

Supporting learning at home in the early years: a booklet of ideas and activities

LEARNING
happens
everywhere
anytime
and for
everyone



EENET – Enabling Education Network

PO Box 422

Hyde

Cheshire

SK14 9DT

UK



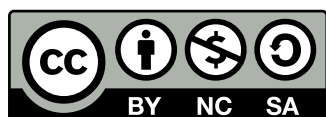
www.eenet.org.uk



info@eenet.org.uk



+44 (0) 3300583339



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Contents



Introduction	4
Pot band	8
Blanket pile	10
Paper Party	12
Empty the drawer	14
Jokey journey	16
So many socks	18
Bag of things	20
Bits and pieces treasure hunt	22
See and say	24
Peg basket	26
Posting tin	28
Dance party	30
Dress ups	32
Shaky shaky	34
Colour hunt	36
Water paint	38
Toy wash	40
Mud tray	42
Tea party	44

Introduction

Who is this resource for?

In the early years, when children are aged 0-8, they develop and learn best when they play.

The activities in this booklet are for all families of young children with and without disabilities. Adults and older siblings (sisters and brothers) can use the activities to help young children learn through play.

What do we mean by learning through play?

Learning through play means that **children are choosing what to do**. They are free to explore and discover.

Adults and older siblings should provide children with something or some place that is **stimulating** and then **interact** with them in this environment.

The child decides how they play, what they discover, and what interests them. You join in with the child.

This booklet helps you think of play activities using objects you can find in and around your home. It suggests what you can do and say to help young children learn through play. There are also suggestions for how to change each activity to suit your child's needs and interests.



Letting children lead

Letting the child lead is different from what we often think we should do to teach children.

Instead of showing the child what to do or giving them instructions, the activities in this booklet suggest that you let the child play and join in with whatever they are doing.



The importance of interaction

Children play naturally, and you are helping them learn through their play.

All of the activities use **stimulation** and **interaction**. They are not activities that you set up and leave the child to play by themselves.

Your interaction helps the child learn and keeps them safe.

The activities all involve some adult or older sibling **interaction**. It may not be safe to leave young children alone with some objects that have small parts or that are not usually for playing with.

It is also important for children to have uninterrupted play alone in supervised places – with safe objects and without involvement from others unless invited. However, this booklet is not about that type of play.

Types of interaction you could use for any activity:

Comment: Notice what the child is doing. Do not give an opinion. Tell them what you see and hear, the effort you see the child making, and what skills they are using.

Watch and wait: This is sometimes the hardest part of playing with a child. Give them time to choose how to use the objects. If you can wait, watch the child and join them in their choice of how to play. You might be surprised at what they decide to do.

Imitate and join in: Joining in a child's play involves imitating what they are doing.

Offer deeper thoughts: As the child plays, you can extend the activity. For example, if a child is hiding under a blanket, you could add some deeper thoughts like: 'Rabbits and worms hide underground. I wonder what you might be?'. Or, if a child is banging pots with a stick, you could say, 'I wonder if that stick makes the same sound as this stick?'

Conversation: Ask the child about what they are doing, listen, and repeat what they say. For example, a child is putting leaves into a puddle and you ask 'What are you doing?' and the child answers 'fish'. You comment, 'ah, the leaves are fish swimming in the water?'. Listen, if the child says, 'fish eat', so you respond 'Oh, are the leaves for the fish to eat?'

Playfulness: Some children will enjoy it if you are playful and silly when you join in their activities. You could make funny voices, pretend to misunderstand them, make nonsense stories, exaggerate movements, make funny faces, and use made-up words. Be willing to do what they do – even if it is not something you would normally do, like putting your hands in mud or rolling in a blanket.



What are the activities in this booklet?

This is a **'mixed bag' of ideas and activities** for girls and boys aged 0–8 years and their parents, caregivers, and families to do at home. You can use your own ideas and creativity to build on these activities. The activities can be done many times in different ways.

How to use these activities?

Pick an activity you think your child will find interesting. The activities do not need to be done in a specific order.

The following information is provided for each activity:

You will need: This box shows what objects you need for the activity. Some activities need no objects, others need items that may be easily found around the home.

What you can do and **What you could say:** These are suggestions and ideas for how you could stimulate and interact with your child during the activity.

How you can help: This box includes ideas for how you can support your child if they are losing interest or are not sure what to do. It also includes ideas for children who may need a bit more help.

Remember, learning happens everywhere, all the time.



Pot band

You will need: Pots, pans, utensils such as wooden spoons or sticks.



