

Toys from Throwaways: Let's Recycle!



Have you ever seen a child unwrap a gift, then play more with the box and wrappings than with the toy? It's no surprise that children can find ways to play with many kinds of household items that you might otherwise throw away. You can be kind to the environment and encourage your preschool child's imagination by recycling household items that you no longer need. Here are some ideas to get you started. The possibilities are endless!



Practice safety first

Make sure all materials to be used by children are clean and free from sharp fasteners or sharp edges. Food containers, such as milk or egg cartons, should be thoroughly washed and dried. Do not use meat containers. Wrapping paper or paper towel tubes are fine but, for sanitary reasons, avoid using toilet paper rolls.



Provide magazines or catalogs, scissors, glue sticks, or tape

Colorful magazines are a great source for pictures that your child can cut out and paste into homemade books or collages. Make a guessing game using the front of a large windowed envelope or a piece of scrap paper with a window you've cut out of it. Put a picture cut from a magazine under the window so only a part of the picture shows. Can your child guess what the picture is? Show the whole picture and talk about it.



Reuse no-longer-worn clothes

Old clothes are great for imaginative play. Clean adult clothes can make great dress-up costumes. Your child will enjoy dressing up in shirts, dresses, shoes, and handbags. Old socks can be turned into sock puppets by drawing on eyes and a mouth and adding some yarn hair.



Share the unwanted mail

Open the mail first to check the contents—then share envelopes full of colorful advertising. Coupons can become part of a grocery store game. Large empty envelopes can hold cut-up art projects or other treasures. The front of a pretty card can be cut out to become part of a new card or an art project.



Make a treasure chest

Paint and decorate a small box or plastic tub to hold a child's special treasures. Label it with the child's name. An egg carton is great for storing coins, small rocks, and other items that can be sorted.



Weave a fruit basket

A clean plastic mesh fruit basket can become a doll bed or a pretty container for pencils or crayons. Tie one end of a piece of yarn or ribbon to the mesh; stiffen the other end with glue or tape to make a stiff point. Show your child how to weave the yarn or ribbon in and out of the holes to make patterns.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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