

# Fun Home Activities for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

## Outdoors

- **Obstacle course.** Use sidewalk chalk to draw the course. Set up a series of activities, like hop like a bunny on one foot, do 10 jumping jacks, sing a silly song, hold a yoga pose for three seconds. Use cups or any other household items to mark off the different spots. Shoot a ball at a hoop or box at the end of the course.
- **Water table fun.** If you don't own a water table, use a small inflatable or plastic pool, a bucket or a bathtub. Drop items into the water to have your child scoop out with a kitchen spoon or tongs. Add toys, pompoms, balls and anything else that would engage your child in this fun and sensory exploration.
- **Chalk art.** Using tape, create fun shapes on the concrete, and then fill in each section with different colors of chalk. When you remove the tape, you will see the design you created.
- **Scavenger hunt.** Make a checklist of nature items and animals you might find on a walk and check off the items once you see them. This can be a continued walk every day to keep kids moving and engaged. For a sensory scavenger hunt, tape real items to the checklist ahead of time, like leaves, pebbles and dandelions.
- **I Spy.** Play a game of I Spy on your walk or while you are outside.
- **Water balloon toss.** This is a simple and fun way to play catch while getting wet and staying cool in the heat. Or toss balloons into buckets and knock over objects you've set up. Smaller balloons are harder to pop, so the smaller you make some balloons for games, the longer the play can continue.
- **Bubble blowing.** Blowing and catching bubbles helps children with sensory and joint attention difficulties. You can even make your own bubble solution and use different kitchen utensils, like a slotted spoon, to see what makes the best bubbles.
- **Gardening or plant care.** Taking care of a small plant or a garden improves empathy skills in children and teaches them about nurturing and responsibility. If you do not have an outdoor area, let your child take the plant outside for some sunlight and teach them about how good it is for both the plant and for themselves.
- **Hopscotch.** Use sidewalk chalk to create a hopscotch board. This is good for both fine and gross motor skills and social skills.
- **Giant tic-tac-toe.** Draw a board using sidewalk chalk. Cut out Xs and Os from a paper plate or use whatever items you have at home. Turn it into a craft activity and decorate the plates with markers, crayons or stickers.
- **Ice treasure hunt.** Freeze objects such as small toys in a large bowl of water and let children use warm water from spray bottles, paint brushes, spoons, salt or whatever you have at home to melt the ice and uncover the treasure. This activity helps children with sensory integration and fine motor skills.
- **Follow the leader.** This game can improve social skills as well as motor skills in children with autism. Take turns being the leader and following what the leader does.
- **Yoga.** Yoga helps children with stress, focus, balance, self-confidence, awareness and more. It is also a great

technique for deep breathing, helping to ground a child who may be experiencing stress or anxiety, or just helping them take a break and slow down the pace a bit.

- **Cloud watching.** Lay on a towel or blanket and look up at the clouds. Ask your child what they see, if they see any shapes or clouds that look like animals, or to describe their feelings.
- **Object sorting.** Sorting is an occupational therapy activity for children with autism. Collect items such as leaves, twigs and rocks, and have your child sort them into categories.

## Music Time

- **Rain sticks.** Make rain sticks by filling plastic bottles with rice, dried beans, buttons or similar items. Sticks make a great sensory sound when mixed with the rice or other items. You can also use a paper towel or toilet paper roll, and seal off the edges with duct tape or cloth and rubber bands to make a rain stick.
- **Drum set.** Flip pots, plastic bowls, coffee cans or jars upside down to make drums. Use wooden spoons, pens, pencils or something else creative for your drumsticks. To explore the senses, use different materials to show your child the different sounds one item makes over the next. It becomes very exploratory and engaging.
- **Egg maracas.** Fill a plastic egg with jellybeans, dried beans, rice, buttons or anything that creates a sound. You can also use an egg carton. Cut out your egg and color it for more fun. Use a hot glue gun or strong tape to close the carton. Put two plastic or real spoons around the egg and put strong tape over them to create a musical instrument that is a great sensory item and is very engaging.
- **Singing.** Encourage kids to sing. This is not only very important to child development, but for kids to express themselves and be creative. Learn new songs together as a family. Play some of your favorite songs from when you were growing up. It may seem silly, and they may not like the songs, but they will remember the day they got to hear their guardians' favorite songs and they danced so silly to them.
- **Dance.** Follow a dance you can learn together that is age appropriate. Have a freestyle dance too as it's important for kids to be creative in their movements. Dancing is very fun and expressive!

