

Crafty Kids

What can you make with cardboard boxes, dental floss, marshmallows, and coat hangers? When doing craft projects with your child, the possibilities are endless. We've taken some easy-to-find items and come up with seven projects that will keep your little one happy, busy, and learning.

ABC mobile

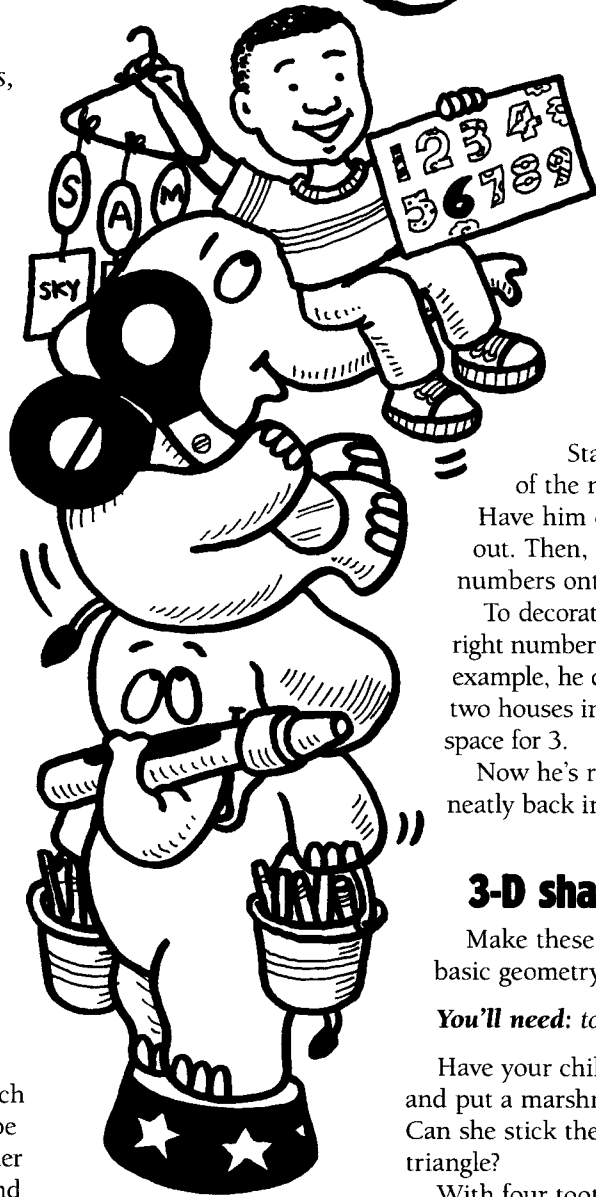
Your child can practice reading skills while creating a colorful mobile. She'll learn to recognize letters, hear beginning sounds in words, spell her name, and identify a few words.

You'll need: old magazines, safety scissors, plastic lids (from coffee cans or carryout containers), tape, hole puncher, yarn, plastic coat hanger, glue, poster board

Have your youngster look through magazines to find each letter of her name in large type (from headlines or ads). Let her carefully cut the letters out and tape each one on a separate plastic lid. Punch a hole at the top of each lid and several more holes at the bottom.

Then, help her string yarn from the bottom of the hanger to the tops of the lids, and tie knots at each end. Suggest that she vary the color and length of the yarn to make her mobile more interesting.

Next, your child can find words in the magazines that begin with each letter of her name. Have her cut them out



and glue them to pieces of poster board. With yarn, help her hang the words from the matching letter on her mobile.

Counting puzzle

Making a number puzzle is a fun way to practice counting and number recognition.

You'll need: 2 equal-size pieces of cardboard (each 8½ x 11 inches or larger), crayons, safety scissors, glue

Start by helping your youngster draw outlines of the numbers 1–9 on one piece of cardboard. Have him color the numbers and carefully cut them out. Then, he can glue the cardboard with the missing numbers onto the second piece of cardboard.

To decorate his puzzle board, have your child draw the right number of objects for each missing puzzle piece. For example, he could draw one heart in the space for the 1, two houses in the space for the 2, and three fish in the space for 3.

Now he's ready to do his puzzle! Each number will fit neatly back into its hole.

3-D shapes

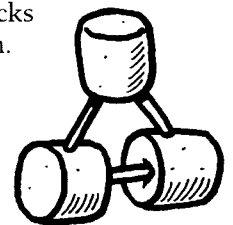
Make these edible shapes with your child. She'll learn basic geometry and work on fine-motor skills, too.

You'll need: toothpicks, marshmallows

Have your child count out three toothpicks and put a marshmallow on one end of each. Can she stick them together to form a triangle?

With four toothpicks and four marshmallows, she could make a square. And with six of each, she might try making a rectangle (two toothpicks for each long side and one for each short side).

