

Building with cardboard boxes

Rationale:

A big empty box is the perfect starting point for creative and imaginative play. It is full of potential as your child decides how she can change the box into something she can use for pretend play and uses her problem-solving skills to turn her ideas into reality. Boxes can also encourage physical play. Often the first thing your child wants to do with a cardboard box is to climb into it – and perhaps jump out to surprise you!

Age range information

2-6 years

What you need

Any size boxes are fun to play with and will get your child's imagination working. If you can find a large cardboard box from an appliance such as a fridge, dishwasher or washing machine, your child can fit inside it and create something amazing.

If you want your child to be able to modify the box, some of these might be useful:

- Scissors or a craft knife (adult use only).
- Tape and glue.
- Paints, marker pens or thick crayons.

Depending on how your child decides to use the box, other items can add to her creation. For example:

- Colourful paper, foil, cellophane or fabric to decorate the box.
- Paper plates to use as the wheels of a car, bus, truck or train.
- Puppets and a bit of fabric for a curtain to make a puppet theatre.

How to do it

There is no 'right' way to play with a cardboard box, so let your child decide what she wants to do and follow her lead. You could start by just talking about the box together. For example, ask, 'How big is it? Can you fit inside?' or 'What does it remind you of? A house? A car?'

If your child needs suggestions to get started, here are some ideas:

- Make a house. Cut open a window and a door and let your child furnish it with cushions. She could even bring some toys in for a tea party.

- Make a plane or a car. Use paper plates for wheels and steering wheels. Cut off the box flaps and stick them back on as the wings and tail of a plane. Let your child draw or paste markings and racing stripes.
- Make a robot costume. Cut out a head-hole and armholes for your child and let her decorate it with foil and coloured markers.
- Make a puppet theatre. Cut a doorway and a window on opposite sides of the box. Hang a curtain over the window and let your child put on a show for the family from inside the box.
- Decorate the box. Cut windows for her to stick colourful cellophane over. Let her draw or paint on it and stick paper or scraps of fabric of different textures inside and out for a sensory experience.
- Use the box to encourage active play – for example, turn it sideways into a tunnel. You could also see if your child wants to pretend to be a Jack-in-the-Box – crouching low inside it and then jumping up like she’s on a spring.

Adapting for children of different ages

Allow your younger child to explore the box on her own terms. She will get more out of climbing in and out, and perhaps making a few scribbles on it with her markers, than she would watching you make the world’s best cardboard-box racing car on your own.

Encourage your older child to be more involved in the construction. Help her to problem solve rather than providing all the solutions – for example, whether glue or sticky tape works best, or which way up the box should be for a puppet show.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

Recommended Reads

- [Cardboard](#)
- [Fun things to do with cardboard tubes](#)
- [Cardboard Creatures](#)

Engage your child with simple activities at home! Check out some of these things you can do together:

- [Animal Masks](#)