

# Preschool Pastime

The Big Book of Activities for Little People

Keeper'sBook™ series focuses on specific topics relevant to *Keepers at Home* readers. Our goal is to bring together talented writers who have passion for the subject and readers whose lives will be blessed by the information presented in each Keeper'sBook™.

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Compiled by: Darlene Zimmerman

Design: Larisa Yoder

Cover Photograph: Wes Yoder

Contributors: see page 64

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# Acknowledgments

*(You have my permission to skip this page. I usually do too!)*

I hardly know where to begin to express my gratitude to everyone involved in this project... but at the beginning is God—Who listened to my countless pleas for wisdom to know what to include and what to discard, and to put it all together in a readable way.

Next is my husband... who kept his hand on my shoulder, sometimes as an encouragement, and sometimes as a reminder that my family comes ahead of my writing. I tried to keep them first—I really did! Most of this book was written before my children were up in the morning and after they were in bed in the evening. I did my best to not look forward to bedtime too much.

And my children... who were my enthusiastic guinea pigs through many experiments, and also the reason for beginning this project!

To my family... who kept asking about the progress of this book, and in the process did a good job of keeping me at it!

Thank you, Sheila Petre... for the hours spent in editing. And the publishers... for turning this raw material into a book.

And I've saved a big, hearty thank-you for all the contributors. (Next time you meet me, remind me that you sent a paper, and I'll thank you in person!) I'm grateful to the five mothers who took the time to jot down their advice for the article on time spent with children. Thank you, Louisa Hoover, for the stack of papers you sent—you made this book a better one. And there were others who sent an extraordinary amount of ideas—Martha High, Mary Edna Garman, Miriam Shirk, Rachel Martin, and Darla Weaver. There are so many more I'd like to mention... I certainly appreciate you all!

*Darlene Zimmerman*

*Here's a note*

## Before you begin...

**B**efore I was a mother I read this saying: “Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape.” I thought it was cute. And then I became a mother. Now I see more than cuteness—I see an ocean of challenge for myself. I’ve discovered I’m not naturally flexible.

When I’m rocking the teething chap instead of baking cookies as I had planned... When I’m mending an assortment of wear-and-tear holes and missing buttons instead of shaping that piece of fabric into a dress... When there’s someone at my knee with a book the minute I sit down to catch my breath or write a letter... then I try—I try—to see these interruptions as precious.

They are! They are my children. My treasures. Even on the tenth consecutive dreary day... even when they are whining their way through yet another flu... and even when I become frustrated and let it show. Even then they are my treasures.

I’m still learning this—this discipline of holding my daily plans in an open palm, so that when there is an interruption in the form of a little person, I’m not all bent out of shape. On the days I have that “to-do” list in a tight fist, nobody is smiling. My patience is too thin, and my children suffer because of it. I’ve been a mother for five years and I’ve taken such few, tiny little steps toward being the kind of mother I’d like to be. But there’s always tomorrow.

And that’s not all. God can supply all my needs according to His riches in glory... And not only can He, He will! I feel inadequate to care for children who will base their choices tomorrow on my teaching today. But God can—God will—fill in my weak spots.

A friend shared with me her personal challenge: “The raising of this family is so important to me that I will discipline myself to set aside time for the activities made necessary by its existence.”

Read that again! For myself I’d need to add... “And I will do it willingly and lovingly, even if I don’t feel like it.” Because these interruptions are precious! They are my children.

But not only am I to lovingly read stories, play church, and make playdough for my children—I’m also to feed and clothe them. And clean the house they live in. And be a wife to their daddy. Now what—oh what—could *they* do, so that *I* can do what *I* need to do?

That’s where I found myself frequently. I often wished for a collection of ideas to keep preschoolers occupied. So I asked some friends and family for ideas to put together on a few pages. The ones I asked generously responded, and passed the request on to their family and friends. I got more ideas than I thought existed!

I started to type them together. Meanwhile more envelopes arrived in my mailbox. And more and more. I kept typing and I began to feel very indebted. So many busy mothers took time to write down their tips and techniques so that others could benefit. These mothers surely had many other things to do also. Yet they took the time to respond to my call.

The whole project has helped me tremendously. Now ideas pop up when my little folks come begging for something to do. And if I can’t think of a pastime, I have a resource to go for. So I’m putting the ideas back into the hands that handed them to me, along with many more, and my prayer is that they would bless you too!

I feel inspired after reading everyone’s ideas. I feel a kinship to the many other mothers who are also caring for little ones today. And I feel deeply grateful to all who shared their time by sharing their ideas. This book would not have been possible any other way.

*Darlene Zimmerman*

# Inheritance Issues

DARLENE ZIMMERMAN

“**M**om, Kentin’s getting my stuff.”  
Sigh.  
Sometimes I think that’s the most-used sentence in this house.

“Mom!” Much more frantic this time. “Kentin’s getting... Mom!”

Mom hurried to the scene. Sure enough, Kentin was grabbing the dress that was being put onto the doll. The dress was stretched tightly between two fists in a way that made me fear for its seams.

