



# Activities for Children Sick at Home

## Activity Guidelines

Activities for a sick child should be geared to a slightly younger age group or should be familiar activities that the child can complete successfully. Avoid activities that might frustrate or too greatly challenge your child when he is not feeling well.

The attention span of a sick child is usually shorter than normal. Plan activities that can be finished in short periods of time or can be interrupted easily and started again later.

If you can set regular times throughout the day to spend with your child, she will more easily let you go about your daily tasks. The younger child needs your attention more often, but for shorter periods of time; the older child can manage being with you less often, but will enjoy having you stay long enough to play a game or do some activity with her.

Whenever possible, help your child get started on an activity, check on his progress, and help him finish or clean up. This kind of structure encourages a child to continue on his own.

Help your child set her play space. If she needs to stay in bed, then be sure she can play in bed. Provide her with a large, firm surface for playing and, if possible, some sort of table at her bedside.

Ask yourself, "Can the activity be done successfully in bed?" Avoid games that need lots of players, activities that need a lot of floor space, or toys that would be best played outside.

Try not to insist on neatness. For messy activities, an old vinyl tablecloth or a piece of vinyl can help protect your child's bed or play area. (Do not use thin plastic bags or sheets with children under three years due to suffocation hazard.)

Avoid activities or toys, especially for the younger child, with many pieces that can get lost in your child's bedding. For the child six or seven years and older who enjoys toys of this type, use a large tray or flat tray-like cardboard box to help keep the pieces together.

Familiar toys and play items give a child comfort and security; these are the things he will enjoy playing with and having around him. It is usually not necessary to buy new toys for a sick child. You can add interest and variety to his play by helping him discover new ways to play with his toys and by providing him with new activities or projects using familiar objects found around the home. Set yourself and your child up for success!

## Activity Suggestions

### Under Three Years:

- Cuddling and tender loving care
- Reading/looking at books
- Coloring
- Sorting/matching toys and activities
- Music
- Playdough
- Stacking/nesting toys and activities
- Easy-to-handle building sets (Duplo)
- Dolls/stuffed toys
- Activity sets or centers (i.e., Fisher Price Farm or Garage)

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## Three to Five Years

- All of the activities listed above, plus
- Puzzles (5-25 large pieces)
- Simple matching games (Memory, Lotto, Picture Dominoes)
- Puppets (make your own out of paper lunch sacks!)
- Painting
- Cutting and pasting
- Dramatic/imaginative play (“Let’s pretend...”)
- Bubbles

## Five to Seven Years

- Simple games (Candyland, Chutes & Ladders, checkers, cards)
- Puzzles (up to 60 large pieces)
- Simple crafts, using: safety scissors, glue, crayons, non-toxic felt markers, tape, scrap material/yarn, paper/cardboard, egg cartons, paper towel tubes, ribbon, wrapping paper, etc.
- Construction/put-together sets with more pieces (Lego)
- Sorting/matching/counting activities (pictures, colors, objects)
- Reading/stories
- Music
- Playdough
- “Practice” academic skills
- Collections

## Seven to Nine Years

- Paper and pencil games (word search, mazes, matching, crosswords)
- Board games
- Puzzles (100 pieces)
- Crafts (can add more steps, materials)
- Beginning sewing activities
- Magnets and science-like activities
- Reading
- “Helping” activities
- Collections
- Music

## Nine to Eleven Years

- Activities from above group with added difficulty and complexity. Has more defined interests.

## Eleven Years and Up

- Already developed interests will prevail.
- Competitive games
- Hobbies/collections
- Music
- Reading
- Talking
- Daydreaming, planning, organizing

## Booklist

This list includes some of the many books for parents on this topic. Visit a local library or bookstore to choose those that best fit your needs and style of child rearing. You can also check out many of these books at the Family Resource Center at Children’s located on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor next to the Train elevator.

### Alternatives to the Screen

**Family Fun Book: More than 400 Amazing, Amusing and All-Around Awesome Activities for the Entire Family!**

Joni Hilton, 1998

**Mister Rogers’ Playtime: Encourage Your Child to Create, Explore, and Pretend with Dozens of Nurturing and Easy to do Activities**

Rogers, Fred 2001

**101 Activities for Kids in Tight Spaces: At the Doctor’s Office, on Car, Train and Plane Trips, Home Sick in Bed.**

Stock Kranowitz, Carol 1997

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## Toy Book

Caney, Steve, 1990

Shows you how to make more than 50 toys from things you already have around the house. The discovery, building, action and design-oriented toys are geared for children four to eight.

## What to Do After You Turn off the TV

Lappe, Frances Moore, 1998

This book shares lots of fresh ideas for enjoying family time. From arts and crafts to cooking and baking, storytelling to make-believe, simple games to days at the beach, and educational experiences to just plain silly, this book has activities for toddlers, older children and the whole family.

Information in these books may not reflect the philosophy or practice of Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center.

### For More Information

- Your health care provider
- Children's Resource Line:  
(206) 987-2500 or 1-866-987-2500  
toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.

**Children's**

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