oven for a few minutes. Yum.
- Tent Safari** On a rainy day, ask your child if he would like to invite a friend over to play. Give the children some old blankets or sheets and let them build a tent by draping the sheets over chairs or furniture. Once they make their tent, they can play in it or read books with a flashlight.
- Teddy Bear Picnic** Your child can bring her stuffed animals or dolls on a picnic. Make a basket with a blanket, napkins, pretend food, and plastic plates and tea cups. Your child can practice dressing skills by getting "dressed up" for the bears. Later, your child can help clean up after a wonderful picnic.
- Novice Note Writer** Help your child write a letter to someone he knows. Your child can draw a picture and you can write down the words he wants to say, or your child can try his own skills at writing. Show him how to address the envelope, and have him practice saying his full name and address. You can help your child write his name at the end of the letter.
- Rub-a-Dub** Keep a sturdy footstool in the bathroom so that your child can step up and see herself in the mirror. Give your child her own special washcloth and towel, and teach her how to wash her face with soap. Give her a big kiss on her clean and shiny face! When she takes a bath, she can wash herself and dry herself off, too. Don't forget to have her brush her teeth.



48–54 months



Communication

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child's communication skills are growing and blossoming. She is learning how to have conversations with people she knows and is starting conversations as well as responding to people's questions. She is learning different parts of speech and using more complicated sentences; for example, when describing something she might say, "It was a very big brown dog." She may use very silly language and laugh at her own jokes.

- Animal Guessing** This is a game the whole family can play. Cut out some pictures of animals from a magazine. Turn the pictures upside down and have one person at a time choose a picture. The other people playing ask yes/no questions to guess what the animal is (e.g., "Does the animal swim?" "Is it bigger than a cat?"). When someone guesses the animal correctly, it's another person's turn to choose an animal card and let the others guess.
- Bedtime Memories** When it's time to go to sleep each night, have a soft talk with your child. Whisper to him, "What was your favorite thing that happened today?" Ask what else happened. Share your favorite event, too.
- Reading Adventures** Read to your child every day. Read slowly and with interest. Use a finger to follow the words. Stop reading at times, and encourage your child to talk about the pictures and the story. Make this a special and fun time for you and your child.
- Moonbeams** On a night when the moon is visible, find a place to lie down or sit outside with your child and look at the moon and stars. What do you see? Can you connect the stars to make a picture? Can you make out a face on the moon? Ponder what it would be like to be an astronaut flying into space in a rocket. What do you think it is like on the moon? What would you do there? How would you feel about being so far away from earth?
- Rhymes and Rhythm** While chanting or singing a nursery rhyme, have your child tap it out on a drum, the bottom of a pot, or an oatmeal box. This musical activity can be made more challenging and interesting by adding new instruments such as bells, spoons, or shakers (small plastic containers filled with beans). Have some noisy fun with friends!
- At the Office** Set up a little office for your child with notebooks, a toy phone, a computer keyboard, pencils and pens, a ruler, a calculator, and a calendar. Add some envelopes, paper, and stickers. Encourage her to pretend to go to work, write letters, type messages, and make notes for friends. Pretend with her; call her on the phone and ask her questions.



54–60 months



Gross Motor

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child is continuing to develop and refine his gross motor skills. He has become much more stable and is learning how to balance on one foot or walk along a narrow beam. He is learning skills such as jumping, hopping on one foot, and skipping. He will enjoy activities such as throwing, catching, and kicking balls. You will need to watch him closely as he may try some dangerous tricks. He can ride a small bike with training wheels.

Fall Fun In the fall, take your child outside to play in the leaves. Rake the leaves into small piles. Chase each other around the piles, jump in them, or try to leap over them. Try burying each other in leaves or catching the leaves as they fall.

Freeze Tag Get a group of children together with your child to play a game of Freeze Tag. Designate one person to be "it." The person who is "it" runs around trying to tag other children. If a child is tagged, she must "freeze" (not move). Another child who is not "it" may "melt" a frozen player by touching her. A "melted" player can run around again to avoid being tagged. Whoever is tagged and made "frozen" three times is the next "it."

Splash Game This activity is good on a hot day. You, your child, and your child's friends can stand around a small plastic pool or bucket of water. Using a big ball (e.g., beach ball), take turns and try to make each other wet by throwing the ball hard at the water. Do not throw the ball at each other, just at the water. You can also just play catch. Of course, later you'll all want to get into the pool!

Ribbon Dance Cut a piece of ribbon or a party streamer into 6-foot lengths. Your child can explore ways to make designs in the air. Try circles and loops, up and down movements, and figure eights. Now try all of these movements with two ribbons, one in each hand. Finally, move from place to place taking the ribbons with you. Put on some music to help make a "ribbon dance." Try skipping, running, and walking.

Animal Games Cut pictures of animals out of a magazine. Turn them face down, and take turns choosing an animal with your child. You must act out the animal you drew, and your child has to guess what animal you are. Take turns so your child has to act out an animal for you to guess. If you draw a kangaroo, you must jump, jump, jump. If you draw a cheetah, you will probably need to run. If you draw a cat, you may relax and lick your paws or leap to catch a mouse. You may act out a giraffe by walking on tiptoes and stretching really tall.



54–60 months



Fine Motor

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child is now able to use her fingers in a more controlled way. Her finger movements are coordinated and faster, and she may be very interested in trying to write the letters of her name. Many children begin to prefer using one hand over the other during this time. Your child may be cutting out shapes with scissors and getting better at buttoning and tying her shoes.