What you can do:

- Put 3 or 4 pots upside down with some sticks or spoons.
- Wait to see what the child does.
- Imitate what they do. If they bang the pot, you bang too. If they put the spoon inside the pot and pretend to stir food, do that too. If they bang the pot with their hand, you bang the pot with your hand. If they bang spoons together, you do that too.
- Take turns doing the actions.
- Clap, stamp your feet and dance while the child makes noises with their pots and spoons.

- Guide the child back to the pots if they want to bang other things (or other people)!

What you could say:

- Can you sing a song to the beat the child is making?
- Describe what you see and hear ('You are making LOUD sounds!'; 'That spoon makes a funny noise').
- Make exaggerated actions of sounds when the child bangs a pot (say 'WOW' or 'BANG' for example, or pretend to be frightened by the bang).



How you can help:

- If the child is unsure about playing with the pots, show them a few bangs on the pots, and laugh.
- Smile to show that it is okay to bang and be loud.
- Move the pots around or show them different ways to bang them.

Blanket pile

You will need: more than 2 blankets, towels, sheets, or pieces of cloth folded and placed in a pile.

What you can do:

- Place the pile near to the child, or seat them on top of the pile, or spread the blankets out ready for them.
- Wait and let the child decide what they would like to do.
- Imitate what the child decides to do.
- If the child asks for your help, offer to do it together.

What you could say:

- Say what you see or feel ('So soft'; 'Where are you? You are under a red blanket'; 'I can't see your feet').



How you can help:

- If the child is losing interest or does not have ideas for how to use the blankets, you can show some ideas like:
 - ➞ peek-a-boo (hold the blanket over your face and then drop it and say 'boo');
 - ➞ hide yourself under the blanket;
 - ➞ hide items under the blanket for the child to find;
 - ➞ blankets can make cosy spaces to hide, snuggle in, or tell/read a story together;
 - ➞ a blanket held between two adults makes a great swing;
 - ➞ rolling a young child in a blanket can be a fun shared activity.



Paper Party

You will need: Paper of different sizes, textures, and thickness (for example, tissue, newspaper, printing paper, magazines, sides of cardboard or food boxes, used receipts, baking paper); any pencils, pens, crayons, chalk, markers you have available.



What you can do:

- Spread out the paper on a table or the floor.
- Give the child the pencils, pens, chalk, markers, etc. and keep one for yourself. Tell them the paper is all for them to use then wait to see what they do.

- Let the child begin before you join in. Imitate them. If the child pokes the paper with a pen, you poke the paper with a pen. If the child drops the pen and scrunches paper, you do it too. There is no right or wrong.
- Take turns. If the child is marking the paper, watch and wait until they stop then you do some markings. Then stop and watch them.

What you could say:

- Name things (for example, paper, pens, chalk).
- Sing made-up tunes about the paper and colours or what you see the child doing.
- Count the colours or the paper as the child uses them.
- Repeat the child's words or sounds.
- Describe what you see. ('I see soft paper'; 'the paper is ripped'; 'your pen makes blue'; 'you made red dots'; 'lots of dots'.)
- Ask questions. ('Where is the blue?'; 'Which paper did you use?')

How you can help:

- You could:
 - ➞ hold the paper steady for the child;
 - ➞ support the child to be stable/seated while using pens;
 - ➞ provide support hand-over-hand so they can hold the pen;
 - ➞ add more items that you have at home, like glue or scissors.

Empty the drawer

You will need: For this activity, choose a collection of similar items that the child would not usually play with. These could be the items found at home in a drawer or cupboard, on a shelf, or in a box. These are some ideas:

- Kitchen utensils
- Scarves and hats
- Bowls and pots
- Linen cupboard (sheets, towels, pillowcases)
- Hair clips and jewellery
- Box of tinned food
- Toolbox
- Tin of nails and screws
- Stationary (pens, staples, paperclips).

Note: These are things your child would not normally play with. They may not be particularly safe for your child to play with which is why this activity is for them to explore special things with the supervision and involvement of an adult.

What you can do:

- Spread the items out in a space (for example, on a bed, mat, table, or tray).
- Invite the child to come and see what you have. Tell them that they can play with these things today as a special activity.
- You could hand items to the child one by one.
- You could pick up items and name them, then place them near the child.

What you could say:

- If they are not familiar with these items, you could name and describe each one as the child touches them.
- Tell stories about real situations where the items are used or about their histories (for example, 'my aunty gave me this scarf when I graduated from school').
- Tell imaginary, fun and silly stories about the items (for example, 'when the boy hid under the red scarf, his clothes magically changed to red').

