

Activities to Go

Dashing here and there? Even your busiest days bring opportunities to learn! When you and your youngster go to the store, the dentist, or anywhere at all, enjoy these activities together—and watch her abilities grow.



1 Super spelling bee

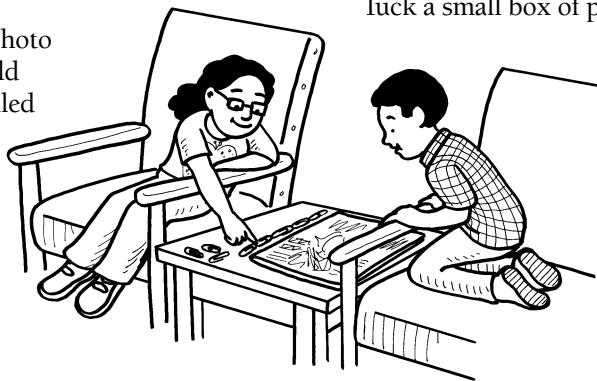
In the grocery checkout line, use your shopping list for a spelling lesson. Call out items from the list one at a time (*chicken, yogurt, lettuce*) for your child to spell. She can check her spelling on signs or product packaging. When she gets five in a row right, she gets to think of a grocery item for you to spell (*detergent, teriyaki*).

2 Hide-and-seek bottle

Let your youngster shake, rattle, and roll his way to better coordination and reading skills. Fill an empty water bottle or milk jug three-quarters full with uncooked rice or beans. Get 5–10 small objects (coin, rubber band, game piece), make a list of the items, and tape the list to the bottom of the container. Add the objects to the container, close tightly, and shake. Have your child read the list, tilt the bottle to look for each treasure, and cross off the items as he finds them. *Variation:* Instead of making a list, tell him there are 10 objects. He can write down each one as he spots it.

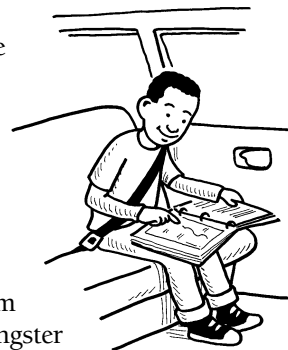
3 Artsy fun

For instant creativity, get a small photo album filled with pictures cut from old magazines and a plastic zipper bag filled with washable markers. Let your youngster use the markers to trace the pictures on the outside of the plastic sleeves. Have her remove the magazine picture and draw her own details onto the outline. When she finishes the album, encourage her to make up a story to go along with her drawings.



4 Homemade atlas

On your next trip, put away your GPS device, and let your child be the navigator! He'll practice reading maps and use spatial reasoning skills. When heading out, help him print out a map and directions to your destination from a free online map service (maps.google.com, mapquest.com), or draw a map on paper. Hole-punch the maps, and keep them in a three-ring binder. Ask your youngster to read the directions to you as you go, and suggest that he trace your route on the map with a highlighter. After a few trips, he will have a collection of directions—and a better understanding of maps.



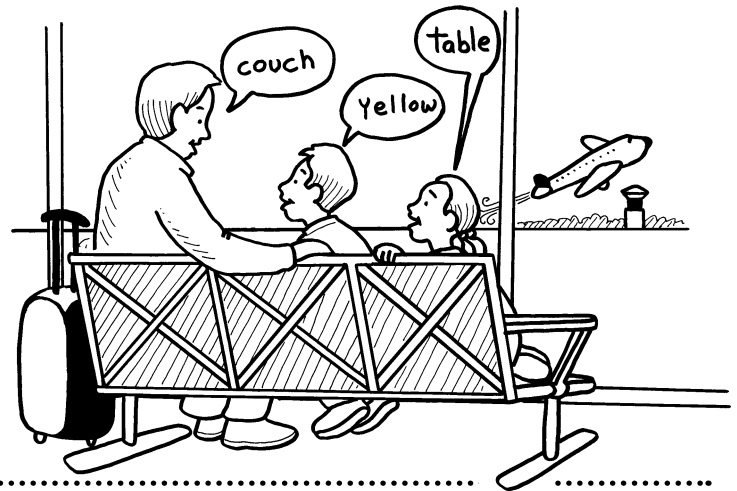
5 Paper clip measurement

Tuck a small box of paper clips into your bag or pocket, and play this estimating and measuring game in a waiting room. Ask your child to find an item (a magazine, a toy, her sneaker) and estimate how many paper clips long it is. Then, she can line up paper clips end-to-end to measure the object. If her estimate is within one paper clip, she scores a point. Next, it's your turn to estimate and measure an item. The first person to score five points wins.

