



Teachers Resisting Unhealthy  
Children's Entertainment

# TRUCE PLAY BOXES

## Play Boxes: For Hours of Creative Play

Play Boxes contain collections of small, familiar, inexpensive items that are organized around a play theme and are presented in an appealing way. Playing with the everyday items in these boxes encourages children to ask questions, investigate, problem solve, and act out familiar scenes. Creative play develops valuable skills including creativity, communication, collaboration, and early academic skills.



Children are natural “scientists,” exploring and learning about their world while involved in activities sometimes misunderstood as “just play.”

Play Boxes are a great way to support children’s creative play by providing easily available, engaging activities and materials that don’t involve screens.

### Here’s how to create Play Boxes for your child:

1. Find a sturdy cardboard box or a plastic bin.
2. Choose a theme and put a label on the box (including both a simple word and a picture of the theme). Decorate the box yourself or with your child, if you like.
3. Collect items for your box at home or purchase supplies at drug stores, hardware stores, stationery stores, arts and crafts stores, and/or grocery stores.
4. Put items in small containers, sandwich bags, or build dividers with pieces of cardboard to make appropriate compartments in the box. Young children often like to organize play items by returning everything to its place.
5. Store the Play Boxes that your child has stopped using in an out-of-the-way place. Choose one to bring out again when your child is looking for something interesting to do. (This keeps the boxes fresh and engaging for your child). You might add one or two new items to the box before you bring it out again.

**Ideas for  
Play Boxes  
inside!**

6. Play Boxes are ideal for rainy days, sick days, play dates, when a child needs a break from screens or when “bored” and looking for something fun to do.

**Play  
Boxes  
Make  
Great Gifts, Too!**



Consider creating and giving a TRUCE Play Box—an alternative gift idea that children will love!

## First Aid

Children understand, control, and gain emotional comfort acting out real-world injuries, illness, and doctor visits.

- Flashlight
- Band-aids
- Sling
- Ace bandages
- Eye patch
- Gauze
- Fabric strips/ bandages
- Surgical mask



## Water/Bathtub

Playing with water encourages curiosity, imagination, experimentation, eye-hand coordination, and communication. Children develop understanding of science concepts such as sink and float and math concepts such as empty and full.

- Plastic tubing
- Rubber ducky
- Turkey baster
- Spray bottles
- Plastic funnel
- Bucket
- Sponges
- Wash cloth
- Small doll for bathing
- Bubble bath
- Plastic boats, animals, and people
- Plastic eye dropper
- Plastic nesting/ measuring cups
- Small plastic pitcher



## Playdough

Using playdough provides multiple benefits. While improving motor skills, children also develop imagination, the ability to represent objects, and even math skills related to comparing and changing size.

Buy a can of playdough (or make your own using the recipe below).

- Plastic knife
- Garlic press
- Popsicle sticks
- Wooden dowel
- Plastic lids
- Buttons and beads
- Plastic animals and people
- Children's scissors
- Small tray



### Playdough Recipe

1 cup flour  
1 T. oil  
1 cup water  
1/2 cup salt  
2 t. cream of tartar  
Food coloring (baker's colors are more intense)  
Mix ingredients in saucepan. Cook over low heat stirring constantly until playdough pulls away from sides of pan. Scoop playdough onto wax paper, knead until smooth. Store in airtight container.

## Office

These materials are especially suited for playfully building interest in early literacy skills related to writing and reading!



- Stapler
- Hole puncher
- Tape
- Post-it notes
- Clipboard
- Scissors
- Glue and glue sticks
- Pencils
- Pens
- Markers
- Highlighters
- Paper clips
- Rubber bands
- Envelopes
- Stickers
- Paper
- Ink pad and stamp
- Spiral notebook
- Index cards

# Active Outdoor Play

*Playing outside allows children time and opportunity to build motor skills, such as strength, balance, and coordination. Children can explore cause-and-effect with various natural materials and make natural discoveries about the physical world.*

- Jump rope
- Balls
- Bean bags
- Frisbee
- Sidewalk chalk
- Sidewalk paint
- Cones
- Whistle
- Stopwatch
- Bubbles
- Spray bottles
- Bucket with brushes (use water to “paint” rocks, fence, sidewalk, sides of buildings, etc.)



