

Inexpensive Fun for Kids in the New Year

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If you're like many parents, you're paying off holiday bills and you're concerned about the economy and maybe your job. During these stressful times we can discover ways to save money while reducing our stress and staying connected to our family.

A trip to a local park can be as much fun as an expensive amusement park. Young children are great models for us, since they love to play and can use their imagination to create fun games and activities. They don't need expensive toys or fancy equipment, but they do need adults to spend time with them and not always have the TV on for passive entertainment.

Here are some fun ideas with little or no cost:

- Get some boxes and cut out different-sized holes and shapes. Watch your little one climb in and out, hide things, and play peek-a-boo with you. For older children, bring out the paints and let them decorate the boxes.
- Save washed milk cartons, cut off the spout, and seal them with duct tape. After a while you will have great blocks for your toddler to play. They are light, and fun to build up and to knock down.
- Make your own play dough. Mix 2 cups flour, 2 cups of warm water, 1 cup salt, 2 tbs. of vegetable oil, and 1 tbs. cream of tartar. Cook over medium heat and then add food color and let cool. Sit down and play; it's a great stress reducer.
- Read with your children. Go to the library on a regular basis and let your children pick books to enjoy together.
- Take a nature walk and bring along a basket to pick up some selected items. When you return home, put out supplies like glue, paper, and markers, and use the "treasures" from the walk to make collages, place mats, or New Year's cards.
- Find old clothes, encourage your kids to play dress up, and suggest they work on a play that they can perform for you when they're ready.
- Play games. You can buy fun and mentally stimulating card and board games that will last for years. For no cost, try games like charades, hide-and-seek, or tag.
- Bake a cake (you can get a cake mixture at the store) and let your kids decorate it with icing and sprinkles or fruit. Have a tea party and cake afterwards.
- Have a picnic with a blanket on the living room floor and invite some friends over for a lunchtime treat.

Having fun doesn't need to cost much, and the rewards are invaluable!

Remember, *"The past is history, the future is a mystery, and today is a gift. That's why it's called the present."*
(Author unknown)

Happy New Year!