How you can help:

- You could use two very different sets of items for the child to explore (for example, a box of nails and plastic containers).
- You may need to be clear that this is just an activity for today, and not something they can normally play with!
- You may need to set rules about where the child can play with the items and whether they need to take special care of them.
- You may need to set a time limit for the activity and help your child to pack up the items and put them away safely.
- Think about the child's level of development, interests, and safety when you choose the items. For example, one child might enjoy sorting and lining up nails, but another might prefer to play with items that are safe to put in their mouth.



Jokey journey

You will need: Just you and your child.

You can do this activity when you are walking with your child, for example, when you are going to the shop or to visit someone, or you might go for a walk just for fun.



What you can do:

- This activity turns a daily routine into an adventure. Take turns choosing fun activities as you walk along.
- You might choose to:
 - ➡ Jump, jump, jump;
 - ➡ Hop, hop, hop;
 - ➡ Swing your arms up high and down low;
 - ➡ Take 5 steps, then spin around, another 5 steps, then spin around.

What you could say:

- Name the actions as you do them.
- Turn the actions into a song or rhyme that you sing as you do them.
- Ask the child to say what action to do next.
- Turn the actions into animal movements and make the animal's noise (for example, jump-jump-jump while making frog noises).

How you can help:

- Pretend to do the routine wrong and let the child teach you how to do it properly.
- Adapt the fun actions to the child's level and interest.
- Different actions could include stopping to touch or see something along the way, making noises (claps, stamping, singing), or thinking up a pattern of actions and trying to remember the order together (for example, stamp-jump-hop, stamp-jump-hop).

So many socks

You will need: A collection of clean socks (for example, big socks, small socks, any socks you have available at home).

What can you do:

Have a sock day. Whatever you normally do at home, find a fun way to add some socks into the routine. For example, you could:

- Hang washing – give the child some pegs so they can hang the socks or put pegs into the socks.



- Wash dishes – give the child some water to wash the socks and put them out to dry.
- Play inside – put other toys inside the socks.
- Get dressed – put the socks on their hands or put 3 pairs of socks on their feet for fun.
- Climb the stairs – put one sock on each step to see if you have enough socks for every step.

- Read a book – put your hand inside the sock to make a puppet and pretend that it is doing the talking.



- Garden – make a line of sticks poking out of the ground and put socks over the ends of the sticks.
- Tidy – the child could hide socks around the room for you to find.
- Play with sock balls outside – roll the socks into balls to throw or hit with a rolled-up newspaper or cardboard tube.
- Play with sock balls inside – roll the socks into balls and roll them at empty plastic bottles to knock them over.

What you could say:

- When the child is exploring or playing with the socks you could point out things you notice about the socks (for example, big and small, same and different, colours, how many).

How you can help:

- In this activity you are giving your child ideas about what to do. You can choose activities that they are interested in and able to do.

Bag of things

You will need: An empty bag. This can be any kind of bag, such as a cloth bag, paper bag, empty pillowcase, shopping bag.



What can you do:

- If you can use an outside space (for example a garden, yard, park, or street) go out with the child and tell them to use their bag to collect things.
- Let them decide what to collect but make sure that it is ok for them to pick these things. For example, you may not want them to pick unripe tomatoes or pull leaves off plants.
- Join in by collecting items that they think of. For example, if they are looking for rocks, you could add a few rocks or show them where you can see more rocks.

- When they have finished collecting, or the bag is full, help the child to spread out and examine their collection. For example, you could use a table, a cloth on the floor, or a tray for this.

What you could say:

- Name the items the child collects and ask them questions about each one.
- Talk about how many they collect (counting and words like 'lots', 'can't find any more', 'so many').
- Talk about the bag ('still empty', 'heavy', 'full', 'no more space', 'we need a bigger bag next time').

How you can help:

- Carry the bag while they collect items.
- Find a space with plenty of items to collect and sit the child where they can reach them (for example, sitting under a tree with many dry leaves around them).
- You could prepare a bag of items that you have collected for your child to explore.



Bits and pieces treasure hunt

You will need: An empty basket or a box.



What you can do:

- Explain to the child that you will go together to look for things to play with.
- Go with them from room to room and collect a few items from each space. For example, you might collect a mixture of unrelated items like a scrubbing brush, a mirror, a necklace, a washcloth, a chopping board, a hat, a tin of soup, an egg carton, a pen, a shoelace.
- Ask the child to think of a game to play with these treasures. You may need to help them think of a game.
- Watch and wait for the child to lead the play and then join in by using imitation and taking turns.

What you could say:

- Name and describe the items as they choose them.

