



At Home Outings and Day Trips

Make the days at home feel like a staycation for your kids with these creative adventures. To enhance the fun, read related books as part of the experience. We have offered paired suggestions. You can, of course, use books you already have that relate to each of the excursions. For these activities, we have only offered picture book pairings, as even big kids can enjoy a well-written picture book to set the mood for an experience. In addition to hours of fun, each excursion offers educational opportunities as well for kids of all ages.

Campout

Pick a night (or a day time, for younger kids) to do a camp-in with your family. You can use your backyard or living room for your campsite. You may use an actual tent and sleeping bags or create your own with sheets and blanket and pillows. After setting up camp, take a walk outside and look around at the trees, the birds, and every other element of nature you can see. What do you observe? As you're walking, collect one or two favorite nature finds to share later (a special rock, an interesting leaf, a flower, etc.). Once back at your campsite, have everyone share their nature finds and observations. Later, use flashlights or something else for a makeshift campfire, as you sit around and share "campfire" stories. You may also choose to eat and/or sleep as a family at your chosen campsite.

Book suggestions: *Just Me and My Dad* by Mercer Meyer; *When We Go Camping* by Margriet Ruurs; and *Olivia Goes Camping* by Jared Osterhold

Educational Enhancements: *Use identification websites to look up and identify found rocks, leaves, flowers, etc. Before or as a part of campfire time, teach elements of story telling (beginning/middle/end, characters, setting, conflict, resolution, details, etc.). You can have younger kids dictate stories to be recorded by a grown up or simply share aloud, while older kids can either write down their own stories or simply share them aloud. Other family members can get in on the story creating fun too. This activity can be as simple or involved as you want.*

Tea Party Time

Set the stage to enjoy a tea party at home, with all family members, dolls, and stuffed animals welcome. All available family members can get in on the preparation fun. To get ready for your tea party, prepare finger sandwiches with two or three different fillings of your choice. Next, put together a fruit and/or vegetable platter, accompanied by dips if you like (hummus or ranch for veggies and vanilla yogurt or whipped cream for fruit). Choose a dessert to add to the spread (cookies, chocolates, or anything that you have on hand). For the beverage, you can use hot or iced tea or some variety of juice. You can use a tea pot or a pitcher for serving. Lastly, decorate a space for your tea party. You can use your usual dining table or set up for the tea party on a coffee table or a picnic blanket outside. Adding touch like flowers or cloth napkins or handmade decorated placemats can make the setting feel extra special. Once all the preparations are done, enjoy your tea party!

Book suggestions: *The Tea Party in the Woods* by Akiko Miyakoshi; *Tea Party Rules* by Ame Dyckman; and *Tea Rex* by Molly Idle

Educational Enhancements: *Fine motor skills can be practiced with everything from cutting placemats and decorations to cutting fruit (with younger kids being asked to cut soft things, like bananas, that can be done using butter or plastic knives). You could also add simple origami folding lessons when preparing decorations for the table (seek step-by-step directions online for anything from simple origami flowers to more complicated origami tea cups for older kids). When cutting finger sandwiches, you can give a lesson in shapes and/or fractions.*

Living Room Beach Day

Create a day at the beach in your living room. You may wish to include a beach towel, sunglasses, seashells, blocks or other building materials for making a “sand castle,” a plastic bucket and shovel, and salt water (in whatever size container seems appropriate). You should also bring along some books (as no beach time is complete without them) and have all available family members join in on the fun.

Book suggestions: Swimmy by Leo Lionni; The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister; and Over in the Ocean in a Coral Reef by Marianne Berkes and Jeanette Canyon

Educational Enhancements: *If you have shells to use, refer to identification websites to look up and identify the sea creatures found in each shell type. Use “sand castle” building as an opportunity for counting or color sorting for younger kids. For kids who can read at any level, involve them in the beach story time, using it for reading practice.*

Wilderness Adventure

Go through your backyard or a local park or open space on the search for wildlife. Scour the trees for varieties of birds, overturn stones and bricks looking for bugs, and peek about the bushes for bunnies, squirrels, lizards, and other animals (domestic pets can count as wildlife too). Consider keeping a list of the all the creatures you see. For older kids, you may even make it a competition by seeing who can be the first to spot each creature and keeping a tally of who finds the most. To add to the experience, bring a sketch pad and colored pencils to draw some of your finds.

Book suggestions: We’re Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen; The Berenstain Bears Blaze a Trail by Jan and Sam Berenstain; and Finding Wild by Megan Wagner Lloyd

Educational Enhancements: *Refer to identification websites to look up and identify the wildlife found. Use online step-by-step drawing guides to practice drawing skills when capturing some of the favorite creatures spotted, from bugs to birds to lizards. Younger kids can practice counting and number writing when keeping track of all the wildlife found.*

Restaurant Night

Create your own fancy restaurant at home by adding candlelight, cloth napkins, flowers, a tablecloth, placemats, or whatever touches make the dining space feel special to your family. You can make some of the decorations as part of the day time play (curling tissue or construction paper into roses, decorating paper placemats, folding and writing out table name cards, etc.) After setting up the space, prepare the meal. For younger kids, getting them involved in the cooking will add to the experience, so choose food they can help prepare. Older kids may enjoy making the meal themselves (with just a bit of assistance and oversight). The food does not need to be fancy. Simply, creating a nice space for dining (including lit candles) and getting kids involved with the food preparation will help to make the meal feel like an event. You can even play music in the background while you eat, to help add to the experience.

Book suggestions: Today is Monday by Eric Carle; I Have a Restaurant by Ryan Afromsky; Froggy Eats Out by Jonathan London

Educational Enhancements: *Fine motor skills can be practiced with everything from cutting placemats and decorations to cutting fruit (with younger kids being asked to cut soft things, like bananas, that can be done using butter or plastic knives). Coking can be used as an opportunity for numerous math lessons, from teaching large numbers when setting the oven to teaching about fractions when cutting or measuring food items. Place tag writing can offer younger kids a chance to practice letter writing and older kids a chance to write in cursive. Older kids can act as waiters for the evening, recording orders, calculating bills, and giving change.*