

Kids' Science - Fun with Magnets

Magnets are a great way to introduce your child to the world of science. Try fishing in your kitchen sink along with these other activities to get you started.

If you're short on kids' science activities, pick up some small magnets from your local hardware store. They're inexpensive and lots of fun. In addition to keeping your child's full attention, magnets achieve the following:

- *Arouse a sense of wonder
- *Expose your child to science and scientific laws of nature
- *Stimulate *self-motivated* desire to explore and experiment
- *Raise questions and generate discussion
- *Provide a means to additional activities such as counting and grouping

Here are some basic magnet activities to get you started. Be prepared---during the course of these activities, your child may suddenly decide to go around the house pressing a magnet against things, or may empty and pick up a box of staples five times in a row. Be flexible. Allow for this kind of variation. Your child is conducting research at her own level. Try these activities for starters:

-Fill your kitchen sink with water. Drop nuts, bolts and paper clips into the water. Make a fishing pole: tie a string to a stick. Attach a small (donut hole) magnet to the end of the string. Let your child go fishing. Have your child place the items into groups as she catches them. (Advanced: play the part of a purchaser from the market. Tell your child you only purchase items in groups of three. Let your child arrange the items into groups of three for purchase.)

-Fill a glass with water and drop a paper clip into it. Have your child try to take the paper clip out of the glass using a magnet (along the side of the glass). Repeat the activity with a tall vase with a narrow neck. (Use an inexpensive one from a thrift or dollar store.) The vase should be dark in color so the contents cannot be seen. Your child will love the challenge of navigating the unseen paper clip to the top of the vase. (Advanced: count five paper clips with your child. Drop them into the vase. Now let your child retrieve the paper clips with the magnet. Continue the activity until all five are retrieved.)

-Cut out construction paper fish with your child (colors should vary). Tape a magnet onto each fish. Place the fish on the living room floor and let your child go fishing with her magnetic fishing pole. This time have her group the fish by color. (Advanced: group the fish by size or fin type.)

-Take a poster board (or large sheet of paper) and make an line down the middle using a marker. Make small dots in pairs on either side of the line. Place magnets on the dots. Have your child use her finger or a Popsicle stick to try to push a magnet along the line without attracting any of the magnet pairs. Repeat the activity with a wiggly line instead of a straight line. (Advanced: have your child make the line and then allow her to mark where the magnet pairs will go. Let her set up the course the way she's planned it. Allow her to predict whether you'll be able to navigate the course she's made. Allow her to adjust her strategy as a game maker by creating a new course. Continue to play on her terms. Put a check mark on the courses you navigate successfully. When you're finished, review the results.)

-Of course, there's also the time honored favorite: let your child use a magnet under the table to move objects on top of the table. This is a great starter activity and provides ample opportunity for your child to amaze mom or dad, or a neighbor with the seemingly magical properties of magnets.

Magnets are a great way to introduce your child to the world of science. They're inexpensive, easy to get out and clean up, and provide enough variation to stimulate your child's curiosity for years to come. Consider supplementing magnet activities with easy to read, age appropriate books on the subject. Don't overshoot the mark with complex material explaining the properties and significance of electrons. It's enough that your child is exposed to the wonders of magnets and has fun playing with and exploring their unique characteristics. Enjoy!

About the Author. . .

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