

## BRAIN-BUILDING THROUGH PLAY

# 5 Games & Activities for Children (4-7 years)

Children’s executive function, self-regulation, and physical skills develop rapidly during the years from four to seven. Every child develops at their own pace, so **choose games that align with their individual skill levels**. Games should be challenging, but not too frustrating.

Younger children in this age range may need help as they learn game rules. As kids get older, their independence grows as well. **You can support this development by stepping back from leading their play**. Your goal is for children to eventually manage their own games with their friends and peers, though your help may still be needed occasionally for sorting out disagreements.

1



### Freeze Dance (or “Musical Statues”)

Children need lots of opportunities to be active. Playgrounds and parks are great for outdoor fun, but if you can’t get outside, a simple game of Freeze Dance can do the trick! Just play some music and have children dance along, then stop the music suddenly. As soon as the music stops, everyone needs to “freeze” in place and stand perfectly still until the music starts again. Keep the game challenging as children get older by asking them to freeze in a particular position, like standing on one foot.

2



### Simon Says

Ask children to follow your instructions to move, but only when you say “Simon Says” before the action. For example, “Simon Says jump up and down!” Test their attention by randomly calling out instructions without saying “Simon Says” first (“Jump up and down!” or “Take two steps forward!”). Vary the speed of the game to keep it interesting, and let the kids take turns being “Simon” when they are comfortable with the game. Similar active games include “Red Light, Green Light,” “Duck, Duck, Goose,” and “What Time Is It, Mr. Fox?”

3



## I Spy

Saying, “I spy with my little eye...” give a clue about an object that everyone playing can see. For example, if you see a school bus, say, “I spy with my little eye ... something yellow.” The child(ren) must look around and make guesses that match the clue (raincoat, flower, etc.), and the game continues until someone guesses correctly. Add more clues if needed (“it’s yellow and has wheels”). (Tip: Borrow *I Spy* books from your local library to keep the fun going!)

4



## Opposites Bingo

Matching and sorting games are still fun at this age, but switch up the rules and increase the difficulty to keep kids interested. Here’s one idea: Make your own Bingo picture cards by drawing a grid on a piece of paper, then gluing photos from magazines onto the spaces. Kids can help with this, too! Use small objects like pennies for markers. But, instead of having kids mark a *match* on their card, they can mark the *opposite* of what is called out by the leader. For example, if the leader calls out “daytime,” children with a nighttime picture on their card would mark the spot.

5



## “Continue the Story” Game

Children love to tell stories. Help them write down the words and encourage them to illustrate their stories and act them out. With a group of children, try this storytelling game: One child starts a story, then the other children each take turns adding something to it. This requires them to pay attention to each other, reflect on possible plot twists, and come up with additions to fit the changing story.



To see more brain-building play ideas for kids of all ages, visit:  
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/brainbuildingthroughplay>

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