



Christmas credit crunch play ideas

Are you feeling guilty because you can't afford the latest 'must have' toy which your child wants this Christmas? Or maybe you fear that, whatever you buy, your kids will have lost interest in their toys by Boxing Day.

Either way, don't worry because children are much better off with inexpensive basic playthings – that's the message to parents from NICMA – the Childminding Association. An increasing number of childminders in Northern Ireland are adopting a 'back to basics' approach to children's play – using materials like cardboard boxes, sheets, and pots and pans.

Not only is this approach terrific fun, it really stimulates a child's imagination, creativity and initiative. Why not give some of these ideas a try?

With all these activities, try to let your children take the lead and the initiative. At the same time, do keep an eye obviously to ensure there are no accidents!

- **Treasure Basket** – this makes a wonderful inexpensive gift for a baby or toddler. Fill a shallow, sturdy basket with a varied collection of household objects of different sizes, textures, shapes and colours e.g. wooden curtain rings, spoons, sponge, wallet/purse, greaseproof paper. Your child will love exploring and playing with these things.
- **Indoor Sandbox** – fill a large washing-up bowl or well-sealed cardboard box (without the lid) with a mixture of lentils, rice and/or cous cous. Provide spoons, sieves, measuring jugs, plastic funnels and ladles. Great for toddlers and pre-school children.
- **Outdoor Dens** – for older children, you may wish to help them nail together a few sturdy sticks to form the framework for a den if your garden or backyard doesn't have any features which provide a natural den. Search out unwanted tyres from bike shops or garages, plastic crates from milkmen, old sheets, curtains, pieces of sturdy polythene etc. Tables and chairs may also help to provide a frame.
- **Indoor Dens** – indoor dens are even easier. Let your children move the furniture around as they wish and provide sheets, towels and/or duvets to drape over it. Rugs, cushions and pillows will make the den more homely.. The den may become a castle, a ship, a rocket – let them use their imaginations!
- **Junk Art** – all sorts of natural and everyday objects can be put to good use as materials for junk art. Try paper plates, plastic containers, twigs, used match sticks, egg boxes. Provide paints, felt-tips, crayons and glitter so your children can decorate their artworks.
- **Musical Kitchen** – younger children will love the opportunity to take all the pans and lids out of the cupboard and bang them with spoons. Let them experiment with the different noises made by big and small pans, spoons of different sizes etc.
- **Cardboard Boxes** – given the chance, children will turn these into all sorts of things – a pirate ship, a shop, a puppet theatre – you name it! Let them paint and decorate their creation if they wish.

If you would like more ideas for children's play or any help with looking for childcare, please call NICMA on 0871 200 2063, or visit its website at: www.nicma.org