



## Wee Builders(3 - 4 years): How to Turn Your Backyard into an Adventure Playground

Gather empty boxes, wooden planks, and rocks or sticks in your yard to encourage open-ended exploration, problem-solving, and self-directed play. What to do with a pile of old tires, broken toys, rope, and boxes? A child-development expert would say you've got an adventure playground on your hands! These kinds of spaces eschew traditional equipment to encourage open-ended exploration, problem-solving, and self-directed play.

**Stock It:** Aim to find new uses for old things you already own.

- Sort through your junk. Anything you were planning to get rid of—old plates and cups, sheets, blankets, scrap wood, popped tires—can be a creativity gem.
- Save your cardboard boxes. This is how your online shopping pays off! Also keep the foam and specialty cardboard pieces from the boxes, as well as recycled plastic containers.
- Supplement with nature. Rocks, sticks, pinecones, leaves; go on a nature hunt with your child and pick up whatever catches his or her eye.
- Ask local businesses for unused supplies. A plumbing company may give you leftover PVC pipe. A tree-trimming service could unload tree cookies (round disks cut from trees) to you.
- If you buy one thing, make it wooden planks. Kids will quickly turn them into ramps, balance beams, bridges, or slides.

**Prepare for Action:** Remember, you're giving your kids permission to play with objects they may never have considered before. This is exciting! Don't put out anything you're worried might break or would require you to hover.

- **Emphasize the unexpected.** Objects in unnatural settings will capture a child's imagination. Examples: Tie an old sheet to your fence. Throw a nylon rope over a tree branch. Tuck a ratty blanket into a bush. Arrange old chairs around a tree trunk.
- **Be strategic about placement.** For little ones, it's helpful to put a bucket or a funnel next to a hose or a water spigot to spur on water play. Shovels and rakes can rest near dirt patches.
- **Build a starter structure.** Tape cardboard boxes together to make a tunnel.

**Let the Games begin:** Wait for an afternoon when you have nowhere to go and nothing to do, it may take your crew longer to find their groove with this setup—but once they get going, they won't want to stop.

- **Prompt the fun.** Have your kid imagine what his favorite book or movie character might do or use. You can also bring out a favorite toy to help ease him into play.
- **Invite friends over.** Collaborating with other kids on what to create is part of the fun
- **Restrain yourself.** Resist getting involved—even when your child is attempting something challenging or trying to resolve disputes. Allow your child to take risks and build her confidence! Plus, you'll give him/her an opportunity to problem-solve.

Source: <https://bit.ly/2GDYkGN>

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