## Cooking

*Imaginative cooking play gives children freedom to mimic adult activities that may be dangerous in a real kitchen. As they play, children are also counting, measuring, developing fine motor skills, building vocabulary, cooperating, and communicating.*

- Small mixing bowls
- Measuring cups
- Measuring spoons
- Rolling pin
- Small whisk
- Wooden spoon
- Spatula
- Empty plastic spice bottle
- Cookie cutters
- Recipes
- Children's cookbook
- Apron
- Chef's hat
- Spiral notebook for child's original recipes, as dictated to an adult



## Sensory Fun



*Playing with materials of various textures provides chances to pay attention to touch, smell, sight, and sound. Sensory play supports language growth, development of fine motor skills, problem solving, reasoning, and social interaction.*

- Hypoallergenic, unscented shaving cream
- Plastic tray
- Food coloring
- Popsicle sticks, clean combs, plastic fork, paint brush

Adult sprays shaving cream on tray, adding food coloring. Children sculpt, smooth, draw, and write. This can also be done in a bathtub.

## Nature

*Exploring nature can be a great way to practice counting, sorting, and classifying. By comparing the many treasures found in nature, children begin making discoveries about the life cycles and how plants and animals grow and change.*

- Magnifying glass
- Binoculars
- Nature guides with pictures of birds, trees, animals
- Small sketch book or clipboard and colored pencils
- Vest or small backpack with pockets
- Small ziploc bags or plastic jars for collecting things
- Bag of bird seed



## Baby

*Imaginative play can provide a powerful emotional outlet for children as they act out their realities, boosting their self-regulation skills. By giving feelings to a baby doll, children practice identifying emotions and reading social cues.*



- Baby doll or stuffed animal
- Newborn disposable diapers
- Bib
- Empty baby food jars
- Baby spoon
- Baby bottle
- Infant or doll clothes
- Burp cloth
- Baby blanket
- Baby pillow
- Pacifier
- Rattle



# Vehicles

*Racing cars and building ramps develop problem solving and logical reasoning skills.*

- Small cars and trucks
- Vinyl sheet, paper, or fabric to draw roads with markers
- Boxes of various sizes for buildings, bridges, etc.

- Toilet paper rolls to be used for signs, bridges, stoplights, etc.
- Construction paper, markers, and tape



## Balls & Ramps

*As they play, children learn about the physical world, including speed, friction, and weight.*

- Paper towel and toilet paper tubes
- Masking tape (to tape tubes together)
- Board or piece of stiff cardboard (for ramps)
- Various textures to add to ramps to affect speed of balls or cars (tiles, carpet pieces, sandpaper)
- Small balls of all sizes and materials (foam, tennis, ping pong, rubber, plastic)
- Marbles
- Little cars



## Collage

*As children explore collage materials, they are developing creativity and problem-solving, as well as eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills.*

- Roll of paper
- Construction paper
- Children's glue, glue sticks
- Tape
- Stickers
- Recycled gift wrap and pieces of ribbon
- Fabric scraps
- Craft feathers
- Glitter
- Tissue paper
- Pipe cleaners
- Googly eyes
- Cotton balls
- Buttons
- Beans
- Colored pasta
- Leaves, pine cones, pebbles, shells, other natural materials



## Gardening

*Gardening provides many learning opportunities, from sorting and counting seeds to discovering how plants grow and how to care for them.*

- Plastic flower pots
- Potting soil
- Seed packets
- Shovel
- Small rake
- Small watering can
- Spray bottle
- Popsicle sticks
- Garden tools
- Gardening gloves



## Numbers

*In playing with these materials, children can identify numerals, count, estimate, measure, problem solve, and make up games.*

- Dice
- Playing cards
- Bingo cards
- Coins
- Calculator
- Calendar
- Measuring tape, cups, spoons
- Objects to count (such as buttons, shells, etc.)
- Pencil
- Paper



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TRUCE (Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment) is a national group of educators deeply concerned about how today's children's media entertainment and toys are affecting the play, learning, and behavior of young children.

For more information and to find other TRUCE publications, including our "Seasonal Family Play Plans" and "TRUCE Guide for Using Children's Books to Promote Play," visit [www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org), find us on Facebook at TRUCE Teachers, or contact us at [truce@truceteachers.org](mailto:truce@truceteachers.org).