

Vroom Tips™



These print-at-home tip sheets include a mix of Vroom Brain Building Activities™ for children ages 0-5. Share them, put them up on your fridge, or carry them around—whatever helps remind you that brain-building moments are all around you.

Brain Building Basics™

We've made the science of early learning simple! Remember these 5 actions to help build your child's brain anytime. They're color coded for easy finding.

Look

Children use their eyes to learn. See what catches your child's attention and talk about it. Or connect eye-to-eye, then smile, chat, hug, or make funny faces!

Follow

Young children learn best when you follow their lead. Tune into your child's words, sounds, movements and ideas! Then respond with your own words and actions.

Chat

Children's brains light up when you talk, sing, or make sounds back and forth with them. Chat about your day, food, and what's around you, or string sounds together for a fun conversation!

Take Turns

Children learn from taking turns when you play, talk, or explore. After they go, take your turn. Then repeat: they go, you go, they go, you go!

Stretch

Children's brains grow strong when you help them stretch their learning further. Keep a moment going: ask your child a question that starts with what, when, where, how or why!

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Category Convos

Tell your child about a favorite food. Ask them to name a food they like that's in the same category, like fruit, but different. Keep count of how many different things you both like in the same category. Play the same game with something else, like clothes!

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



This game is teaching your child about categories; things that are the same in important ways, though different in others. They're also learning about your likes and dislikes compared to theirs, helping them learn about other people.

#49

Learn more at vroom.org

Smile and Wink

Smile at your child and then wink at them. Repeat it several times, then encourage them to try to copy you. The smile is easy, and their wink, which may be just crinkling their eyes, will make you smile again! Take turns. Count how many smiles and winks you share.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Playing "Smile and Wink" may seem simple, but it takes a great deal of skill for your child to pay attention to what you're doing, remember the rules (first you smile, then wink), and copy what you're doing. These are important skills for school and life.

#54

Learn more at vroom.org

What's Next?

Boost your child's independence by asking them questions instead of telling them what to do. If you're getting ready to leave the house, instead of telling them to put shoes on, try saying something like, "I see your socks are on. What comes next"?

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Asking questions helps your child think before acting. This takes focus and self-control. Your child must stop what they might want to do so they can reach their goal. This is true for even something as simple as putting on shoes.

#147

Learn more at vroom.org

Use Your Words

Does your child get upset and start to cry or whine? Gently remind them to use their words to say what is bothering them or what they want. If they're too upset to talk, try to guess what they want to say until they let you know you got it.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Helping your child learn to use words to share upset feelings is one of the best tools you can give them. This helps your child managing these feelings and express them in ways that others can understand and responded to.

#152

Learn more at vroom.org

No Words?

Are you teaching your child to use words to express their feelings? As you're out and about, ask them to notice animals, which don't use words, and see how they express what they want. Does the dog bark or stare at you? Ask them what they think the dog is trying to say.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



You can help your child learn to communicate with words and in other ways by noticing how animals communicate without words. Use what they notice to ask questions and help them think like a scientist, applying what they see to their own life.

#153

Learn more at vroom.org

New to You

When they are playing, help your child do things they haven't done before. Try out the swings or the slide at a playground, or even feel the different textures on the ground. As long as they're safe, let them try new things, with a helping hand if they need it. How do they respond? Celebrate what they say and do!

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Giving your child the chance to do safe things by themselves helps them feel confident and to learn to take on challenges.

#182

Learn more at vroom.org

Up and Over

Ask your child to find an object like a stick or rock and place it on the ground near you. Encourage them to explore different ways of moving over it: Can they jump? Hop over on just one foot? Run and then jump? Take turns jumping with them and talk together about how far you both go.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



It takes focus and self-control for your child to manage how their body moves, as well as flexible thinking to come up with different ideas. Fun experiences with math ideas like space and distance help them develop a foundation for learning now and in the future.

#204

Learn more at vroom.org

Touch Talk

Ask your child to touch the clothes you're both wearing. Talk back and forth about how they feel. You could say, "We're both wearing shirts. Mine is smooth and yours is wrinkled." Take turns using as many words as you can to describe how your clothes feel.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



This type of conversation helps your child learn how to make connections. This is the idea that that one thing (a word) can stand for other things (what they touch). You're also helping them learn new words and their meanings.

