

5 4 3 2 1 Countdown To Kindergarten

Countdown To Kindergarten suggests monthly activities to help prepare a child for Kindergarten.

Monthly Activities

January: It's Cold Outside



Have your child choose the clothes to wear when it is cold and practice doing the zipping and buttoning. Make a game out of keeping all these clothes together when you take them off. Make a rap: "You put your mittens in your hat and your hat in your sleeve." If there is snow on the ground, make three different sized snowballs and use the words big, bigger, and biggest to describe them. Bring one of them inside and put it in a bowl. If there is no snow, put an ice cube in the bowl. Ask your child, "What will happen to the snowball or ice cube? How long do you think it will take?"

Other Ideas:

- When you go out, walk to the tree you chose in the fall and ask "What is different about the tree now?"

Related Books:

- The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats / Spanish Version: Un Dia De Neive
- The Jacket I Wear in the Snow by Shirley Neitzel
- The Hat by Jan Brett
- Leo the Late Bloomer by Robert Kraus / Spanish Version: Leo El Retona Tardio

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February: You've Got Mail!



Have your child draw a picture and "write" (or scribble) a note to himself/herself. Address the envelope and write the return address. Talk about why you write a return address and why it is important to know your own address. Put a stamp on your letter and explain why. Take the letter to a mailbox or the Post Office and ask: "How long do you think it will take for the letter to come back to us?" See if you are right. To have writing materials ready to use, make a writing box. Decorate a shoebox and put writing materials in it such as: pencils, crayons, note pad or scrap paper, scissors, glue stick, scraps of yarn or cloth, old greeting cards, stickers. You can keep this in a special place in the house for writing/drawing projects. Take the writing box with you when you travel (by car, bus, subway, plane).

Other Ideas:

- Lift the flap on an envelope to make the shape of a "house." Write your address on it and have your child decorate it. Put it on your refrigerator.
- Send a card or letter to a friend or relative. Have your child draw a picture of someone they love and mail it. This is a good opportunity to talk about feelings: loving someone, missing someone, being sad, being happy, or mad, etc.

Related Books:

- *Letter to Amy* by Ezra Jack Keats
- *Mailing May* by Michael O. Tunnell
- *Dear Mr. Blueberry* by Simon James
- *Loving* by Ann Morris
- *Guess How Much I Love You* by Sam McBratney / Spanish Version: *Advina Cuanto Te Quiero*
- *Everybody Has Feelings / Todos Tenemos Sentimientos: Moods of Children as Photographed* by Charles E. Avery

For more ideas visit www.countdowntokindergarten.org

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March: March Around The House



Walk around your house looking at colors, shapes, and numbers. Count the windows, the steps on the stairs, the number of rooms, chairs, etc. Look for shapes and colors in your home. Say "Let's find a square" or "Let's find things that are red." If colors and shapes are new to your child, place something red in her hand and say "That's red. Let's find other red things." Or "This is a square. Let's find other things in the house that are square."

Other Ideas:

- Write large numbers from one to five on a piece of paper. Next to the number one, put one little ball of clay or play dough, next to the number two, put two little balls of clay and so on. Have your child count the balls and use a finger to trace the number.

Related Books:

- The Doorbell Rang by Pat Hutchins
- Red is Best by Kathy Stinson / Spanish version: Rojo Es El Mejor
- Afro-bets Book of Shapes by Margery Brown
- Color Box by Dale Ann Dodds
- Spot's Big Book of Colors, Shapes, and Numbers - El Libro Grande de Spot Colores, Formas, y Numeras by Eric Hill

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April: Word Play



Have fun with the sounds in words. Clap out the rhythm of your name and have your child do the same. Then try other people's names (Jon-athon, La-toy-a). Say words that start with the same sound as your child's name: Sam, soap, and sandwich. Say the word slowly so that you hear the first sound. Have your child try to do the same. Find the rhyming words in Mother Goose or other rhymes.

Other Ideas:

- Say two words and ask your child if the words begin with the same sound. If your child can do this, then try words that end with the same sound.

Related Books:

- *Sheep on a Ship* by Nancy Shaw
- *Hand Rhymes* by Marc Brown
- *Diez Deditos / Ten Little Fingers and other Play Rhymes from Latin America* selected by Jose-Luis Orozco
- *Arroz Con Leche / Popular Songs and Rhymes from Latin America* selected by Lulu Delacre
- Any collection of *Mother Goose Rhymes* or children's poetry.