Lacing Cards Using safety scissors, your child can cut out simple pictures of familiar things from magazines and glue the pictures onto cardboard. With a paper punch, punch several holes around the outside of the picture. Tie a shoestring or heavy piece of yarn through one of the holes. Make sure the other end of the string has tape wrapped around it to make a firm tip. Your child can sew in and out around the edge of the card. For variation, have your child sew two cards together.

Sidewalk Fun Decorate your sidewalks with beautiful chalk drawings. Colorful chalk can be found at any toy store and some supermarkets. Chalk is easy to wash off the sidewalk, or rain will wash it away. Don't forget to remind your child to sign his name!

It's a Wrap Give your child a small sturdy box, some newspaper or wrapping paper, tape, and ribbon. Let her practice wrapping the box. Later she can wrap a real present for a friend in her very own way.

Family Portrait Encourage your child to draw a picture of the family. When he is done, ask him to tell you about his picture. You can write down what he says about his siblings, parents, pets, or grandparents and save his responses with the picture.

Map It You and your child can make a map of your neighborhood. Go for a walk to start this activity, and point out streets, buildings, and nearby parks or other landmarks. Then, after the walk, use paper and pens or markers to encourage your child to make a map of what she remembers. You may need to help her get started with her map. If the neighborhood is too large, start by mapping your own house or her own room. Ask your child, "Where's your bed?" "How about your toy box?"



54–60 months



Problem Solving

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child may be counting to 15 from memory and accurately counting 10 objects. He is able to follow directions when he is in a group activity and knows the rules at home and at school. He enjoys pretend play and may act out different roles with friends. Wild stories and exaggerations are common. He enjoys “reading” books and may have simple books memorized. He is really starting to understand how things work in the world and is endlessly curious about why things are the way they are.

Pretzel Fun Make pretzel letters (or numbers). Pretzels can be made with pizza dough or pie crust dough. Cut the dough into strips and form numbers or letters out of the dough. Brush with a beaten egg, sprinkle with a little salt and bake until golden brown. Eat up an A, B, or C!

Fun Food Coloring Most children love to experiment with food coloring. Let your child color her food. Here are some ideas: color scrambled eggs blue, color a glass of milk, add a drop of color to a piece of apple or to a slice of bread before toasting it, and color mashed potatoes. Ask your child to think of other ideas.

How Long? Count how long your child can do a new skill, such as standing on one foot,
How Many? or how many times he can bounce a ball. Celebrate each time he can do a new skill for a little more time. Let him count while you try something, such as balancing a book on your head. This will help your child practice new skills and counting.

Storytime Tell a story to your child. Use different voices, body postures, and facial expressions to be different characters. Now it's your child's turn to tell a story. Encourage your little one to ham it up—and don't forget to be an appreciative audience.

What's Missing? Lay out five or more different toys and give your child time to look at all of them. Now, hide a single toy at a time. See how long it takes your child to figure out which toy is missing. You may need to give her some clues at first. Once she guesses which toy is missing, hide a different toy. Now it's her turn to try to trick you!

Find the Treasure This activity has to be planned well ahead of time. Hide “treasure” (e.g., a favorite snack, a small bag of old jewelry, a new toy) in a place your child is able to reach. Make drawings of all of the places you want your child to search (e.g., a TV, a mailbox) for the “treasure.” Be sure to make the drawings simple and clear. Each clue should direct your child to a place where he will find the next clue until he eventually finds the “treasure.”



54–60 months



Personal-Social

Activities to Help Your Child Grow and Learn



Your child is able to meet most of her personal needs but may need practice or help on some of the more difficult parts of a task, such as tying her shoes. She eats a variety of foods, has social dining skills, and is dressing herself. She enjoys playing with other children and working together on projects. She is beginning to use her words to help solve conflicts with friends.

Going on a Date Go on a "date" with your child. Go out to lunch, or go to see a movie. Before you go out, you and your child can get ready. He can put on a special shirt and pants, wash his hands and his face, use the potty, and brush his teeth. Show him a mirror so he can see how great he looks. Now go have fun! Be extra polite. Use "please" and "thank you" throughout your date.

Fruit Salad Make a fruit salad for lunch. You can use any favorite fruits such as grapes, bananas, apples, and oranges. Your child will enjoy washing, peeling, and scooping the fruit into a bowl. She could even help slice a soft fruit such as a banana with a butter or plastic knife. Add things to the salad that sound yummy such as yogurt or nuts. Your child can practice using a spoon and fork as she helps make and serve the fruit salad.

Pressed Flower Cards Collect flowers from your yard or neighborhood, a park, or a roadside. Flowers that are small and delicate work best because they press flat. Once you collect your flowers, place them between sheets of paper towels or newspaper and lay them between heavy books (such as old phone books). Then, give the flowers a few days to dry and flatten out. Glue these flowers on a piece of paper to make notecards for family and friends. Help your child write someone a special note.

911 Talk to your child about what he should do if he gets lost or if there is an emergency in the house. Your child can learn how to dial 911 and give information to the operator. You can role-play this with your child using a pretend phone, but teach your child to use a real phone for a real emergency. Teach your child his name, address, and telephone number. Sometimes it helps if he learns this information as a song. Pretend you are a police officer, and your child can pretend, too.

All by Myself Make sure your child has a little extra time in the morning to get dressed. Then encourage her to try to button her shirt, snap her pants, or tie her shoes. She will need some help and some time, but be patient. The more she practices, the sooner she will be able to get dressed all by herself.

You as Me, Me as You You and your child can switch roles for part of the day. She can pretend to be you and help you get dressed or brush your hair. You can pretend you need help getting ready. The make-believe could include a change of duties, clothes, behaviors, vocabulary, and other habits. Keep the activity positive and fun.



54–60 months