- As you watch the child play, turn the game into a story. For example, 'Johnny is wearing a hat. He looked ready to go to the shops, but then he remembered to put his hairbrush in his pocket. He said, "never go out without your hairbrush, because you do not know when you might need it". Just then a tin of milk rolled over and said "what about me? I want to come to the shop, but I have no hair!" ...
- Ask the child if you can play too and then ask them what you should do with each item.
- You could be silly while you play. If they tell you to put the hat on your head, you could pretend to be confused and put the egg carton on your head instead.



How you can help:

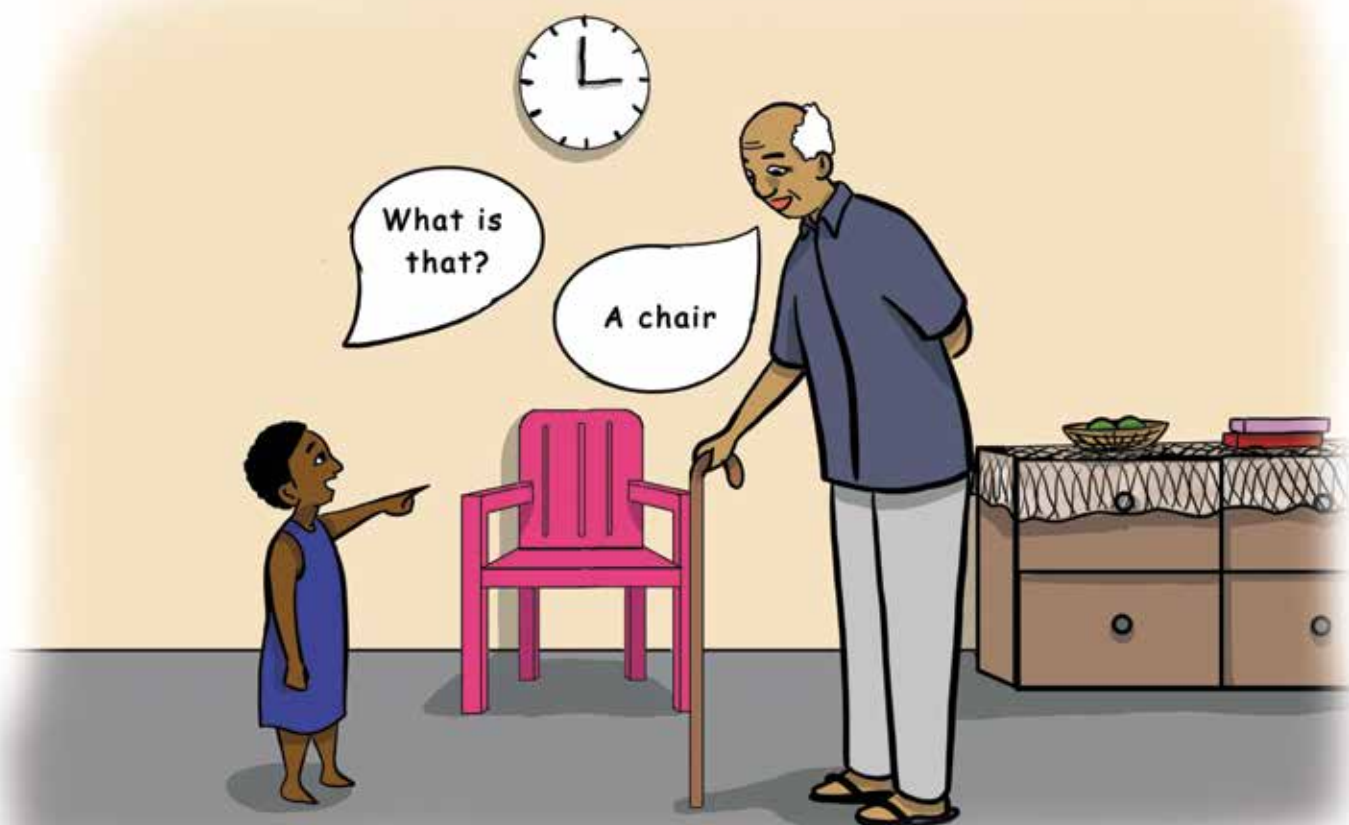
- When the activity is over, help the child to put the items away.
- You could discuss what the items are usually used for or why you have them.
- If they find it difficult to choose objects, point some out to the child and wait for them to say yes or no.

See and say

You will need: Just you and your child.

What to do:

- You can do this activity in any environment – inside or outside the house.
- Tell your child that you are going to play a game of 'see and say' together.
- Ask them to point to things and you say what they are.