#246

Learn more at vroom.org

Food Favorites

As you go shopping, point out some of your favorite foods to your child and see if they like them: "I love bananas, do you?" Then invite them to point out a favorite food. Tell them if you like it. Play back and forth as you move down the aisles.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



This game teaches your child that people have different likes and dislikes. Thinking about how someone else might feel differently than them will help your child learn from others and form better relationships.

#270

Learn more at vroom.org

Shopping List Scribble

Writing a shopping list? Talk with your child about what you need. Read aloud what you write down: "Milk, eggs, cereal." Invite them to write or draw on the list too and to tell you what they're thinking about when they make those marks on the paper.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Your child is learning that the marks you both make on paper have meaning. Understanding that one thing stands for another is an important thinking skill for learning to write, read, and communicate.

#272

Learn more at vroom.org

Toothy Twosome

When brushing your teeth, have your child be your partner. Let them brush their own teeth first, then give them your toothbrush so they can help brush yours. Ask, "Can you help me brush my teeth? Can you brush the ones in the front, and then the ones on the sides?" Take turns!

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Sharing a moment and taking turns is one of the most important ways you can promote your child's learning today and in the future.

#357

Learn more at vroom.org

What Do You Feel?

Put some safe items your child loves—like an egg carton, plastic bottle, or small box—into a bag just for them. They can play with the full bag. When they reach in, ask, "What do you feel? Is it an egg carton or a bottle?"

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Who needs expensive toys when learning possibilities are limitless from everyday objects! This activity promotes the skills of paying attention and making connections between what your child remembers by sight and feels by touch.

#404

Learn more at vroom.org

Proud Potty

Potty training can be really tough. Try celebrating your child's successful potty trips. Tell them about what they did in a proud tone: "You went to the bathroom in the potty." Invite them to tell you what they did too. Be matter-of-fact about accidents.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



It's hard work to put together the signals that your body is telling you ("I have to go potty") with the actions of sitting in the right place, the potty, and going. When you praise your child's effort, "You did it!", they'll be more willing to take on the challenge.

#433

Learn more at vroom.org

What's Inside?

Is there an empty tissue or wipes box handy when changing your child's diaper? Hide something safe inside, lie them down, and give them the box. Shaking it, ask "Can you guess what's inside?" See if you can keep the guessing game going until they're changed and dressed!

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



This game is a great way to help your child learn life skills, like paying attention to clues (the sounds inside the shaking box), remembering the names of things, and having the self-control to try to lie still until the diaper is changed!

#443

Learn more at vroom.org

Clothing Choices

Does your child want to choose their clothes? Help them by giving them two choices: "Do you want to wear your blue pants or your green pants?" When they choose, congratulate them by saying, "Great choice, I like those too."

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Limiting choices in the early years sets your child up for success as a decision-maker, a skill they'll use their whole life. You're giving them the control they want and need without letting them get overwhelmed. This lets them focus on thinking.

#466

Learn more at vroom.org

Big Foot, Little Foot

Have your child help sort socks and find pairs when you're doing laundry. While they do it, you can chat about which socks go together and why. Are they the same color, pattern, or size? Help them hold the socks next to their feet, then your feet, and talk about the differences. Who has big feet and little feet in your family?

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Grouping, and figuring out what's the same and what's different, helps your child to understand the world around them. Back-and-forth chats help them connect their world to words. Plus it builds their vocabulary!

#489

Learn more at vroom.org

I Can Help

While you're doing laundry, ask your child to help. Invite them to sort clothes into piles of dark and light colors.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



It may take longer, but when you let your child help, they learn about how to hold an idea in their mind and get it done. These thinking skills are needed to make plans and see them through—skills they will need the rest of their life.

#495

Learn more at vroom.org

Pick the Cup

As you both have something to drink, take turns talking about how your cups are the same and different. Is one bigger? Smaller? What colors are they? What is in your cups? Is the liquid warm or cold?

