Heavy Work at Home

Play-based activities for pushing and pulling








Ages 3 to 5 **40 activities**

Proprioception · Motor planning · Proximal stability

What's inside

The activities are grouped by the main kind of movement each one uses, and most build more than one skill. Start anywhere your child is curious.

Push, pull and carry

Moving heavy things across the floor with the whole body.

Block Tower Tug 5
Heavy Blanket Nest Tug 6
Strong Pull Chain 7
Weighted Puck Push 8
Laundry Basket Skee-Ball 9
Air-Power Cup Delivery 10
Sponge Stack Tilt 11

Crawl, stomp and balance

Big body moves that take careful control.

Sticky Spider Crawl Maze 12
Balloon Waddle Race 13
Silent Bubble Walk 14
Space Station Balloon Squeeze 15

Squeeze and splash

Wringing, squeezing and carrying wet sponges and paper.

Sponge Squeeze Splash 16
Sponge Weight Release 17
Wet Paper Squeeze & Drop 18
Wet Paper Squeeze Mail 19
Sensory Balloon Squeeze Pairs 20
Wet Sponge Target Post 21
Sponge Stick Rotation 22

Smash, tear and press

Tearing, crumpling and pressing with strong hands and arms.

Foil Smash Target 23
Sticky Web Smash 24
Resistant Rip Mural 25
Sticky Roller Texture Wall 26
Foil Ball Toss 27
Foil Rod Roller 28
Squeeze and Slot Cups 29
Playdough Treasure Dig 30
Tape-Wrapped Block Unwind 31
Foil Mountain Climb 32

Strong hands

Pushing and pulling against tight, firm materials.

Felt Resistance Wall 33
Resistant Card Weave Pull 34
Foam Fortress Pull-Apart 35
Resistant Cardboard Push Pucks 36
Resistant Gate Push 37
Tension Gate Stick Pull 38
Sticky Rice Push-Through 39
Fuzzy Force Sculpture 40
Aluminium Pan Sifter Shake 41
Marshland Cotton Ball Tug 42
Bubble Wrap Architect Challenge 43
Balloon Tongs Catch 44

Also in this book

Before you start 3
8-week play tracker 45
Notes for your child's therapist 46
Notes 47
More in the series 48

Before you start

Every activity in this book comes from OTPlan and uses everyday things like masking tape, sponges, boxes and stuffed animals. There's no wrong way to play. Follow your child's lead and keep it fun.

How to use this book

Keep it short. Most activities take 10 to 15 minutes.

Let your child choose. Their interest is the best guide.

Adjust as you go. Every page has an easier and a harder version.

Stop while it's still fun. You can always come back another day.

Check off the days you play in the tracker on page 45. If your child sees a therapist, bring the book along.

How each page works

Time and place
How long it takes, setup time, and where to play

Skills it builds
The skills the activity works on

You'll need
Everyday materials to gather first

How to play
Step-by-step directions

Easier and harder
Ways to adjust to your child

What to notice
Things to watch for and share with your child's therapist

Things you'll use most

- [ ] Masking tape
- [ ] Cardboard
- [ ] Sponges
- [ ] Boxes
- [ ] Construction paper
- [ ] Scissors (grown-up setup)
- [ ] Containers
- [ ] Plastic containers
- [ ] Balloons
- [ ] Aluminum foil
- [ ] Stuffed animals
- [ ] Craft sticks
- [ ] Markers
- [ ] Bowls
- [ ] Dried beans
- [ ] Yarn

Each activity page lists everything it needs.

Safety. Stay close during play. Balloons and small items like beans, rice, beads and pom-poms can be choking hazards. Clear a space for floor games and wipe up spills so no one slips. A few setups use scissors or a sharp pencil. Those steps are for a grown-up.

These activities are for home practice and don't replace the guidance of a licensed therapist.

Strong Pull Chain

10 to 15 minutes **Setup: 5 minutes** **On the floor**



Skills it builds

Core Strength · Proprioception · Shoulder Strength

You'll need

- [ ] Boxes
- [ ] Paper Roll
- [ ] Yarn

Why it helps

This activity provides great strengthening input (proprioception) for the hands, arms, and core. Pulling the yarn chain requires sustained effort. The heavy work helps increase muscle stability and body awareness. Gathering the chain uses alternating hand movements, which is key for developing bilateral hand use and crossing the midline. This movement supports future skills like fastening buttons or writing.

How to play

1. Put a few books or heavy toys in a box and set it on a smooth floor.
2. Braid three long pieces of yarn into a thick cord, or use a thick rope. Tie it around the middle of the box like a belt, knot at the front, leaving a tail about six feet long.
3. Have your child sit on the floor four to six feet away, facing the box, with the cord stretched out between them.
4. Ask your child to grab the cord with both hands and pull, reaching one hand past the other to bring the box closer.
5. Encourage slow, steady pulls so the box slides smoothly instead of jerking.
6. When the box arrives, your child can wind the cord around the paper roll like a fishing reel, then push the box back out for another turn.
7. For a new challenge, try the pull from a kneeling position.

Make it easier

- Use a lighter box with a few toys inside so it slides toward your child with a gentle pull.
- Tie a knot every foot or so along the yarn so your child has bumps to grip.
- Have your child sit with their back against the couch for support while pulling.

Make it harder

- Add a few more books to the box so each pull takes more effort.
- Pull while lying on the tummy, propped up on the elbows.
- Stop the box right on a tape line on the floor, which takes slow, careful pulls at the end.

In everyday life. Pulling with steady effort while gathering a line one hand after the other uses the same arm strength and two-hand teamwork kids need for carrying groceries, climbing a playground ladder, and tugging open a heavy door.