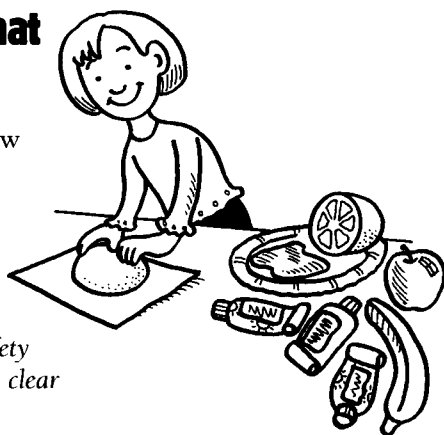
You'll have fun experimenting. See who can make the shape with the most sides. Introduce words like pentagon (five sides), hexagon (six sides), and octagon (eight sides). Ask your youngster how many toothpicks and marshmallows she'll need for each.



Produce placemat

Make a yummy-looking placemat that will let your child review her colors every time she eats.

You'll need: fruits and vegetables, paints in matching colors, white paper, crayons, safety scissors, cardboard, glue, clear laminate



Gather different-colored fruits and vegetables (strawberry, orange, carrot, green pepper), and cut them lengthwise. Have your youngster dip the cut sides into paint that matches the fruit or vegetable's color and stamp them firmly onto white paper. *Tip:* Leave small items (blueberries, grapes) whole so she can lightly press several times to make a "bunch."

Below each stamp, help your little one write the name and color of each food in the same color crayon (for example, use green to write "kiwi"). When the prints are dry, she can cut them out, along with their labels.

Finally, have your child glue the prints and labels onto cardboard, and add her name. Cover with clear laminate, and serve a snack on her new placemat! *Note:* Watch to make sure your youngster doesn't eat the fruit with the paint on it.

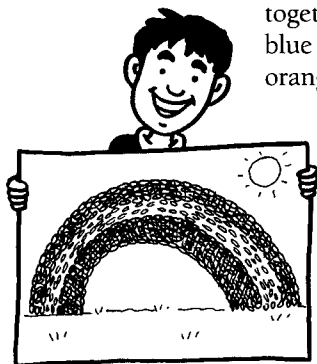
Rainbow rice mosaic

Build your child's small-motor skills and help him learn about mixing colors with this colorful mosaic.

You'll need: 6 small bowls with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water in each, food coloring (red, yellow, blue), $\frac{1}{2}$ cups uncooked white rice, strainer, paper towels, construction paper, pencil, paintbrush, glue, spoon

Have your youngster squeeze 3–4 drops of food coloring in the water. Encourage him to make one bowl each of red, yellow, and blue, and then add colors together to make three more (red and blue for purple, red and yellow for orange, and yellow and blue for green).

Next, have your child add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of rice to each bowl and wait 10 minutes. Let him drain the rice in a strainer and dry it on paper towels for about an hour.



Then, he can draw the outline of a rainbow on construction paper and brush on glue. Have him spoon on rice, and a beautiful rainbow of color will appear!

Pattern necklace

Playing with patterns will help your youngster learn math skills such as "skip counting" (counting by 2s, 5s, or 10s). With this project, your little one will get a necklace to wear, too.

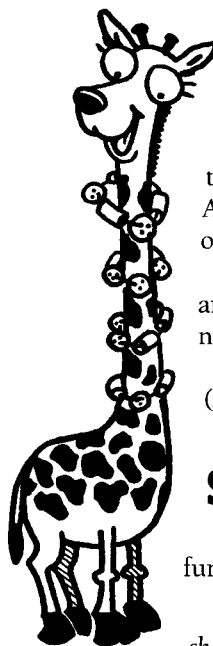
You'll need: narrow ribbon cut into 8-inch strands, unwaxed dental floss, buttons, colored drinking straws cut into 1-inch lengths

Tie a ribbon in a bow around a 24-inch piece of dental floss, about 6 inches from the end. Then, have your child thread charms on in a pattern on the long side of the floss.

Begin by explaining the idea of patterns: "The buttons and straws are going to take turns decorating the necklace. Now it's the button's turn. Then it's the straw's turn." Tell your child that charms can take two or more turns, and encourage her to make a pattern by using different colors of straws and buttons (green straw, yellow button, green straw, yellow button, and so on). After every six or eight charms, help her tie on a ribbon to keep the pieces from sliding.

When she's finished, add another ribbon, and tie the ends of the floss together. Her necklace is ready to wear!

Variation: Use a shorter piece of floss (about 1 foot) to make a bracelet or an anklet.



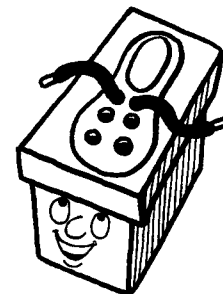
Shoelace box

Teach your child to tie his shoes with this fun project.

You'll need: shoebox, construction paper, shoe, crayons, pen, shoelaces

You and your youngster can make a shoelacing board by covering a shoebox lid with construction paper, tracing a shoe on top, and coloring it. Then, carefully use a pen to poke two rows of holes on the shoe where lace holes would be.

Now you're ready to lace a shoelace through the holes and show your youngster how to tie his shoes. He can use his new shoebox to practice over and over. *Idea:* Keep different-colored shoelaces inside the box to add variety.



Early Years