

Creating Homemade Blocks for Young Children

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Young children play with blocks less often than in the past in homes, early child care classrooms, and elementary schools. There is now more focus on teaching math, reading, and writing while children sit at desks or tables.

However, research shows that blocks can help children's social development, physical skills, and potentially their school readiness. High-quality early child care classrooms often have blocks, but parents and teachers may wonder how to find quality block sets for their homes and schools. Many commercial blocks are expensive, and some are not widely available.

But there's good news: Parents and teachers can create homemade blocks by using easily available items found in homes and classrooms.

Play with homemade blocks can benefit children as much as play with expensive block sets.



Many materials found in the home can be used as blocks.

Creative Tips

- Check if items can be used for block play before throwing them away.
- Stuff boxes with crumpled newspapers, junk-mail ads, or used envelopes to improve strength.



- Wrap items in duct tape to improve sturdiness and long-term use.

Playing with blocks helps children learn and prepares them for school.

What can blocks do for children?

Playing with blocks helps children learn, prepares them for school, and helps form healthy friendships and healthy bodies. Block play can help children develop:

- **Math, Geometry, and Spatial Skills** — Children can learn about shapes, sizes, parts-and-wholes, and quantities. They begin to understand how to think about and see objects from different viewpoints.



- **Physical Skills** – Children move their fine motor muscles when they use their hands to change or move small objects as they build. They also use gross motor muscles when they use their arms and legs to bend over, reach long distances, and balance objects.
- **Social Skills and Language** – When children build with blocks in groups, they often talk about what they are building and how to build. This helps children learn new words, conversation skills, teamwork skills, and how to solve problems with friends.
- **Engineering, Imagination, and Science** – When children build block structures they use creative thinking and imagination. They plan and design block structures in the same way engineers think about blueprints and design. In addition, children learn about the concepts of gravity as block pieces tumble over, as well as the stability of structures and how to create supports so structures can stand. All of these skills are important for children's growing brains and bodies, and for encouraging early interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

Safety Awareness

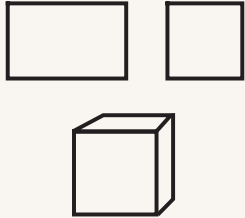



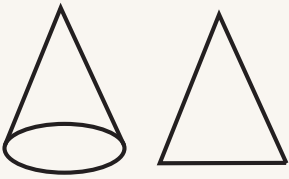
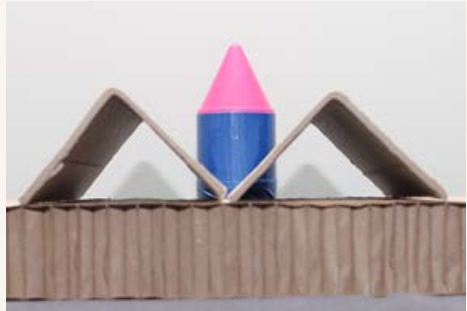


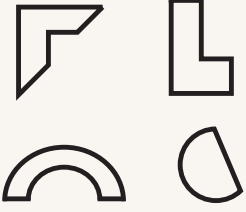

- If you make blocks with children, remember that adults should cut and create difficult items, thus preventing child injuries.
- Avoid using harmful items such as aluminum cans with sharp edges, plastic bags or attachments, packing peanuts, toilet paper rolls, spray cans, styrofoam, pill bottles, or any other items that can cut, poke, scrape, choke or cause harm if eaten or inserted into children's mouths.
- Always clean items before use to make sure any food pieces, chemicals, or other dangerous substances are removed.

Children of all ages enjoy playing with blocks, whether they are 9 months, 8 years old, 30 or 60 years old! Multiple ages and multiple generations can enjoy playing together with blocks. Children enjoy helping adults find materials to be used for making blocks. For little or no expense, sturdy blocks can be made with materials found in the home — and children still gain the same benefits of block play as they do with expensive blocks.



It is easy to make homemade blocks! Many materials are already in your home.

Here are some ideas to get you started. ►

Making Homemade Blocks		
Shapes	Items	Examples
<p>Rectangles/Squares/Cubes</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sturdy empty food boxes • Cardboard milk or juice cartons (liters, half-gallons, quarts, pints) • Shipping boxes • Tissue boxes • Shoe boxes • Gift boxes 	
<p>Cylinders/Circles</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper towel and wrapping paper tubes • Plastic-topped nut or snack containers • Water or juice bottles • Coffee cans • Empty tape rolls • Disposable cups or yogurt containers • Plastic lids, caps, bowls or plates • Empty oatmeal containers 	
<p>Cones/Triangles</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birthday party hats • Funnels • Top piece from cardboard milk or juice cartons • Cardboard shipping materials 	
<p>Planks</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sturdy cardboard box flaps • Safely-sanded lightweight wood pieces • Books 	
<p>Other shapes</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plastic bottles • Sturdy corners from packing boxes • Safely-cut pieces from plastic lids or containers • Plastic plumbing pipe 	



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