

The Amazing Benefits of Playing with Puppets in Early Childhood

by [Tanja Mcilroy](https://empoweredparents.co/playing-with-puppets/) <https://empoweredparents.co/playing-with-puppets/>



Playing with puppets is one of the most educational activities you can expose your kids to. Watching a child play with a puppet may seem like fun and entertainment, but play with puppets is so much more.

When you realise all the additional benefits of this activity you may want to keep a basket of puppets available at home or in your classroom.

There are great developmental benefits that are embraced when you encourage playing with puppets.

What Kinds of Puppets Can Young Children Play with?

The wonderful thing about puppets is they don't have to be expensive store-bought models. The humble sock, the odd one that always hangs around, can be made into a very engaging puppet.

Young children love to play a game of 'peek a boo' and a puppet is the perfect partner for this activity. Make a puppet from a paper bag or try your hand at making a string puppet using cardboard boxes or toilet rolls.

The purpose of the puppet is to create interaction, fun dialogue and even an element of surprise into your play and learn activities. Playing with puppets will benefit your child's development in the early learning years.

Take a look at this list of 9 ways playing with puppets encourages child development.

9 Benefits of Puppet Play



How do children learn from puppets? It might be surprising as a parent to know that children learn a great deal from playing with puppets. These hand-held toys have the potential to improve language skills, creativity, social awareness and more.

Here are nine examples of the developmental areas that are encouraged through play with puppets.

Language Development

Children love to have 'conversations' with a puppet. Each verbal interaction with their puppet will encourage [language development](#).

Children who are generally shy really benefit from the opportunity to let the puppet be their voice. It is also possible to have a conversation between two puppets. Wearing a puppet on each hand enables the puppeteer to have a dialogue going on between two puppet characters.

Social Development

The shy child, or the young child still learning social skills, has an opportunity to be more sociable through the medium of a puppet. The puppet becomes the spokesperson for the group.

A puppet can be the voice used to correct table manners or other [social skills](#). The puppet becomes the instructor and children often enjoy listening to the puppet teaching them to be sociable. It is not mom or dad's voice setting the rules again, but a funny puppet character.

Emotional Development

Puppets can teach children about their emotions.

Children can interact with the puppets as they share their ability to be happy, sad, angry, funny or jealous.

Children can express these emotions too without upsetting anyone. Their puppet character is the one to feel these emotions. Playing with the emotions of the puppets helps to develop the characteristics of sympathy and empathy too.

Children also experience this kind of expression when engaging in [symbolic play](#).

Listening Skills.

Puppets are great tutors.

The puppet on your hand can encourage your child to listen to it as it gives instructions or tells a story.

Puppets can help children to learn [rhymes and songs](#) as they imitate the puppet too.

Motor Skills

There are a number of motor skills that children can improve through playing with puppets.

The fine movement required to wear a puppet helps with dexterity and using fingers to manipulate the puppet improves [fine motor coordination](#).

Marionettes or string puppets help with [eye-hand coordination](#) as the puppet is made to walk and move in different directions.

All these skills improve balance and directionality as the child has great fun playing with the puppet.

Building Self Confidence



Putting on a puppet show often happens quite spontaneously when children have access to puppets.

It is really encouraging to see how children develop their self-confidence through the act of handling a puppet. As their confidence grows they will be happy to entertain family or friends.

The puppet is centre stage and the child becomes more confident to speak in front of other people with the help of a puppet friend.

Creativity



Puppets encourage [creativity](#) on several different levels.

Making your own puppets from recycled socks or paper bags is just the starting point. There are many interesting ways to create your own puppet characters.

Creativity continues by creating a puppet show. The show will need a simple puppet theatre and decorating an old cardboard box for this purpose adds to the creativity factor.

Story Telling and Sequencing

Storytelling comes alive with puppets. Retelling favourite fairy tales is a great way to put on a puppet show.

Learning how to repeat the rhyming part of the story, like in the *Gingerbread Man*, helps with [memory skills](#).

Puppets lend themselves to being the characters in your stories and allow your child to join in with the action.

Travel Companions

Packing a puppet in your travel bag or even popping one in your handbag is a wonderful way to provide entertainment when you need it. A hand or glove puppet and a storybook are all you need for some holiday travel fun.

Next time you are caught in the doctor's waiting room, a puppet and a book may be all you need to distract your child. The beauty of puppets is they are lightweight, unbreakable little entertainers and they travel well.



The creator of the Muppets, Jim Henderson, had this to say about the value of puppets:

“One of the nicest things about puppets is that it's your own hand in there. You can make it do anything you want to.”

As a parent, you can add all the benefits of handling a puppet to that statement. Instead of just watching a puppet show you can bring the real thing into your home.

It is really beneficial to encourage your child to play with puppets knowing they are going to learn at the same time.

How to Make Simple Puppets



It is not difficult to make your own puppets. Children are generally happy with something you have made together and created for the purpose of telling stories or putting on a puppet show.

Sock puppets are the easiest little critters to make. A couple of googly eyes and a bit of red felt for a tongue and hey presto you have a snake.

