Rainy day activities for kids: a whole fall day indoors, hour by hour

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A parent's plan for a wet Saturday with kids, from breakfast to bedtime. Energy first, quiet later, one mess at a time, and the rain itself when it's safe.

A rainy day with kids goes best when it has a shape. Big movement in the morning, before anyone gets restless. One messy thing at a time, cleaned up before the next. The rain itself when there's no thunder. A quiet hour after lunch. And a blanket fort built early that lasts until bedtime. Below is a whole wet fall Saturday, hour by hour, with the reasons behind the order. Every activity in it is a card in Peabody's Rainy Day Box.

I'm a parent who built Peabody, a free reading and math site, and this week I added the Rainy Day Box: 108 indoor activities for kids, each on a card with what you need from around the house, about how long it takes, the ages, the mess, and whether a grown-up has a job in it. The box is good at answering "what now?". This post is the other half: how to string the cards into a day so it doesn't fall apart by two o'clock. It's free through the end of 2026, with no sign-up and no ads.

Four rules that hold the day together

1. Energy first, quiet later. Kids wake up with the most energy they'll have all day. Spend it early on something loud and physical, and the calm things (a puzzle, a story, a craft that needs patience) are far easier after lunch. Put the quiet things first and you get bouncing off the couch at 10 a.m.

2. One mess at a time. Cover the table once, do the messy thing, clean it up together, then move on. Three projects out at once is how a rainy day turns into a lost afternoon of tidying. The cards are marked No mess, A little mess or Messy, so you can space the messy ones out.

3. Start the slow things early. Some activities need time on their own: walking water climbs paper towels over a few hours, ghost window clings dry overnight, salt dough takes two days to dry (or a low oven). Start them in the morning and they become a reason to check back later.

4. One grown-up job at a time. Any card with scissors, a sharp knife, the oven, the stove or hot glue says "Needs a grown-up", and so does anything outside. You can't be at the scissors and the stove at once, so put a grown-up card next to one a child can do on their own.

The day at a glance

- Time: 7:30 · What: Breakfast at the window · Cards to pick from: Raindrop races, be a weather reporter
- Time: 8:30 · What: Burn it off · Cards to pick from: Indoor obstacle course, the floor is lava, freeze dance
- Time: 9:30 · What: Build base camp · Cards to pick from: Blanket fort; start walking water
- Time: 10:30 · What: A snack they make · Cards to pick from: Banana sushi, yogurt parfait
- Time: 11:00 · What: Go out in it (no thunder) · Cards to pick from: Puddle jumping, listening walk, worm watch
- Time: 12:00 · What: Lunch · Cards to pick from: English muffin pizzas, indoor picnic in the fort
- Time: 1:00 · What: The quiet hour · Cards to pick from: Audiobook, jigsaw puzzle, coloring pages
- Time: 2:00 · What: Kitchen-table science · Cards to pick from: Rain cloud in a jar, magic milk
- Time: 3:00 · What: Make something for Halloween · Cards to pick from: Paper bat garland, paper chain countdown, ghost window clings
- Time: 4:00 · What: The second wiggle · Cards to pick from: Mummy wrap race, pumpkin bowling, hallway bowling
- Time: 5:00 · What: While dinner cooks · Cards to pick from: Play restaurant, card games
- Time: 6:30 · What: Lights low · Cards to pick from: Shadow puppets, tell a story in the dark
- Time: 7:15 · What: Wind down · Cards to pick from: Flashlight reading in the fort, rainy day breathing

The times are a guess at a family's day, not a timetable. Slide them to fit naps, meals and whoever is still in pajamas.

Morning: watch it, then move

Breakfast at the window. Start with the rain itself, from the dry side. Raindrop races take no setup: each person picks a drop at the top of the window and cheers it to the bottom. A weather report is a nice follow-on: draw today's weather, stand up and announce it. Do it every day for a week and you have a chart to count the rainy days on.

Burn it off. Then go big. An obstacle course (crawl under the table, hop pillow to pillow, walk a tape line, then time it) uses the most energy of anything in the box. Keep it off the stairs and away from sharp corners. The floor is lava works on a carpet, never a slippery floor, with no jumping off furniture. Freeze dance needs nothing but music.

Build base camp. Next, a blanket fort: chairs in a square, a big sheet over the top, clips on the edges, pillows inside. The card's tip is the important part: leave it up all day. It's the reading nook at bedtime, the picnic spot at lunch and a cave in between. While you're building, start walking water on the counter, so the colors have hours to climb.

A snack they make. Mid-morning is a good time for a no-cook snack a child does almost alone. Banana sushi only needs a butter knife (use yogurt or sunflower seed butter if peanuts are a problem at home), and a yogurt parfait needs nothing sharp at all.

Middle of the day: out, fed, then quiet

Go out in it. If there's no thunder or lightning, put on boots and go out for twenty minutes. The National Weather Service's rule is when thunder roars, go indoors, and to wait 30 minutes after the last thunder before going back out. Every outdoor card in the box carries the same line: only when there's no thunder or lightning, stay out of moving water, and keep away from storm drains. Puddle jumping is for small, still puddles. A listening walk is the calmer choice: walk slowly, stop, close your eyes and count the sounds. After the rain, a worm watch is a gentle one for little ones. Have dry clothes waiting by the door.