What you could say:

- You could simply name items or add extra information and use full sentences (for example, 'Clock' or 'That is the clock' or 'Can you see the clock's hands moving?', or 'The clock tells us when it is time to eat and when to go to bed!').
- If the child already knows what they are pointing to, you could say the wrong names so that the child can correct you.
- You could use silly names (for example, 'that is the great big tick tock clock').

How you can help:

- Do the activity while moving around the house or on a walk outside.
- Carry the child while moving around or lie next to each other on the floor, bed, or outside.
- Switch roles so that you point at things and the child says the names.
- Use a picture book and point to different things in the pictures.
- If you cannot go outside together, you could sit at a window or in a doorway together and name the things that you can see from there.

Peg basket

You will need: Clothes pegs and a container to put them in that has edges for the pegs to clip onto (for example, a box, bowl, or basket).

What you can do:

- Give the child the container and the pegs to explore.
- Maybe clip some of the pegs around the edge of the container before you give it to the child.
- Watch and wait. If the child tries to clip a peg to the edge, you could imitate them or take turns to do it also.



What you could say:

- Talk about what they are doing and ask questions (for example, 'You pulled 2 pegs off'; 'Which peg will you do next?'; 'Is it difficult to clip the pegs on again?'; 'Oh, that is my favourite peg, I like yellow'.



How you can help:

- Attach the pegs to the edges of the container, for the child to pull off.
- Arrange different coloured pegs into patterns or groups of the same colour.
- If the child has more fun dropping the pegs into the container, you could peg them on, and they can take them off and drop them in.
- The child might prefer to tip the pegs out of the container and use them in a different way.
- Clip pegs to each other to make a chain of pegs for the child to add to or take apart.

Posting tin

You will need: A clean empty container with a hole cut into the lid (for example, an empty powdered milk tin or a cardboard box).

Small items that fit through the hole (for example, stones, small sticks, pieces of wood, dried beans, coins, bottle tops, nuts).

What you can do:

- Give the child the container and the small items.
- Watch and wait. Join in with them, taking turns to do what they do.

What you could say:

- Name the objects and describe what is happening (for example, 'You dropped the stone into the tin. What a loud noise it made!').
- You could make surprised noises or make funny faces every time an item is dropped into the container.



How you can help:

- Remove the lid or make a larger hole in the lid.
- Give the child larger items to post through the hole.
- Help the child to find different items to put in the container.
- The child might want to tip the items out and then you put them back in or, you could tip the items out for the child to put back in.
- Cut some different sized holes in the lid so they have to think about which hole each item can fit through (for example, trying to post toothpicks through a very small round hole is a good challenge).



Dance party

You will need: Music. Any source of music will work (for example, you could use a radio, television, phone, or play an instrument) but upbeat and lively music works best.

What you can do:

- Remove all other distractions (toys and activities) and sit or stand with the child.
- Wait for them to notice the quiet. Start the music.
- Watch what they do and immediately join in by doing the same thing.
- Imitate their movements and exaggerate them to encourage their confidence.

What you could say:

- Sing along to the music if you know the words.
- Clap to the music.
- Make up your own words or rhymes to the music.
- Chant things like “we are, we are moving our arms” “We are moving to the music’s beat.”
- Show your excitement and enjoyment of the music and comment on what you are doing together.



How you can help:

- Watch what the child does, imitate them and add an additional movement, then wait to see if they copy you. For example, if they wave their arms, wave your arms but also shake your shoulders at the same time.
- You may choose to sit and cuddle the child while listening and swaying to the music. You could also hum or sing along while sharing this special moment.
- You could massage or rock the child with music playing.

Dress ups

You will need: Different items of clothing (for example, shirts, coats, hats, ties, scarfs, gloves, shoes, boots, dresses, aprons, etc.).



What you can do:

- Lay out the clothes in the middle of the floor or on a mat, or arrange them into a folded pile.
- Tell the child that they can play with the clothes today.
- Be ready to help if they ask for it.
- If you have enough clothing, you could play 'dress up'.

What you could say:

- 'Let's dress up. What will you wear today?'
- Name the items of clothing as the child puts them on. Describe the process you see (for example, 'You chose a coat. One arm goes in, another arm goes in. Now you are even trying to do up the buttons').
- If the clothes normally belong to someone in the family, pretend that the child has magically become that person (for example, 'Oh, you look like grandmother. Hello Granny, come in, sit down – let me make you a cup of tea.')
- You could dress up too and change your voice in a funny way to pretend to be someone else.