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Exploring a cup might sound silly, but when you explore and talk about the everyday things that are around you in a back-and-forth way, you're fueling the curiosity your child will need to be a lifelong learner. For them, the ordinary is extraordinary.

#542

Learn more at vroom.org

Little Independence

Does your child want to do everything themselves? Whether it's eating with fingers or trying to use a fork, give them ways to be more independent. Talk to them about what they're doing. If they need, help them a little. When they're done, notice how they respond with a smile or an "I did it!" Celebrate with them!

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



It may take longer and be messier, but you're helping your child to feel good and develop new skills. This will give them a sense they can try something new and succeed.

#554

Learn more at vroom.org

One, Two Foods

Pick two food words, such as banana and apple, to make a word pattern two times. Repeat with your child, "Banana, apple, banana, apple." Have them pick two food words and make a pattern two times: "fork, spoon, fork, spoon." Talk about which word comes first and second.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



When your child is choosing words, listening to words, and making patterns with you, they're creating and then using a rule. Understanding and applying rules in patterns helps them learn math concepts.

#576

Learn more at vroom.org

Piece-by-Piece

Offer your child a whole fruit or vegetable, like an apple. Ask questions about what the apple looks like, feels like, and smells like before cutting it. After you cut it, talk about what you both notice. What does it look like, smell like, and feel like now? Does it always taste the same?

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



It takes flexible thinking to understand two things can look different but still be the same, like how an apple can be whole or sliced and is still an apple. This ability is important for learning and creativity. Talking back and forth is the best way to develop their language skills too!

#610

Learn more at vroom.org

Finger Telescope

Make a telescope with your hands. Circle your fingers and hold them to your eye and look at your child telling them, "I see you!" Show them how to make their own finger telescope. Take turns looking through the finger telescope and sharing what you see.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



This simple game is not only fun, it gives your child the chance to pay attention to their surroundings and think flexibly as they see familiar people and things in a new way. Being flexible is a big part of problem-solving and making the most out of life.

#666

Learn more at vroom.org

Animal Game

Here is a fun guessing game while waiting. Start with, "I'm thinking of an animal." Then give your child clues to help guess what animal it is. For example, "I'm thinking of an animal who lives in our house and is black."

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Playing games like this help develop what scientists call "working memory." They are using working memory to remember names and details. It also turns waiting-time into a fun time for learning!

#698

Learn more at vroom.org

Pretend Play

Here's a fun and easy way to add something new to your child's favorite song or story. Use a few familiar objects as you tell the story or sing the song. If you are outside, they can be leaves or rocks, or household items like a spoon or toy if you are inside. Pretend these things are part of your song or story. Ask your child for ideas too!

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Using pretend play helps your child learn that one thing can stand for another. Making connections and thinking creatively are part of learning to read and communicate. What else can you do to build these skills?

#703

Learn more at vroom.org

Fast-Slow Race

Invite your child to have a “Fast-Slow Race.” Find a starting line and count out loud together, “one, two, three!”, then go! As you get going, call out “slow!” Can they adjust their speed? Give them a turn calling out “fast” or “slow.” How fast can you go? How slow?

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



During a “Fast-Slow Race,” your child is practicing listening to directions and responding as the game changes. These skills will help them manage feelings and actions, now and in the future.

#819

Learn more at vroom.org

Mail Time

Talk to your child about getting mail and what it means. Then write them a note or give them a piece of junk mail or store flyer and say, “Mail Time!” After they look at it, take turns talking about the letters, pictures, colors, and designs.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



This game sets the stage for a back-and-forth conversation. As you talk about mail, your child’s vocabulary grows. As you point at the letters, they begin to understand that the lines on paper stand for sounds, words, and objects. This is a big step in becoming a reader.

#820

Learn more at vroom.org

Fast Dance

Let your child pick a fun, fast song to dance to. Ask them to make a dance move and then copy what they do. Take turns going back and forth copying each other’s dance moves.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



When you and your child copy each other, they’re learning to focus and connect what they’re seeing and what they’re doing. Following along and learning to focus are important skills for learning new things.

