

6 GET READY GAMES FOR LITTLE KIDS

For your go-go-go toddler or preschooler, doing things is fun. Getting ready to do things? Not so much. That's why your sweetie might come to a screeching (maybe shrieking) halt when he has to switch gears. Transitions can be tough on tykes — first, because they don't understand the concept of time, and second, because no one, big or small, likes to stop what he's doing when he's having fun. What helps? Fuss-free get-ready games that will get your little one where he needs to go without throwing a fit.

1. Getting ready to go outside.

Simply helping your darling dress in the right type of clothing for the weather (especially in winter) can make leaving the house pretty stormy — especially on preschool mornings. Besides allotting plenty of time (nothing ups the stress level more than trying to accomplish everything in five minutes), turn the process into a get-ready game of Simon Says. "Simon says, 'Find your shoes.' Simon says, 'Wiggle into your sweater.'" It might take a minute or two longer, but by the time you're out the door, you'll both be giggling.

2. Getting ready to leave the playground.

It's no wonder your munchkin melts down when it's time to say bye-bye to the swings, slide, and sandbox — not to mention his pals at the park. After giving your honey a handful of two-minute warnings, try playing a few rounds of I Spy as you head to the parking lot or sidewalk: "I see something brown and furry. Can you see it?" Your tot will be so busy looking around that he'll forget to fuss. Or challenge him to wiggle to the water fountain, hop to the tree, and, finally, flap his arms to the car or stroller.

3. Getting ready to go to the car.

Need your munchkin to bust a move to the minivan? Try a round of Beat the Song. Start singing one of your tot's favorite tunes, then challenge her to get to the car and into her seat before the song's over. On super-dawdly days, put a tiny treasure on her car seat in advance — a favorite book, a plastic animal — then tell her she's got a surprise waiting for her. She'll be so eager to see what's there that she'll speed out the door.

4. Getting ready for dinner.

Sometimes it takes a silly get-ready game to spice up the journey to mealtime, especially if you've got a picky eater who's not that into food. Capitalize on the fact that a toddler thinks it's hilarious when Mommy makes a mistake by putting a bowl or napkin on her head or his fork in her hair — then ask him to tell you where it's really supposed to go. Or see if your preschooler can guess what's on the menu by describing what you're serving on the way to the kitchen: "It's made up of long, skinny strands that you can wind around a fork and slurp."

5. Getting ready for bath time.

It doesn't take much to ignite a preschooler's imagination, and the bath is the perfect place to play pretend. So if your sweetie pulls a face when you tell her it's time to head to the tub, pull out your make-believe wand and transform her into a sea creature. One night she's a mermaid, another, a dolphin, a lobster, or turtle. Then help her channel her new identity to swim, slide, or shimmy her way to the bathroom.

6. Getting ready for bed.

One way to banish bedtime battles: Snap pics of your pipsqueak going about his nighttime routine — picking out pajamas, brushing his teeth, reading a story with Dad. Paste each photo onto a small piece of card stock, and then turn your photo cards into a fun get-ready game by mixing them up and having your munchkin put them back in the right order. Or turn the cards facedown and let your tot pick one — whichever one he draws, whether it's going potty or kissing you night-night, is the next item on his way to bed.