What to notice

Notice whether both hands take turns pulling, or one hand does most of the work while the other just holds.

Watch your child's posture. Leaning far back or tipping over can mean the box is too heavy for now.

If the yarn feels rough or rubs, offer gloves or a smooth rope instead.

Safety. Cord and yarn can wrap around a neck, so stay close and put the cord away after play. Keep the box light enough that your child does not tip over backward when it starts to slide.

We played M T W T F S S

Sponge Squeeze Splash

10 to 15 minutes **Setup: 2 minutes** **Outdoors**



Skills it builds

Finger Strength | Grasp | Proprioception

You'll need

- [ ] Container
- [ ] Sponge
- [ ] Water

Why it helps

This fun water activity is a great way to build strong hands and fingers. When your child squeezes the sponge, they are performing a heavy-work action that strengthens the intrinsic muscles needed for drawing and writing. Carrying the saturated sponge improves stability in the shoulders and core. Aiming the squeeze at the target container helps refine motor control and visual skills. It's also excellent practice for bilateral coordination, using both hands to stabilize the body while the working hand does the intense squeezing.

How to play

1. Fill a large bucket or Container halfway with water. Place the Sponge inside to soak.
2. Place a small, empty Plastic Container about three feet away. This is your target zone.
3. Have your child kneel or stand stably beside the large water bucket.
4. Encourage your child to reach in, grab the wet sponge, and carry it over to the target container. Hold it carefully above the target.
5. Use a strong, firm squeeze with one hand to empty the water into the target. Encourage maximum effort!
6. Return the empty sponge to the bucket. Repeat the process until the small target container is full.

Make it easier

- Use a shallow dish tub with a few inches of water instead of a deep bucket, and set the target right beside it.
- Cut the sponge in half so a small hand can wrap all the way around it.
- Use a wide bowl as the target so more of the water lands inside.

Make it harder

- Mark a line on the target cup and stop right at it without going over.
- Set the target on a low stool so your child lifts the sponge higher before squeezing.
- Squeeze with the non-dominant hand, or squeeze two sponges at once.

In everyday life. Squeezing a wet sponge builds the grip kids use to wring out a washcloth, squeeze a bath toy, and hold a cup steady while they drink.

What to notice

Notice whether your child squeezes with the whole hand or mostly the fingers, and whether the thumb joins in.

Watch whether your child holds the sponge still over the cup while squeezing or squeezes on the move. Pausing over the target shows good planning.

If wet hands or cold water are unpleasant, use warm water, or let your child squeeze with a gloved hand.

Safety. Constant adult supervision is required. This activity involves water, so ensure the playing area is non-slip to prevent falls. Make sure the child does not put the sponge or water near their mouth.

We played M T W T F S S

Sticky Web Smash

10 to 15 minutes **Setup: 5 minutes** **At a wall or easel**



Skills it builds

Bilateral Hand Use | Finger Strength | Proprioception

You'll need

- [ ] Construction Paper
- [ ] Masking Tape
- [ ] Tissue Paper

Why it helps

This activity provides great proprioceptive 'heavy work' input to the hands, strengthening the intrinsic muscles necessary for later complex fine motor tasks like coloring and grasping tools. It also encourages both hands to work together efficiently (bilateral integration).

How to play

1. Prepare the 'spider web' by sticking several long strips of masking tape across an empty doorway, a chair opening, or a wall (ensure the tape is safe for the surface). Crucially, make sure the sticky side faces out toward the child. On a wall, fold each end of a strip back on itself and press only the ends to the wall, so the sticky side of the middle faces out.
2. Give the child large pieces of construction paper and tissue paper. Demonstrate how to tear the paper into small, medium, and large pieces. Tearing paper provides excellent resistance for finger and hand muscles.
3. Encourage the child to 'smash' or firmly press the torn paper pieces onto the sticky web, using maximal effort and pressure to ensure they stick. Challenge them to cover every piece of exposed tape!

Make it easier

- Pre-tear a pile of pieces and let your child focus on smashing them onto the tape.
- Snip small starter cuts along the paper edges so each tear begins more easily.
- Use only tissue paper, which tears with much less effort than construction paper.

Make it harder

- Tear the paper into stamp-sized pieces using only the fingertips.
- Fill the web in color stripes, like red on the top strip and blue on the next one.
- Make a shape with the tape, like a star or the first letter of your child's name, and cover only that shape.

In everyday life. Tearing paper uses the same two-handed pull kids need for opening snack packets, tearing off a paper towel, and ripping open an envelope.

What to notice

Notice whether your child tears by moving one hand toward the body and the other away, or by pulling the hands apart sideways. The first way tears more easily.

Watch how your child presses each piece, with a flat-palm smash or light fingertip taps. Their choice shows how much pressure input they are looking for.

If the sticky tape feels unpleasant, let your child press the paper on with a sponge or the back of a spoon.

Safety. If using a doorway, ensure the tape is placed at the child's eye/chest level and not near the floor where someone could accidentally walk through and trip. Always supervise peeling tape off surfaces to prevent paint damage.

We played M T W T F S S

8-week play tracker

Check a box on each day you play. Write down the activity your child liked best.

Week	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	Favorite activity
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								

Activities to play again

Notes for your child's therapist

Jot down what you notice as you play. The **What to notice** box on each activity page can help. Bring this page to your child's next visit.

What my child enjoyed

Which activities did they ask for again?

What seemed tricky

Where did they get stuck or want help?

Changes I noticed

Anything that got easier over the weeks?

Questions I want to ask