How you can help:

- Hold up items of clothing for the child to choose from.
- Assist them to put on the clothes.
- Oversized clothing may be easier to use.

Shaky shaky

You will need: 4 or 5 empty bottles, containers with lids, or cardboard tubes and sticky tape to close the ends.

Containers you can see through are great because the child can see the contents. Fill each container (about quarter full) with a different item. For example, you could use dry beans, chickpeas, dry corn, lentils, uncooked rice, seeds, stones.

Each container will make a different sound when you shake it.



What you can do:

- Shake the bottles to make your own music.
- Play some music (radio, phone, television, play an instrument, or sing a song) and shake the containers along to the music.
- Copy how the child shakes their container or shake your container in a different way (for example, by banging it, rolling it, or shaking it up high).

- Offer the child different containers to try.
- Clap along with the child's shaking.
- Take turns with the child. Copy the way they shake, then stop.

What you could say:

- Sing along.
- Make up your own songs.
- Describe the sounds you hear (for example, 'That is a loud one'; 'oooh, did you hear? That one sounds different'. 'Fast', 'slow', 'loud', and 'soft' are the type of words you might use to describe the sounds).



How you can help:

- Help the child to make the shakers.
- Smaller shakers can be easier to hold.
- Hang the shakers up using string or wool so that the child can use their hands to bump them.

Colour hunt

You will need: Just you and your child. This can be done inside the house or outside.

What you can do:

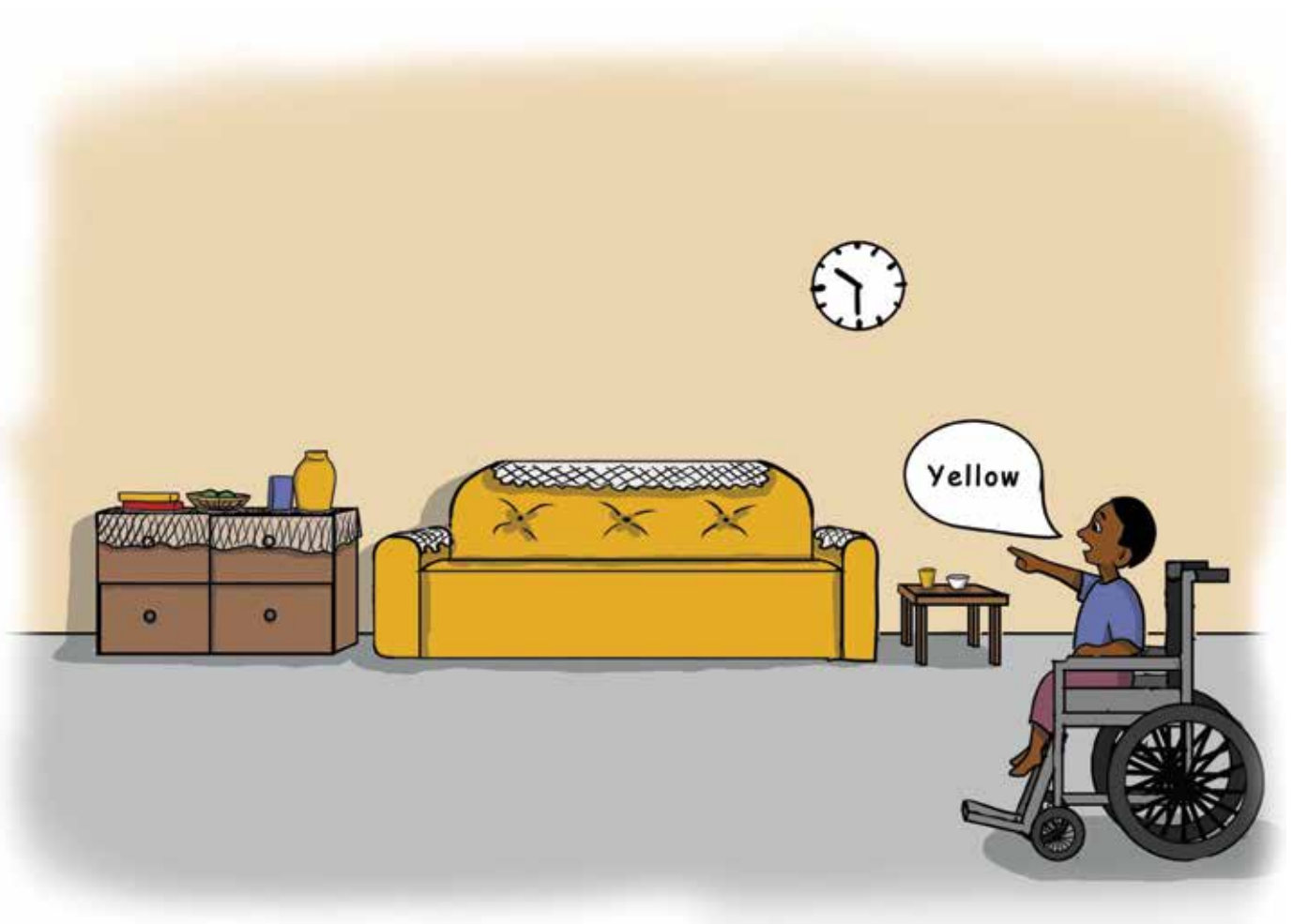
- Choose a colour and show something to the child which is that colour.
- Walk with the child or carry them around while you hunt for other things that are the same colour.
- Give the child time to notice things before you point them out.
- If it is difficult to go outside, you can sit at a window or doorway together. Find and point to the colours that you see from where you are.