Make sure the sock is a nice long one to go right up your arm. Your silly snake or worm can play 'peek a boo' or sing silly songs.

Keep a stack of paper bags for rainy days and make paper bag puppets with stickers and marker pens to decorate.

You will be amazed at how easy it is to make a funny face on a paper bag and then use the flap or fold at the front of the packet for a mouthpiece.

Let your paper bag puppet talk and sing funny songs. Paper bag puppets will encourage all the benefits of puppets including creativity and craft.

Here are step-by-step instructions to [make 4 simple types of puppets](#).

I hope you've enjoyed reading about learning through puppets!

4 Types of Puppets That are Easy to Make with Your Kids

by [Tanja Mcilroy](#)

Children love to play with puppets and there are many educational reasons to play with them.

Making your own can add creativity to the list of [benefits of puppet play](#). Your creation does not have to be a state of the art puppet! A bit of time and a few basic materials found in your home are all you need.

You and your child will have fun creating and playing with your homemade puppet characters.

Why Preschoolers Should Play with Puppets

Having fun and entertainment with a puppet is top of the list of reasons why playing with puppets is beneficial for preschoolers. In addition, you can be sure puppets will improve [language skills](#), boost confidence and help your child with many other educational milestones.

Different Types of Puppets to Make

The following puppets are the easiest to make at home.

- sock puppets
- paper bag puppets
- glove puppets
- simple string puppets

The beauty of these types of puppets is that the resources you need are right there in your home. Start with the easiest – the humble sock puppet – and move on down the line of DIY puppet creations.

Sock Puppets



Sock puppets are such fun to make because they are quick and easy.

Choose a long stocking type of sock so the puppet will cover your arm and look more authentic. Sock puppets are ideal for the peek-a-boo villain. Peek-a-boo puppets can pop up all over the place for a tickle and the surprise element of the game.

What you will need:

- An old sock
- Googly eyes or black felt to cut out eyes
- Red felt for a tongue if you make a snake
- Needle and cotton
- Scissors
- Glue

Instructions:

- Choose a long sock that will cover the arm of the puppeteer.
- Cut out eyes and a tongue for a snake. If that is a bit frightening, make a worm instead.
- Glue or stitch the eyes and the tongue in place.
- Googly eyes could be used instead of felt depending on the age of the child involved. You'll want to avoid little pieces that could be pulled off and accidentally eaten if your child is still at that stage of development.
- Practise putting your hand inside the sock and pinching the end between your thumb and fingers. This is where you would want a mouth to be.
- Wiggle your hand and sing a silly song – perfect entertainment with your very first homemade puppet.

Paper Bag Puppets



Brown paper bags make wonderful puppets.

These paper bags can be saved from a shopping spree or can be bought at a store. Look for a bag that will fit over your hand.

The best type of packet has a bottom part to stand on when it is opened up. This flap at the bottom becomes the mouth of the puppet.

Paper bag puppets are light and easy to wear. They decorate easily, and although they are not long-lasting, they are simple and not expensive to make.

What you will need:

- A brown or white paper bag with a flat bottom
- Glue
- Scissors
- Stickers
- Marking pens

- Other creative waste items like cotton wool for beards or ribbon or wool
- Have a box or basket with all sorts of bits and pieces available to put onto the DIY paper bag puppet. (This is a great way to encourage your child to use their imagination. A creative wastebasket is always handy for other creative activities.)

Instructions:

- Start by imagining the character you will make. If it is a rabbit, for example, you will need bunny ears, eyes, nose, whiskers and a mouth.
- Cut out all the bits and pieces required to make your puppet.
- Use coloured paper, stickers and coloured pencils to create the features of the puppet
- Create arms and fit them into the fold on the side of the paper bag to look as if they are sticking out from the side of the puppet. Or just draw them on the front of the packet.
- Don't forget to decorate the back of the puppet too. Bunnies need a fluffy tail, for example.
- Practise slipping your hand into the packet and fitting your fingers into the flap to move it up and down like a mouth.
- Now your puppet can talk and be part of the conversation.



Glove Puppets



The glove puppet is a step up from the sock and paper bag puppet. Two versions of the same concept are possible. An old knitted glove or a fabric version of a glove puppet.

The head of a glove puppet is operated with the middle three fingers of the hand while the two arms are moved by the thumb and baby finger. If you decide to use an old glove then cut off the thumb and little finger of the glove for your own thumb and finger to appear. This is optional but it does make it easier for your preschooler to wear the glove. The other three fingers will hold up the

headpiece.

You can create tiny finger puppets out of the pieces you cut off.

The head of this puppet may be a circle of felt decorated to make the face of the puppet.

Alternatively, make a glove puppet by sewing fabric or felt together in the shape of a puppet head and two hands at either side. Decide on your character beforehand to use scraps and other creative bits and pieces for its features.