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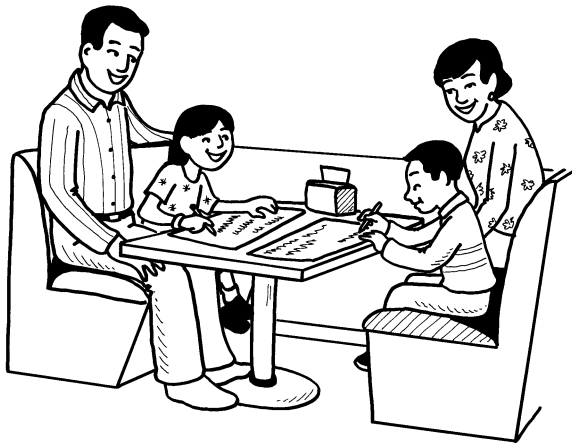
6 Pattern race

Give your child's math and thinking skills a workout while you're waiting in the dentist's office, car repair shop, or airport. Let him choose a pattern, such as "furniture, color, furniture, color." Using your watch or cell phone as a timer, see how many items your family can name in one minute. For example, you might say, "Couch." Your youngster could add, "Yellow," and the next person may say, "Table." Or try a number pattern like "add 2, add 3." Players alternate adding 2 and then 3 to the next number (0, 2, 5, 7, 10).



7 Jungle journey

After ordering food in a restaurant, use the time to build your youngster's imagination and find out how well members of your family know each other. Choose a topic (say, a trip



through a rain forest), and have each person ask a question. *Examples:* "What is the first thing you would pack?" "Which animal do you want to see the most?" On a paper napkin or placemat, everyone writes down their own answers, along with what they think others will say. After three questions, share your responses. The person who correctly predicted the most answers picks the next topic.

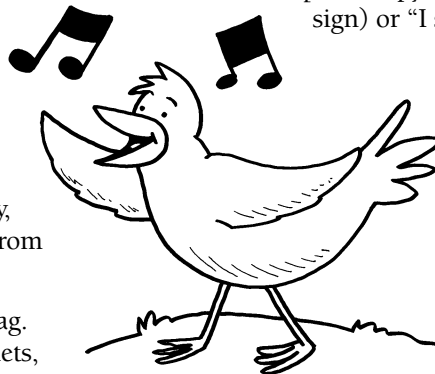
8 Story hunt

Strengthen reading and creativity with this activity. When you run errands, encourage your child to collect words from highway billboards, waiting room magazines, or store aisle signs. He can jot them down in a small notebook. On your way home, have him write a story that uses every word. *Tip:* If he's having a hard time fitting a word into his tale, perhaps it could be the main character's last name ("Mr. Fusion," for example).

Quick fun

Listen, read, sing, and more with these ideas for learning in the car:

- Make a list of sounds for your youngsters to listen for as you drive (siren, bird singing, train whistle). They can check them off as they hear each one.
- Gather books from home or the library to read in the car. To keep interest high, include a variety (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, trivia, jokes) and switch up the collection from week to week.
- Put sheets of aluminum foil in a zipper bag. Your children could shape them into bracelets, crowns, hats, and even animals.



- Play I Spy. Have your youngsters look for items of a particular color or shape or that begin with a certain letter. *Examples:* "I spy an orange triangle" (a "No Passing Zone" sign) or "I spy something that begins with B" (a barn).

- Suggest that your children copy down license plate numbers and add the digits together. What's the highest number they can come up with? *Variation:* Rearrange the digits to make the largest or smallest possible number.
- Take along a small voice recorder for road trips. Have your youngsters tape your family sing-alongs.

Recipes for Success