The fist on Kentin’s end released when I got close. The two-year-old and I took a walk to another room.

When the issue was dealt with and the apologies were said, I got the little tyke started driving his tractor again. Then I was back in the kitchen, thinking and wondering... What can be done for a case of chronic fighting?

Grabbing a toy that someone else has is only the one side. The other side is the excessive amount of fuss coming from the one whose toy is taken. One is as bad as the other. But how does a mom teach one child to share and at the same time teach the other child not to grab another’s toy? If I focus on the one grabbing, the other will become exceedingly selfish. And if I work on the one that must learn to share instead of hoard, how will the other learn not to grab? Surely I never acted like these children act...

But as the situation rolled around in my mind, a dusty memory tumbled to the top. My favorite doll on top of the fridge for awhile? Tractors and books up there too? Ah yes, I remember now—that rule we had: if we fought over a toy, no one got it. It became Mom’s property and was stored on top of the fridge for awhile.

Hmmm, so there were other children like mine. Hmmm, the implications are uncomfortable. Have my children *inherited* this problem?

My musings were suddenly interrupted. “Mom, Kentin’s grabbing my crayons. *Mom!*”

That evening once the fights were ended again for another ten hours, I sat down with my husband. And he brought up a subject... Can you guess? Yes, it was about the

most recent fight: the one about who will, and who will not, have their bedtime drink out of the pink cup.

I told him about a few prior spats, and we both agreed that this was a two-sided problem. “You know,” he said, “when I was a boy, if we fought over a toy, it got put away and nobody played with it.”

I was excited to hear that. Maybe this *was* an inherited problem, and maybe it *wasn’t* from me! I shared these insights with my husband, and he had some opinions of his own to add.

But in the end we decided that although it probably is an inherited problem, it doesn’t come from us, but through us. And it stems way back to the Garden of Eden.

We decided to implement the “nobody gets it if you fight” rule in our house too. And so the next morning my daughter and I had a chat. I didn’t try to explain the rule-coming-into-effect to my son. Two-year-olds understand consequences much better than warnings.

The morning proceeded quietly for awhile. Then came an Event. Alissa was building a house with a few Lego blocks. A few blocks. Not even enough to put the second layer on the walls. A big Lego block created the one side wall all by itself.

Kentin soon noticed the construction site and he came over to inspect. “Big one,” he crowed and grabbed the side wall block.

Alissa opened her mouth... then she closed it. Then she opened it again. “You may have that one, Kentin. This can be a doorway here where it was.”

“Alissa!” I exclaimed, in a voice dripping with surprise and delight. Real genuine delight. “You didn’t make a fuss. Thank you!”

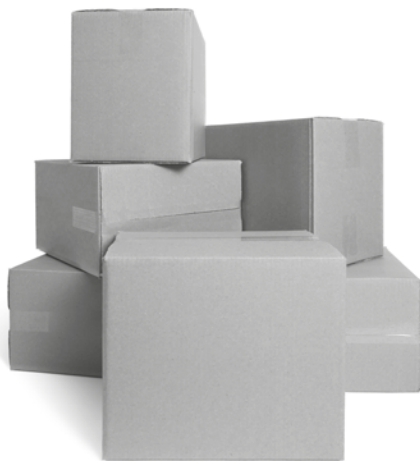
You should have seen her eyes shine. And you should have seen how nicely those two children played for a whole half hour!

But then... “Mom, Kentin’s just getting my stuff.”

And so the battle continues. But victory is possible and someday there will be another one!

Meanwhile, I have cleared a space on the top of my fridge. ★

# Big Old Xtra Entertainment Service



## **B**OXES. BOXES. BOXES.

Don't throw out that box; it has a future. Imagination is all you need. It could be an equipment shed, a barn, a house, a pen... Doors always add to the novelty. Just let one side uncut so they open and close.

A box could become an oven for your budding little cook if you turn it upside down and draw burners on top. Add an oven door in the front. Stack two boxes on top of each other for cupboards.

An appliance retailer may give you a box big enough to house a child, or two, or more! Cut in windows and doors. The outside can be decorated with crayons or magazine pictures. Or cut an opening in each end big enough to crawl through. A tunnel!

If you have a box that a child can kneel in and still reach the floor it could be a boat. He can use his hands like oars. You'll wish you had half his energy!

Drive a car! Find a box big enough to sit in. Make a steering wheel by unscrewing the knob from a kettle lid. Put the lid with the screw still attached on the inside of the box. Push the screw through and refasten the knob on the outside. This steering wheel really turns! You can also use a plastic lid that you no longer want, and fasten it with a large tack, or a bolt, washer, and nut.

A row of boxes make a train. Tie them together with

string or baler twine. The dolls and teddies may enjoy a train ride if there aren't enough little people to fill the cars.

Turn a box upside down and cut leg holes on all four sides. There it is—a child-size table just waiting for a tea party!

Turn one banana box upside down and set another on top right side up. A bassinet! Sew a pretty cover for it, and you'd hardly guess what it's made of.

