

Creative After-School Activities for Kids

by Pamela Fay

With many structured after-school activities from which to choose, many kids still spend plenty of time at home with little or nothing to do. Left to their own devices, they may spend mindless hours planted in front of the television or grazing through the kitchen cabinets. As energetic as they can be, even kids need downtime. Before the homework and after a demanding school day, help your kids find engaging, yet relaxing, hobbies to constructively use those after-school hours.

Create Your Own Fashion

For kids who are interested in wearing the latest trends to class, let them design their own clothes after school. Start with combing through closets for t-shirts and sweatshirts to repurpose. These may be items that are stained, stretched out, out of style, or simply too ugly to wear. If you don't have items that can be repurposed, visit a local thrift shop, garage sales or dollar store. Invest in some fashion paints and markers, scrap materials and trim, buttons, shoe laces and basic sewing supplies, like needle and thread, scissors and tailor's chalk. Kids will enjoy cutting, slashing, tying and decorating t-shirts to suit their individual style. If they are short on ideas, visit the local library where you can find a design book, such as *Generation T: 108 Ways to Transform a T-shirt*. (*Generation T: 108 Ways to Transform a T-shirt*; Megan Nicolay; 2006)

Build a Model

Model building is a terrific after school activity that can complement the classroom curriculum. These days, models come in many forms. How about a tyrannosaurus rex, a replica of a human skull, or a radio-controlled space shuttle? Model building isn't just for boys. Encourage girls to build models, as well. Younger kids will learn small motor skills and begin to understand spatial relationships. Older children learn how to follow directions and develop the patience to complete complex tasks. Once the model assembly is complete, kids of all ages enjoy the creativity that goes into painting and decorating the final result.

Plant a Vegetable Garden

Gardening is a stress-relieving after school activity that helps kids connect with the food supply. Also, children may have greater interest in eating their vegetables if they participate in growing them. They can have fun researching easily grown veggies online and discovering how best to care for their crops. If you do not have sufficient land to support a garden plot, consider container gardening on a sunny patio or deck. Kids can even plant a garden in a few well-placed window boxes. Start small with prolific veggies like lettuce and peppers. As the vegetables are ready to harvest, kids can cull through cookbooks and online repositories to find recipes. With a little adult supervision as needed, dinner is served.

Create an Online Blog

There are many simple online programs that kids can use to create an online blog. WordPress is a software program and LiveJournal a blogging site that children can use

with little or no adult assistance. Easy-to-use interfaces allow them to showcase writing, art or photography with a theme selected that is based on their interests. For example, the blog might be about kid-proof recipes, funny cat stories, or pictures of cool cars. Blogging offers children a chance to express themselves, improve their computer skills, and communicate more effectively both in and out of school. Of course, as with all online activities, you will want to safeguard your children by putting appropriate security in place. Blogging is for older kids, age 14 and above. Consistently screen the content and monitor your child's blog activities.

References:

Generation T: 108 Ways to Transform a T-shirt; Megan Nicolay; 2006
Container Vegetable Gardening; Larry Bass, 1991
<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8105.html>