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May: Spring Walk and Talk



As you walk in your neighborhood, say that you will be listening for sounds of spring, looking for the sights of spring, and trying to find the smells of spring. Ask: "What do you hear that sounds like spring? Where is it coming from? Can you make that sound?" Next, "What do you see that's new in springtime? What colors do you see?" Take a deep breath together at different points in the walk and ask, "Do you smell a difference in the air?" Talk about the differences in weather as the seasons change.

Other Ideas:

- Look back at the tree you "adopted" in the fall. How is it different this month?
- Try a "safety walk." As you go around the neighborhood, ask "How should we cross the street safely?" Point out a stop sign: "Do you know what the sign says? What do you think that sign is for?" You can also talk about streetlights, bus safety, and more.

Related Books:

- *When Spring Comes* by Robert Maas
- *My Spring Robin* by Anne Rockwell
- *My 5 Senses* by Ailiki / Spanish Version: *Mis Cinco Sentidos*

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June: Let's Guess



In March you counted what you saw around the house. This month, try estimating. See what 1, 5, or 10 of something looks like. Start with a small cup or a ziploc bag. Fill it with items that are medium-sized: marshmallows, crackers, cotton balls, large hair beads. Ask your child to guess how many are in the cup, and then count them together. Take the same cup and fill it with something smaller, like grapes, pennies, or cheerios. Have your child guess how many of each fit in the cup. Ask, "Why do you think the same cup holds only 5 marshmallows, but 10 grapes?"

Other Ideas:

- Do the same game but use larger containers, and try putting different items in.
- Ask your child, "Now can you guess how many of my feet it will take to walk across the kitchen or living room?" Walk across the room and count together. Say, "Your feet are a lot smaller. How many of your feet do you think it will take to cross the room?" Have your son or daughter walk the way you did, and count together. Later, you can have another family member or a neighbor guess how many feet it took each of you, so you can show off the game again!

Related Books:

- *How Many, How Many, How Many?* by Rick Walton
- *Much Bigger Than Martin* by Steven Kellogg
- *Mouse Count* by Ellen Stoll Walsh / Spanish version: *Cuentas Ratones*

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July: Water Play



Gather together a large dishpan and different sized containers (cups, plastic bowls, tupperware). Using a child's pool, your kitchen sink, or a bathtub, have your child explore how water fills containers. See how many containers of water can fill a larger one. Or try the reverse: start with a large container of water and talk about how that water can fill lots of little containers. Ask, "What do you think will happen if you put your hand in a full bowl of water? Why does that happen?" Try putting a sponge in the full container, instead of your hand. Squeeze the sponge to see how much water comes out. Try to find different shaped containers (Round, square, rectangular) that hold the same amount of water.

Other Ideas:

- Add a drop or two of food coloring to the water and watch it change colors. Ask your child to choose a color he/she likes, and ask what two colors need to be mixed to make that color. See if it works.
- Sink and float game: Take different items from around the house and have your child guess "What do you think will happen to this when we put it in the water?" Talk about sinking and floating. Try a rock, a sponge, a spoon, a straw, an empty water jug, a full water jug.
- At the end, you can add liquid dishwashing soap to the water to make bubbles.

Related Books:

- *In a Small, Small Pond* by Denise Fleming
- *Splash* by Ann Jonas
- *Who Sank the Boat?* by Pamela Allen
- *Hundirse y Flotar* by Maria Gordon

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August: All About Me!



Take blank sheets of paper and fold them in half. (You can staple along the fold, if you have a stapler.) Say, "Let's make a book about you! What would you like people to know about you?" (Helpful questions: "What makes you happy? What is your favorite color? What do you like to eat? How old are you? Who do you live with? What does your house look like? Do you have any pets?") You can write the answers (or let your child write some of the words in the answers, if she/he is ready). Write your child's name on the cover. Other things to write: your address and phone number. Have your child "read" the book to another family member or to a neighbor.

Other Ideas:

- **Picture Book:** Gather some photos from around the house of your child. Help your child glue them on to a page and ask your child to tell you about the pictures, as you write down what he/she says.
- **Face Book:** Title each page with a part of your child's face - My Eyes, My Nose, My Mouth, My Ears, My Hair, etc. For each page, have your child look in the mirror. Say, "Look at your eyes and try to draw them on this page." Title the last page "This is Me!" and ask your child to draw his/her whole face.

Related Books:

- *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman
- *I Like Me!* by Nancy Carlson / Spanish version: *Me Gusto Como Soy!*
- *William's Doll* by Charlotte Zolotov
- *Peter's Chair* by Ezra Jack Keats / Spanish version: *La Silla De Pedro*
- *Faces* by Barbara Brenner / Spanish version: *Caras*

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September: Let's Get Moving



To help your child learn the names of body parts (and get exercise while having fun), sing the following song to the tune of "Old MacDonald." (The idea for the Old MacDonald Had a Body" song is from Follow Me Too: A Handbook of Movement Activities for Three- to Five-Year Olds, by Marianne Torbert and Lynne B. Schneider.)