## Games and Activities

- **Sharing time.** Ask your child to choose one item and share what they love about it, what the item can do and how it works. The next day, have them choose something else to share. This will help them feel comfortable talking out loud and transition back to school or ABA therapy. Take turns as a parent as well.
- **Story time.** Ask kids questions as you read. For example, if you were reading Cinderella you could ask, how would it feel to be the main character? What are some ways her stepsisters can show her kindness? If you were reading Aladdin, you could ask, if you had a magic carpet, where would you go? This helps children with autism learn empathy and helps them with perspective taking.
- **Hide and seek.** Play with specific rules so children know safe boundaries, that they cannot go outside or climb on or in something, such as a washer or dryer.
- **Seek and find.** Hide items around the house for your child to find. You can give clues and hints. This is great for exploration, critical thinking and taking turns.
- **Indoor obstacle course.** Set up an indoor obstacle course for your child. Each day you can alter it. They can even set one up for you as the parent. Add elements to your course such as balancing an item on a spoon or on your head. Have kids climb over a pillow or through something. Have a wooden puzzle at the beginning of



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the course without any pieces in it. At the end of the course, lay out all the puzzle pieces so they can grab a piece, come back to the beginning and put it in the empty puzzle.

- **Pretend restaurant.** Help your child with their creativity by playing restaurant with them. A lot of kids love to do this as it becomes fun imaginative play. Use play food or hand-drawn food, a notepad and pen. You can also make play money to enhance the experience. Kids will love eating at the restaurant and taking orders.
- **Cooking.** Encourage your child to help you cook meals. A lot of children love to be helpful in the kitchen. They may make mistakes, but if we are understanding and patient, they will be more likely to try again.
- **Build a fort.** Make a fort out of sheets, cardboard or any items you have around the house. This is fun for kids because they get to be creative, and it serves as a very fun area for story time, movie time or camping time.
- **Cardboard box movie theater.** Make a car out of a cardboard box, then let your child sit in to watch a movie. You can use paper plates to make wheels, design a number and name for your car, and draw headlights and a license plate. If you do not have a big enough box, you can use two smaller cardboard boxes and have open sides. Let your child bring snacks inside their car, they will love it!
- **Flower bouquet.** This is a great sensory project, as kids can tear and crinkle up different sized pieces of tissue paper or construction paper to make petals. Cut out flowers or tear pieces to glue onto the stems. Make a mosaic design by using the torn pieces and gluing them in different patterns to a piece of paper. For added fun, glue on buttons or other items for continued sensory and tactile exploration.
- **Sensory find bucket.** Put a mixture of items into a bin full of rice or dried beans and use tongs or hands to fish them out. This is a very fun sensory activity. For a second challenge, your child can choose smaller toys that could be safe to put into the sensory bin and with their eyes closed, and they can feel around to see which toy they think it is. This helps children explore their senses and is a fun way to engage and manipulate items.
- **Spaghetti strainer sensory activity.** Take cooked spaghetti noodles or uncooked noodles and let your child string them through your colander. This great sensory activity uses fine motor skills as well.
- **Slime.** This tactile art activity can be a science experiment too. Mix one cup of Elmer's glue into a bowl, add a few drops of either food coloring or nontoxic paint, and stir it up. Next, add one spoonful of baking soda, followed by one and a half spoons of contact solution. If you find it is too sticky, slowly add more drops of contact solution and continue to mix. This is not a recommended activity if your child puts items in their mouths. Parental supervision is recommended.
- **Sorting snacks game.** Kids can sort snacks by size, color and similarities. Work on adding and subtracting with the snacks. This helps kids with colors, shapes, basic math, counting and more.
- **Grounding techniques.** Slowly recite the alphabet or count to 10, hold something tactile/sensory or a stuffed animal, play calming music, list items you see around the room or do stretches/simple yoga moves.

Sources:

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