#823

Learn more at vroom.org

Hand Games

Use hand actions for your favorite rhyme or song, or make up your own. Face your child and hold their hands so they mirror you. Vary your tone of voice from high to low and use a big, expressive way of speaking or singing.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Rhymes and songs are great for early reading skills. Plus, the mirrored actions teach left to right tracking, also an important part of reading. This kind of speaking is extra engaging for your child. It can add brain-building to any chat in an interesting and fun way!

#844

Learn more at vroom.org

Be a Fixer

Pretend to fix things with your child. With a plastic spoon, pretend to fix a hinge on a kitchen cabinet. "I'm fixing this broken hinge on the cabinet door. Now it's your turn." After their turn, hold out your hand saying, "My turn!" Keep taking turns, smiling while you work.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Pretending is an important way that children make sense of their world. When children pretend, they learn that one thing (a plastic spoon) can stand for something else (a tool to fix a broken hinge). That is the basis of understanding symbols, which is important to literacy and math.

#846

Learn more at vroom.org

Sweep Together

Include your child in common chores. For example, start with, "It's time to sweep! Can you hold the dustpan for me?" Then, let them dump the dirt into the trash. Don't be surprised when they ask you to hold the dustpan for them. Go back and forth. Taking turns is how they learn best and makes them feel included.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Not only is your child learning by copying you, but they're also learning by doing. They're also figuring out how things work—that things get dirty and need to be cleaned up. More importantly, they're learning to be helpful and considerate.

#847

Learn more at vroom.org

Imaginary Flower

Does your child like to pretend? Tell them there is an imaginary flower growing on their nose. Describe what it looks like. Then pretend to grab it! Now say there is a flower on their ear and grab it too. Have them describe and grab the flowers on you and enjoy the joke.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Although pretending is lots of fun, it also teaches your child that one thing can stand for something else. These symbols are the basis of reading and writing, with words standing for objects and ideas. This game also develops children's creative thinking.

#165

Learn more at vroom.org

Sock Puppets

Sorting the laundry? Encourage your child to help you find all of the socks and make a pile of them. Pick a sock and pretend it is a puppet looking for its matching friend. Celebrate when you find a match. Then let them take a turn as the puppet.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Not only is this activity fun, but your child makes connections as they group the socks and look for the matching pairs. They must use focus and self-control to remember the details of the matching sock. When they pretend, they're thinking creatively.

#506

Learn more at vroom.org

Can You Find It?

Draw or use your cell phone to take pictures of things in your room like a chair, a table, or the refrigerator. Ask your child to look at your cell phone picture and say, "Can you find it in the room?" As they get good at this, you can make it a little harder.

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



This game helps your child make connections between pictures (symbols) and real objects. This skill is a basic for reading (where written marks stand for words) and math (where numbers stand for quantities of things), and is essential for learning.

#886

Learn more at vroom.org

What Can You Do?

Ask your child to think of things they can do like jump, climb, take giant steps, or collect stones. Ask them to show you one of them. Respond with something you can do, like collect leaves or make a telescope with your hands. Go back and forth.

Suggested Age

2 1/2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Are there things you can do together? Things they can do that you can't? Things you can do that they can't? You're giving them the chance to compare and understand people are the same in some ways and different in others.

#183

Learn more at vroom.org

Sounds Search

As you walk, listen to your child. Which sounds are quiet, which are loud? Yell "loud!" and mimic the sound. Then whisper "quiet" and try that one too. Go back and forth with them imitating all the sounds at their different volumes.

Suggested Age

2 1/2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Outside is the perfect place to talk about quiet and loud sounds. As your child listens for sounds and waits for the right time to make a quiet or loud sound, they're controlling their behavior. This skill is part of being able to set and reach goals.

#184

Learn more at vroom.org

Sight Search

Being out and about is a great time to be on the lookout for what's around. As you go, point out what you see. Do you see birds, trees, leaves, people? Ask your child, "How many do you see?" Take turns pointing to different things all over!

Suggested Age

2 1/2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



This type of activity helps your child learn to estimate numbers. They're using what they know about numbers and applying it. Being able to estimate is an important part of learning and using math.