If it's thundering, swap in sock skating or a laundry-basket toss instead. You still want the movement before lunch.

Lunch. English muffin pizzas let kids do most of it (pull the muffins open, spread the sauce, make a face with the toppings) while a grown-up does the oven. Or carry sandwiches into the fort for an indoor picnic. If there's a little one under 4, cut grapes into quarters and skip popcorn and nuts, which the American Academy of Pediatrics lists as choking risks for young children.

The quiet hour. After lunch is the natural dip. Even for kids who have given up naps, an hour of something calm resets the afternoon. An audiobook under a blanket (many public libraries lend them free through an app with a library card), a jigsaw on a tray or coloring pages all work. This is the hour to resist the screen, so the screen is still a treat later if you want one.

Afternoon: one mess, then make something

Kitchen-table science. Now cover the table for the one messy hour. A rain cloud in a jar (shaving cream on water, blue drops on top until the cloud rains) fits the day perfectly. Magic milk takes ten minutes and gets the biggest "whoa". Then check on the walking water from the morning. Clean up together before anything else comes out.

Make something for Halloween. With Halloween this week, the afternoon craft can double as decorating. A paper bat garland (a grown-up helps with the scissors, and don't cut the fold!), a paper chain with one loop for every sleep until Halloween, or ghost window clings from white glue that dry overnight, which gives tomorrow morning a reason to run to the window. A card

to design your pumpkin face on paper first is handy if a real pumpkin is coming this week; the Pumpkin Patch turns the favorite into a stencil to print. For a spooky science hour instead, the Workshop's Halloween crafts and experiments include a bubbling witch's cauldron and a tissue ghost that dances on static.

The second wiggle. Late afternoon is when tempers fray, so put movement back in. A mummy wrap race with toilet paper (never wrap the face, the nose or the mouth), pumpkin bowling with a small pumpkin you roll on the floor, or hallway bowling with plastic bottles and tally marks for the score.

Evening: low lights, small voices

While dinner cooks. Play restaurant keeps kids busy and close by: they draw a menu with prices, take your order, then write the bill and add it up. Card games are the other easy pick. Go Fish and Memory for little ones, Crazy Eights for older kids.

Lights low. After dinner, dim the lights for shadow puppets on the wall, or pass a flashlight around and tell a story one sentence at a time. Keep it spooky-cute: friendly ghosts and silly bats. If anyone gets nervous, the card's answer is the right one: turn the lights up.

Wind down. End where the day's fort has been waiting: flashlight reading inside it. Our free library has stories at every reading level, and there's a shelf of Halloween stories for this week. Last, rainy day breathing: breathe in like smelling a cup of cocoa, out like blowing a rain cloud away, five times, then listen to the rain for one whole minute. Then the fort comes down. Or it stays up for Sunday.

By age

- 3 to 5: shorter blocks (ten to fifteen minutes each) and more movement between them. Raindrop races, the floor is lava, animal yoga, magic milk, a rain stick and handprint ghosts all suit little ones. Cards with small parts say so, for homes with a child under 3.
- 6 to 8: the day as written. Let them pick between two cards at each step; having a say goes a long way.
- 9 to 12: hand them the plan. Older kids can run their own day: make a board game, write secret code messages, tape a marble run down a wall, or make a bottle rain gauge and check it every day.

When the plan falls apart

It will, somewhere. Two things on the Rainy Day Box help. Pick one for me shuffles the deck and deals one card big, which ends a "but what do we do?" standoff fast. And Our rainy day plan makes a six-card plan from morning move to wind-down, keeping to whatever filters you've set (ages, time, mess, quiet or loud, no screens), with a swap button on each card and a print button for the fridge. There's also Rainy Day Bingo to print, if your kids like a card to fill

in as they go.

The cards you tick, your plan and your bingo card stay on your device. Nothing is sent anywhere.

Questions parents ask

What can kids do on a rainy day with no screens?

Nearly everything in the box. Six of the 108 cards use a screen (a cartoon maker, Peabody TV, typing games, a globe, the Activity Book and the Halloween stories), and the "No screens" filter hides them. The day above uses none of them.

How do I stop a rainy day from turning into chaos?

Give it a shape: something physical first, one messy thing at a time, a quiet hour after lunch, and movement again in the late afternoon. A fort built in the morning gives the day a home base to come back to.

Is it OK to let kids play outside in the rain?

With boots, a raincoat and a grown-up close by, light rain is fine and fun. Come in at the first thunder, wait 30 minutes after the last thunder before going back out, and keep out of moving or deep water and away from storm drains.

What are good fall activities for kids on a wet day?

Leaf rubbings, a leaf crown, acorn counting, an apple taste test with a chart, a pine-cone bird feeder and a paper bag scarecrow are all in the box's Fall cards. This week, the Halloween cards come first: bat garlands, a countdown chain, a costume from the recycling box. Halloween HQ has the rest of Peabody's Halloween things in one place.

Is the Rainy Day Box free?

Yes. Like the rest of Peabody, it's free through the end of 2026, with no sign-up and no ads.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/rainy-day-activities-for-kids-hour-by-hour