

# 19 Ideas for Winter PLAY

## Indoors and Out

BY JANINE HALLORAN



Winter is a challenging time. It's cold, often stormy, and sometimes hard to figure out ways to have fun. Here are suggestions for encouraging play inside and outside during the winter months.

### INDOOR FUN

Think creatively and be flexible when it comes to indoor fun. It doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. Also, it's cool for you as the parent to get in on the action. Have a silly time together with your children. You need to play, too!

**Obstacle course:** Locate items that could be used in an indoor obstacle course. You could use chairs, boxes, pillows, laundry baskets, or step stools all around your home. Work together to come up with a plan for the course, and have your kids try it out. You can make a game of timing them. If they grow tired of the original course, they can move it around and try a different setup. Keep revising the course until they're finished playing with it. At the end, talk about which courses they liked the best and why.

**Calisthenics:** Looking to get them up and moving quickly? Try a calisthenics break. Have the kids do 1 minute of jumping jacks, sit-ups, push-ups, etc. Or you could set a certain num-



ber of an exercise they need to do, like 20 jumping jacks. Not only does it keep them a little more active, but it's also a great way to transition them between activities. For instance, if they're watching a television show and you'd like them to take a break and build with blocks, turn off the TV, have them do 10 push ups and then bring the blocks out.

**Jump:** Some kids just love to jump — my son is one of them. They jump on beds and couches. You could get a trampoline or a bouncy house that can be used indoors. Of course, last year I didn't have a trampoline or bouncy house, so I took the mattresses from their beds and brought them downstairs. My kids were thrilled because they were finally allowed to do something they typically aren't allowed to do. I loved it because it kept them busy and active for some time.

**Dance party:** Turn up some music and get moving. Get on the dance floor and get silly with your kids. Make up dance moves. Have everyone take turns being the leader of the dance by showing what to do and having the others follow. Trust me, there will be plenty of giggles!



It's also fun to video a dance and watch it later.

**Video games that incorporate movement:** There many video games, across a few different platforms, that require movement as part of the game play. Kids can dance, do virtual bowling, or even bike. One of my favorites is a game in which they can pretend to be on a pogo stick — it's so much fun, plus it burns a lot of energy.

### TOYS, CRAFTS AND GAMES

**Toy rotation:** If you don't rotate your toys, start now. Toy rotation can sound daunting, but it doesn't have to be an elaborate system. It can be as simple as dividing your toy stash in half and putting half away in a closet or basement. Have the kids just play with the toys that are out and available. In a few weeks, switch the toys. It's likely that they will play longer with the toys they haven't seen in awhile. Plus, there's a lot less to clean up. This is also a good way to weed out what they no longer like to play with. If they haven't seen it for three weeks and they still don't want to play with it, it's time to donate it.

### CREATE

This is just a fancy way of saying you can use anything you have on hand to set up a craft time for your children. What I love is that there is no specific "project" the kids are trying to make. There's no model, they are just focusing on being creative with what you've given them. You can set out whatever is available and see what happens.

Recently, I put out small paper bags, glue, markers, googly eyes, and pipe cleaners. We made some really interesting creatures. You could also set up around a theme. For example, if you wanted to do a winter theme, you could put out blue and white paper, crayons, cotton balls, coffee filters, scissors, and glue.

**New materials:** When you're out and about shopping, check out any supplies in the discount area. Maybe there's some cool washi tape, cute stickers, or a crafting material you've never used before. Gather these new materials and keep them stored away. Pull them out on a snowy day. Your children will appreciate having new things to play with!

**Board games:** Playing board games helps kids practice taking turns,



solving problems, and winning and losing graciously. There are plenty of new ones out there and you can also check out your favorites from when you were a child. It can be neat to show your child a game that you loved from your childhood. You could even exchange games with another family so you can try different ones without the additional cost.

**Puzzles and puzzle books:** Whether it's hidden pictures, Sudoku or a word find, these types of games can help pass the time inside when it's too cold to go out and play. You can work together as a family on a jigsaw puzzle. Set it up in a place that won't get disturbed, that way you can take a break and come back to work on it when you want.

### OUTDOOR FUN WHEN THERE IS NO SNOW...

**Go outside and play:** Even if it's cold, have your children bundle up and go outside for a little bit. Just because it's cold doesn't mean you can't go outside and ride a bike, use a scooter, or kick a soccer ball. Play every day!

**Go on a winter nature walk:** Take a walk around your neighborhood. See if you can spot any animals. Look around at any plant life, too. You can gather leaves or other natural materials you find on the way, take pictures, and make a small book about your nature walk when you get home.

**Blow bubbles:** It's so interesting to see what happens to bubbles when the temperature is cooler. Have some bubbles on hand — check out how long they last and how they pop. So cool!

**Make colored ice sculptures:** Fill different-size containers and ice cube trays with water. Use watercolors or food coloring to color them, then place in the freezer. Once frozen, use a little warm water to pop them out of the containers. Now you have colorful ice blocks for winter outdoor building fun. Take them outside and start building.

### WHEN THERE IS SNOW...

**Make snow castles:** Do you know that sand buckets also work with snow? We discovered this last year when we were playing on the deck in the snow and found our sand buckets in the storage container. The kids started making snow castles. My son would make several, then run through them or kick them down. My daughter made a few and

started embellishing them with icicles and rocks. They played outside for an hour just doing this. It was awesome.

**Make an igloo:** There is an actual snow block maker you can buy to make an igloo in your backyard. Eskimos and Inuits would laugh at our pathetic attempts at igloos: Blocks fall down, or fall apart, and sometimes a section gets knocked down! No matter what, the kids love attempting to make them.

**Go sledding:** Find a local area that has a good sledding hill. If you haven't been able to find one yet,

ask your neighbors, they'll probably know. What a fun way to spend time together with each other and other families, too.

**Make tunnels:** A few years ago, I was working as a school counselor during another snowy New England winter. Once we were back at school, the students who were appropriately dressed could play in the snow. Over a few days, they made elaborate snow tunnels. It was great to see them working and creating together.

**Draw in the snow:** Make colored water by mixing watercolors or food

coloring with plain water. Put the colored water into a spray bottle or a squeeze bottle. You could even use an open container and an eyedropper — be creative and use whatever you have on hand. See what sort of patterns and art can be made in the snow. It's beautiful! You can do this activity outdoors or get a large plastic container and do it indoors, too.

Right now, I'm rotating toys and gathering new games and crafting materials to get ready for this winter. Bring on the cold weather. We're ready to play! ♡

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