Have the toddler step into a banana box, and pull it up to his waist. Draw lights and a grill on the front, and there he goes—roaring like a tractor!

Or glue four boxes of the same size together to make a dollhouse, with two downstairs and two upstairs rooms. Use wallpaper, material scraps, or magazine pictures to cover the walls. Cut in windows and doors. Add curtains. Use stickers for mottoes on the walls. Use pieces of cardboard and hot glue to make furniture. Matchboxes glued on top of each other make wonderful dressers with drawers that really open. Use Popsicle sticks and hot glue to build all kinds of furnishings. Cut the Popsicle sticks to size with a big scissors.

**Don't throw out a little box** until it has been cut, beat up, or stomped on. Little boxes invite collections: Pictures, stones, and chewed gum; barrettes, stickers, and old Band-Aids. Motherly investigations advisable! Let children cover their treasure box with pretty magazine pictures.

Save empty boxes such as cereal and cheese boxes, drink boxes, and cracker boxes. Also empty spice or ketchup bottles and other miscellaneous empty containers. Throw them all into a big box until the next dreary day. Line up a row of big empty boxes for shelves and set all those recycled boxes out for sale!

An empty saltine cracker box makes a good traffic light. Cover the box with paper (or skip that step). Have the children cut out red, yellow, and green circles—four of each—using a small jar ring to trace them. Paste on all four sides of the box for a four-sided traffic light. (This could also be used for a chart: paste on a circle as a reward.)

Shoe boxes or Velveeta cheese boxes double as a trailer. Tie it to a truck or tractor.

**Scrounge together your artistic skills and flatten a box.** The bigger the better, of course. Draw roads complete with white and yellow lines, stop signs,

speed limit signs, and traffic lights. Add buildings. Be sure to draw a house for each child, and lots of places to go: Stores, churches, gas stations (use a drinking straw with a flexible end for a gas hose), schools, fire station, police station, motels, doctor's office, park, library... Make it bigger by connecting more flattened boxes to the first one. This can also be done on a big sheet of paper or an old tablecloth.

If you have a little farmer, create a countryside instead. Draw a farm for each child with a house, barn, shop, garage, chicken house... Be sure there are lots of fields to work in. Add creeks, ponds, and woods. There should probably be a hardware store too, and maybe an equipment dealer where farmers can trade in the piece they are finished with for something different.

The whole thing could be colored or painted if you have a little artist. Calendars or magazines can provide you with buildings. Maybe you have a little carpenter who would rather build his own buildings with blocks. They could also set up a fence and keep their little animals inside. Or use animal stickers. (If using blocks and fences, it won't be as easy to crawl around on.)

You can make a new one every week, or cover it with contact paper to make it last awhile. You could also cover it with puzzle glue or Mac-Tac (from an office supply store).

When it's time to clean up, set it behind the couch or slide it underneath. Pitch it out once it's tattered and draw a new scene.

### **Odds - n - Ends and Extras**

If you have an extra sturdy box, give your little carpenters a handful of nails and a hammer. Lay the box on its side and start pounding. When one side is full of holes, flip the box! Plastic golf tees may work if nails aren't safe for the youngest member of the family. You may have to prepunch some holes.

Next time you have a box big enough for a child to sit in, give him scrap paper and a scissors. Let him snip to his heart's content. (The pieces *must* go in the box, by the way.) When he's finished admire his "snipple soup."

If you have a basement or spare room to throw boxes into, children can set up their stores, trains, or houses there. Then you don't have to help them arrange everything each morning.

Turn a box upside down and stick a lollipop per child

into it. (Poke the sticks into the box and leave the lollipop sticking through.) Then give each child a ring to toss toward the lollipops. The one they can lasso is theirs. You may want to have the older ones stand back a bit for their turns.

Or turn the box upside down and cut three doors into the side—each one a bit wider than the last. The holes must reach to the floor so a ball can be rolled into the box. Put a 1 above the biggest hole—a 2 above the middle hole—and a 3 above the smallest one. Then give children golf balls to roll into the box from whatever distance you indicate. If you have an older preschooler who can add numbers, have him work up to ten points for a prize. For one that can recognize numbers but not add, have him get the ball through the door with a 3 a certain number of times to earn his prize. Another variation is to cut a door on each side of the box (straight across from each other) and see if they can roll the ball through the box. Tailor the game to fit your child's age and ability.

Cover the outside of any box with calendar pages or magazine pictures. Use as a trash can. Once it's full, burn the whole thing and make another, or reuse it until it's tattered. ★

## *Someone's Singing*

(Sing to the tune of "Are You Sleeping...")

Someone's singing, someone's singing,  
Far away, far away.

Listen very closely. Do you hear the singing?  
Far away, far away. (*Sing this verse very softly.*)

Someone's singing, someone's singing,  
Very near, very near.

Listen very closely. Do you hear the singing?  
Very near, very near. (*Sing this verse loudly.*)

Someone's singing, someone's singing,  
Far away, very near.

Listen very closely. Do you hear the singing?  
Far away, very near. (*Vary volume to match words.*)