What you will need:

- Old glove or a glove puppet shape sewn together to fit your child's hand
- Your creative wastebasket with scraps of wool, felt, buttons, pompoms, googly eyes and cotton wool. All these items are very useful for creating the features on the puppet.
- Scissors
- Glue or needle and cotton



Instructions:

- Decide on the basic body and arms for the glove puppet.
- Cut out the mitt and sew round to make the arms and head shape or cut off the finger and thumb of a glove. Stitch a thread through the tips of the middle fingers of the old glove version to keep them together.
- Now that you have the basic shape of your glove puppet you can cut out a head with ears from felt to attach to either the knitted glove or to the cut-and-sew mitten.
- Use your creative waste materials to make eyes, ears, nose and a mouth.
- Make hair out of wool or cotton wool.
- Glue or stitch on the hair, eyes, ears, nose and mouth.
- Have fun creating the character you have chosen. A pirate, for example, will need earrings and an eye patch. Perhaps a scar on his face will give him a real pirate look.
- Look at pictures in books for ideas. Create the best version of your very own glove puppet.



String Puppets

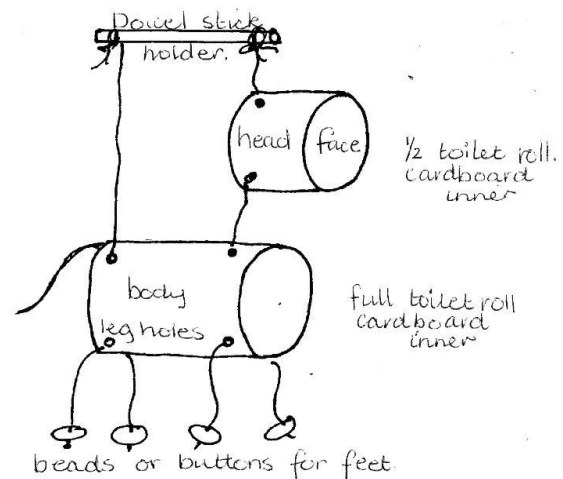
String puppets, or marionettes, are the most complicated of this range of DIY puppets. However, a simple step by step instruction sheet and a couple of toilet rolls will make the task easier for you.

Managing a string puppet encourages eye-hand movements and control of a foreign object. Your child may need some extra help with this puppet, but once the instructions have been followed it is easy to repeat them and make other puppet characters.

You could make a dog and take it for a walk in the park!

What you will need:

- Two toilet roll inner. Cut one in half for the head and leave the other for the body.
- One piece of dowel rod about 30cms long. An old ruler can also do the trick or use an old wooden coat-hanger.
- Plain paper to cover the toilet rolls, or paint.
- Scissors
- String and four big buttons or beads
- Glue
- Stickers or marking pens
- Your creative waste box of wool, googly eyes, felt scraps, cotton wool and pipe cleaners.



Instructions:

- Cut one toilet roll in half for the head section. Then, cover both pieces separately with paper or paint them the colour for the puppet character you have chosen to make.
- Decorate the body and head to suit the puppet you are making.
- Use your scissors to make four holes in the body roll for the legs on the underside of the roll.
- Remember, using pointed scissors is a job for an adult – help will be needed here.
- Make two holes in the top and bottom of the head section to join with a string for the neck. This will link with the rod to make the puppet's head move.
- Make two holes on the upper side of the body roll for the neck string and the tail end string linked to the control stick.

- Now create the puppet's finer features. Use your creative wastebasket for this activity.
- Cut four strings for the legs and attach a bead or big button on the end of each string for the feet of the puppet.
- Now you are ready to assemble your puppet. Push the four strings for the legs through the holes in the toilet roll and pull them through to make a knot on the end that will secure the legs in the toilet roll.
- The bead or big button on the end will give the string a bit of weight as the puppet 'walks' along.
- The hole in the end of the body has a string knotted at the end and pulled up to join onto the rod at the top.
- The head is joined with a string that acts as a neckpiece and goes through the roll to join onto the rod at the top.

Now you have your simple toilet roll string puppet ready to rock and roll and take a stroll down the passage. Watch how much concentration and [eye-hand coordination](#) it takes to get the puppet moving and see how much fun this play and learn activity brings to your home.

- Make a box version of this simple string puppet with a cardboard carton or an old yoghurt container. This simple version needs three strings – one for the top of the head and one each for the feet. It's ideal for a penguin or a robot character and even more simple to operate.

Now the show can begin!

Tell your child about the puppet Pinocchio. In the Disney version of this lovely fairytale, there are some delightful songs to sing along to. Make up a Pinocchio show and enjoy handling a string puppet. Who knows – maybe your puppet can come to life too!

A Creative Wastebasket

Keeping a creative wastebasket in your line up of resources is a really good idea. This basket of tricks can serve you on a rainy day or when friends come to visit. Find an old box or basket and set to work filling it with all sorts of bits and pieces that are readily available to make and create.

Here's a list of suggestions:

- scrap paper and coloured card
- crayons and marker pens
- blunt-nosed scissors

- HB pencils and an eraser
- brown paper packets
- old magazines
- buttons and bows – bits and bobs from your sewing stash
- elastic
- stickers and stamps
- felt and scraps of fabric
- googly eyes
- pompoms
- wool and cotton wool.

These are just a few ideas for your creative wastebasket. When you start collecting you will find many more interesting things to keep for new projects and ideas.

I hope you've enjoyed learning about making puppets!