What you could say:

- Use rhymes to go along with this type of game. There may be some that you know already (for example, 'I spy with my little eye, something that is yellow'). Or you could make up a new one (for example, 'Yellow yellow where are you? Yellow yellow, I see you!').
- You could name the objects that have the different colours (for example, 'you have found a blue cup').

How you can help:

- Use a colourful picture book or a magazine and search for colours on the pages.
- Hunt for different qualities. For example, size (big and little), position (high and low), number (2 items the same), textures (soft and hard).
- You could do this as a treasure hunt and collect small items of each colour to look at together.



Water paint

You will need: Any blank surface that can get wet (for example, a wooden fence/wall, tree trunk, concrete fence/wall/path); a container for water, an old paint brush (or a piece of old cloth or sponge).



What you can do:

- For this activity you might need to show the child how to paint with water.
- This activity works differently on different surfaces. It works best where water can change the colour of the surface. Let the child try different surfaces to decide the one they think works best.
- Imitate and join the child in this activity.

What you could say:

- Talk about wet, dry, colours changing.
- You could talk about evaporation.
- Watch what they paint and ask them about it. Make comments on the designs, pictures, or shapes.

How you can help:

- Use small pieces of wood to paint on.
- Add some food colouring to the water to change the colour.
- Add sand or soil to the water to change the colour.
- Use hands and feet to make water footprints and handprints.



Toy wash

You will need: Warm soapy water in a bucket, bowl, sink, basin, or bath; a washcloth; toys that will not be damaged if they get wet; other items from around the house that will not be damaged if they get wet (for example, a comb, flower pot, small bottle, clothes peg, keys, screwdriver...).



What you can do:

- Put the container of water where the child can reach it and where they can spill water.
- Give them the items and explain that they can play with them today.
- Wait and watch.
- If they start washing, ask if you can help too. Join in by copying what they are doing. For example, if they are dipping toys in the water and watching them drip, you do that too. Avoid demonstrating how to wash and instead follow their ideas.

What you could say:

- Describe what you see the child doing using words like clean, dirty, soapy, bubble, warm, cold, wet, dry, drip, splash...



How you can help:

- After you have waited and if the child is unsure about what to do next, you could pass them a toy and say, 'this is dirty, I wonder if you could clean it in the water?'
- Wash any items that are suitable for the child or of interest to them. For example, if they like sticks, wash sticks or if they like balls, wash balls.
- Position the child so they can dip their hands in the water, then add different textured items into the water for them to find and grab.
- Add cleaning utensils such as a scrubbing brush and sponge.
- Add more soap to the water to make lots of bubbles.

Mud tray

You will need: A tray, big bowl, or bucket; sand (or soil) and water.