Old MacDonald had a body, e-i-e-i-o
And on his body he had a head, e-i-e-i-o
With a nod, nod, here, and a nod, nod, there,
Here a nod, there a nod, everywhere a nod, nod
Old MacDonald had a body, e-i-e-i-o

Continue with hand-wave, or clap, then: knees-bend, feet-jump, etc.

Other Ideas:

Sing and laugh while asking your child if she/he can

- Touch your stomach with your elbow
- Touch your nose with your toes
- Touch your shoulder with your ear
- Touch your knee with your wrist

Related Books:

- *Here Are My Hands* by Bill Martin, Jr.
- *From Head to Toe* by Eric Carle

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October: Fall Walk and Talk



As you walk around the neighborhood, choose a tree with colorful leaves. Talk about the color of the leaves and ask, "What do you think will happen to the leaves as the weather gets colder?" Then watch this tree throughout the year to see what happens. Collect leaves, acorns, chestnuts, or seeds and put them in a grocery bag. Turn a long strip of masking tape inside out and make a belt to stick the leaves on. When you get home you can glue or tape your new treasures on paper or cardboard. Talk about how they are alike and how they are different.

Other Ideas:

- Make "binoculars." Take two empty paper towel or toilet paper tissue rolls. Tape the two rolls together, side by side. Attach a string to the rolls. Put the binoculars around your child's neck and ask, "What can you see?" Your child may want to use crayons or markers to decorate the binoculars.
- When walking, ask your child, "How many ways can you walk?" Use the words "forwards, backwards, sideways, giant or large steps, baby or little steps, fast steps, slow steps." Ask, "Can you hop like a bunny? Can you waddle like a penguin? Can you jump like a frog? What else can we do?"

Related Books:

- *Red Leaf Yellow Leaf* by Lois Ehlert
- *Taking a Walk: A Book in Two Languages / Caminando: Un Libro en Dos Lenguas* by Rebecas Emberly
- *I Went Walking* by Sue Williams
- *Jonathon and His Mommy* by Irene Smalls

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November: Shopping Right at Home

Use the grocery store flyers that come in the mail. Make a real or a pretend grocery list with your child. Write down what you plan to "buy," pointing out the words as you do. (Leave lots of space next to each item.) Use a crayon or marker to circle the items you plan to "buy." Cut out the circled pictures from the flyer and have your child match and glue the pictures next to the word on the page. (For cutting, Fiskars children's scissors with round ends work well. You can buy them at grocery stores, pharmacies, or discount stores.)

Other Ideas:

- Cut out the pictures in the flyer and sort by type of food (vegetables, fruits, breads, meats, and drinks).
- Make up a menu for a meal and have your child cut pictures of different types of food to tape or glue on a paper plate.
- Use the flyer for your child to search for the letters in his or her name or the numbers from one to ten, cut them out and glue or tape them on paper.

Related Books:

- *Feast For 10* by Cathryn Falwell
- *It Takes a Village* by Jane Cowen-Fletcher
- *At the Supermarket* by David Hautzig
- *On Market Street* by Arnold Lobel
- *El Gusto Del Mercado Mexicano / A Taste of the Mexican Market* by Nancy Maria Grande Tabor

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December: Story Time



This can be a busy month, so try a simple activity together. Tell or read a familiar story or fairytale to your child. Change your voice for different characters. Help your child retell the story back to you or to another family member. If you have time, you can go to the library and get different versions of the same story, read them and talk about the differences. (For example, there are many versions of the Three Little Pigs.)

Other Ideas:

- To act out the story with simple puppets, draw a face on a paper plate and glue the plate to a popsicle stick.
- Talk to your child about when you were little, or talk about your heritage or traditions. Ask your child or children if they would like to start a new tradition that your family can do together. She if she/he has ideas. (It can be as simple a tradition as cooking or baking together, singing special songs or something outside the home, such as visiting people who are sick.)

Related Books:

- *Tell Me a Story Mama* by Angela Johnson
- *A Birthday Basket for Tia* by Pat More / Spanish version: *Una Canasta de Cumpleanos Para Tia*
- *Through Grandpa's Eyes* by Patricia MacLachlan
- *Los Tres Cerditos: Un Cuento Tradicional* by Margot Zemach
- Different versions of fairy tales such as *The Three Little Pigs* or *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*