#185

Learn more at vroom.org

Big Time

Play “Big Time” to make waiting time fly by. Hold up an object—a magazine, an item from a bag, or a toy. Ask your child, “Can you find something bigger than this?” After they do, then ask, “Can you find something smaller than this?”

Suggested Age

2 1/2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



When you take turns asking questions, this game becomes a back and forth conversation about size. It is a chance for them to focus on and explore the idea of size—something they will use to organize their understanding of the world.

#225

Learn more at vroom.org

Song-versations

While waiting, create singing conversations. Instead of talking back-and-forth, quietly sing what you want to say to each other. How does your child respond? Then try whispering. Keep going back and forth and make it a game.

Suggested Age

2 1/2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Singing their words and whispering them gives your child practice with controlling their behavior to play the game. This self-control is an important foundation for learning and being able to do what it takes to meet goals.

#227

Learn more at vroom.org

Short or Long

While getting dressed in the morning, chat with your child about if they should wear short sleeves or long sleeves. Do they need long sleeves to stay warm, or short sleeves to stay cool? Pretend together to be hot or cold and act out how you would feel. Brrrr!

Suggested Age

2 1/2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



When you ask your child what to wear, you're helping them think about how things can help us achieve a goal—like keeping ourselves warm or cool. Did you ever imagine that a T-shirt could build thinking skills like making a plan and reaching a goal?

#467

Learn more at vroom.org

Mealtime Message

At mealtime, put a message next to your child's plate. It may be a picture you tear out of a magazine, a quick note, or a drawing. As you sit down to eat, invite them to share the message. Take turns talking about the colors, letters, and pictures you both see.

Suggested Age

2 1/2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



A "Mealtime Message" is unexpected and fun. As you take turns talking about it, your child is learning to pay attention to details. They're also learning that marks and pictures stand for words and ideas, which is important when learning to read in the future.

#560

Learn more at vroom.org

Setting Sizes

As you and your child set the table, make it a game. Take turns holding things up and asking, "What is bigger?" or "What is smaller?" You could compare their cup and your cup or a large bowl and small bowl. What else can you play this game with?

Suggested Age

2 1/2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Your child is practicing focusing on details. Paying attention is an important skill in school and life. This game helps them see differences between things that are similar and learn more about size and shape.

#561

Learn more at vroom.org

Before and After

Chat with your child about how foods change as you cook them. You could show them how a pancake or tortilla goes from doughy to solid. Or how pasta or rice becomes soft. Let them use all their senses and touch them before and after (once cooled.) Talk together about what you see!

Suggested Age

2 1/2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Exploring how food changes means thinking about the food in two ways: before and after. Holding two things in your mind like this and comparing them is a great brain-building skill. Scientists call this working memory.

#567

Learn more at vroom.org

Little Lineup

Pick a few objects around the house, and line three of them up by size from smallest to biggest. Talk with your child about the lineup. Have them turn around while you rearrange the objects. See if they can put them back into the original order and talk them through it!

Suggested Age

2 1/2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



Your child is using what they already know about size to line things up like this. Using what they already know in new situations, like remembering the old order after the objects are rearranged, is an important skill for school and life.

#799

Learn more at vroom.org

Tent Time

Make a tent with your child! Cover two sturdy chairs with a blanket or towel and invite them to come inside. Make it a special place for games like playing “Peekaboo” or bringing special tent toys inside to play with. Name the special place together!

Suggested Age

2 1/2 years - 3 years

Brainy Background



A tent creates a new, almost magical space in a familiar place. As your child goes in and out, they have a chance to change their view of the world, adjust their behavior and play accordingly—in other words, to be a flexible thinker.

#800

Learn more at vroom.org

Hiding Clues

Invite your child to hide. Then search for them, talking out loud about the clues you’re using to find them. You can say, “I see something wiggling. I wonder if they’re near that chair.” If they giggle, say, “I hear a laughing noise near the door.” Now you hide and they make up the clues to find you!

Suggested Age

2 years - 3 1/2 years

Brainy Background



Children love hiding games because they help them understand that when things disappear they can continue to exist. To stay hidden, they have to use self-control. By sharing your clues for finding your child, you’re helping them learn problem-solving skills too.

#1016

Learn more at vroom.org