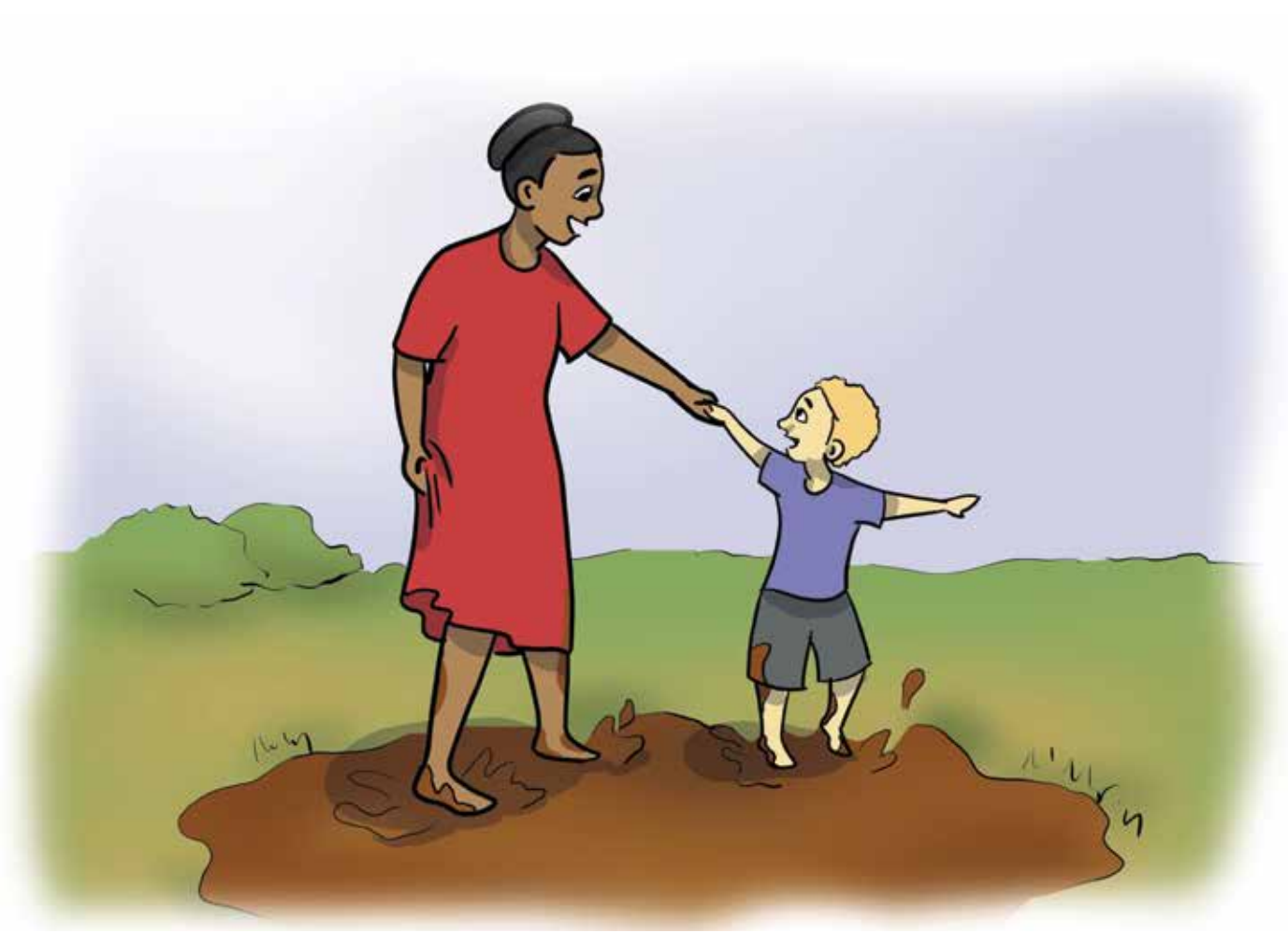
What you can do:

- Dress the child in clothing that can get dirty.
- Invite the child to add a small amount of water to the sand/soil.
- Let them know that they are free to touch it and find out what it feels like.
- Watch and wait. Join in and imitate what they do.
- Do not be afraid to get your hands dirty too!

What you could say:

- Talk about how the mud feels to touch.
- Describe what you see the child doing.





How you can help:

- If the child is not sure about touching the mud, put your hands in to show that it is safe and allowed.
- The child could explore the mud with their feet. You could join in.
- Use tools like a stick or spoon to explore the mud.
- Some children may need to have a wet mixture that is safe to put in their mouth. For example, cornflour or custard.

Tea party

You will need: Cups, jugs and spoons that you do not mind the child playing with, and a tray



What you can do:

- Do this activity in a place where spilling water will not be a problem.
- Fill a jug or bottle with water and tell the child that they can play with it today.
- Suggest that 'we can pretend to drink tea'.
- Allow the child to lead. They can serve and you can be the guest at the tea party.
- You may need to refill the bottle of water a few times!

What you could say:

- Ask the child for a cup of tea. If they offer you some, pretend to drink it.
- Use funny voices and pretend to be someone else.
- Make pretend conversation while you 'drink' your tea.



How you can help:

- If it is appropriate, give the child a jug of warm tea or milk and drink it together.
- Pour rice or sand instead of water.
- Use empty plastic containers instead of cups and jugs.
- Take turns to serve so that sometimes you pour and offer the pretend tea to the child.
- Bring people to the party such as other siblings, pets, or soft toys.