

# SCREEN-FREE ACTIVITIES

## LEARNING ABOUT CATEGORIES

### Instruction Card

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This month's educational tool is aimed at developing early categorization skills.

Children's understanding of the world is boosted exponentially when they learn to mentally organize objects that have similar attributes into different groups, such as food, animals, toys and furniture.

**Three to five-year-olds are naturally interested in learning to classify (sort) objects into basic categories.**

Classification skills go hand in hand with learning to pay attention to how things relate to each other. This explains why it's easier for children, who have had much experience with associating objects with categories, to remember new words and facts. These children intuitively organize information based on similarities and differences. Over time, it has become easier for them to think of something in terms of how it relates to other things. In other words, they store and retrieve information more easily because they're used to relating what they are learning (new information) to what they already know (familiar information).

**Pre-schoolers who categorize well communicate more confidently and reason better.**

#### To set the stage:

**The tried-and-tested method to teach young children to categorize involves achieving 4 goals along the way.**

1. SORTING items into categories
2. NAMING categories
3. LISTING items that are in a certain category
4. FINDING the odd-one-out

- Download our PDF file with printable designs
- Print the pages (and laminate them if desired) to produce **a deck of 32 picture cards** and **two identical A4-size "category maps"**
- Cut the picture cards apart to create a deck of cards.
- Do the activities and play the games as described below in order as they have been arranged according to their degree of difficulty.

# GOAL 1:

## ***"I CAN SORT ITEMS INTO CATEGORIES."***

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The age-appropriate way to introduce categories to children who are between 3 and 5 years of age is by playing simple sorting games, starting with only 4 items.

**Use: The picture cards.**

#### **Step 1: Match 2 pairs.**

Use 4 picture cards (two pairs) that represent two categories. For example, a dog and a fish from the animal category plus a ball and a scooter from the toy category.

Shuffle the 4 cards. Point to one of them (e.g., the fish). Ask: "Which one of the other 3 pictures is the same as the fish? Which one is also a living thing?" When the two of you have found the matching picture, emphasize what animals have in common, e.g.: "A fish is an animal and a dog is also an animal. They are both animals because they eat, have eyes and move around on their own. A ball doesn't eat! A scooter doesn't eat, etc."

Note that, at this point, your child is not yet expected to name the categories. They're simply learning to match objects that have similar attributes, based on categories. At this stage, your role as the parent is to (1) repeat the names of the various categories frequently to make them easier to remember and (2) point out why specific items belong to certain categories.

**Here's a list of things that you can say about the 8 categories that we're covering.**

**Animals are living things that eat, have eyes and move around on their own.**

**We play with toys.**

**We eat food.**

**We put clothes on when we get dressed.**

**Body parts are the different parts of a person's body.**

**Furniture are items we use in the home.**

**We use vehicles for travelling from one place to another.**

**Musical instruments are used for making music.**

#### **Step 2: Cover all the categories.**

The second step is to repeat the basic sorting game described above over a period of days or weeks, using a variety of combinations, until your child is familiar with the most common categories and their defining attributes: body parts, food, clothing, toys, animals, furniture, vehicles and musical instruments.

#### **Step 3: Increase the number of items.**

You can up the ante by gradually increasing the number of picture cards in each of the two categories to 6 (to make 3 pairs) and thereafter to 8 (to make 4 pairs). (Children who are around 5 years old can also practise sorting items from more than 2 categories at a time.)

\*Using more picture cards and revisiting categories help children to generalize what they are learning.

# GOAL 2:

## **"I CAN NAME CATEGORIES."**

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We can teach children to name categories through informal conversations and playing a game aimed at teaching this skill. **Informal conversations** help lay the groundwork for learning to name categories, e.g., "I'm thinking of a dog, a cat and an octopus. They belong together because they are \_\_\_ (animals)."

\*Note that you can include items that are not depicted on the picture cards.

**To play a game aimed at teaching children to categorize, do the following:**

**Number of players: 2**

**Use: The 2 category maps and deck of picture cards.**

#### **Instructions:**

- With the players sitting across from each other, shuffle the cards and place the deck within easy reach of either of them, with the pictures facing downward.
- Place a category map in front of each player.
- Take turns turning a card over, which is to be displayed between the players, picture side up.
- Whenever a player uncovers a picture card that matches the category of a picture that is on display, the player pairs them, names the category and puts the pair down on his or her category map.
- The first player that completes a row of 3 pictures on their category map is the winner of that round.

# GOAL 3:

## **"I CAN LIST ITEMS IN A CERTAIN CATEGORY."**

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**Number of players: 2**

**Use: The 2 category maps and deck of picture cards.**

Play the game above, but when it's time to name a category, also require of the player to list 3 more items from that category.

# GOAL 4:

## **"I CAN FIND THE ODD-ONE-OUT."**

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**Use: Only 1 category map and the deck of 32 picture cards.**

- Encourage your child to help you sort the 32 picture cards into their various categories.
- Place one category map on the table.
- Display the matching set of 4 picture cards next to each of the 8 categories depicted on the category map to create rows extending out to both sides.
- Ask your child to leave the room or face the other away.
- Swap one picture from each of the 8 sets with one from another set.
- Your child returns and to spot and remove the odd-one-out from every set. Encourage them to explain why a particular picture is a mismatch.

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### Printable Category Map

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## Category Map

Image representing  
**FOOD**

Image representing  
**TOYS**

Image representing  
**ANIMALS**

Image representing  
**BODY PARTS**

Image representing  
**CLOTHES**

Image representing  
**FURNITURE**

Image representing  
**VEHICLES**

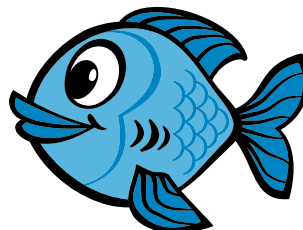
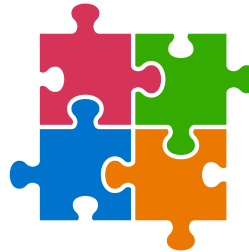
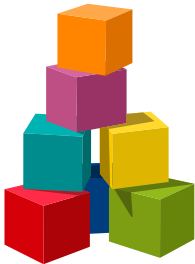
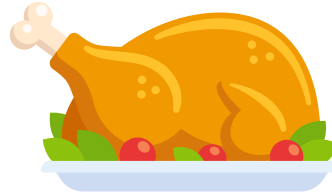
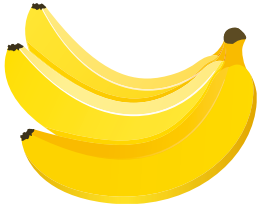
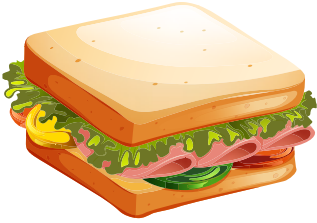
Image representing  
**MUSICAL  
INSTRUMENTS**

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## LEARNING ABOUT CATEGORIES

Printable cards

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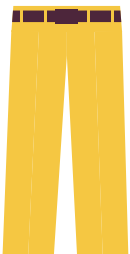
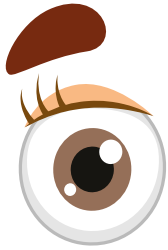
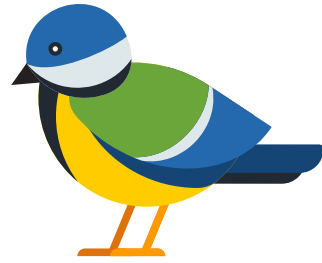


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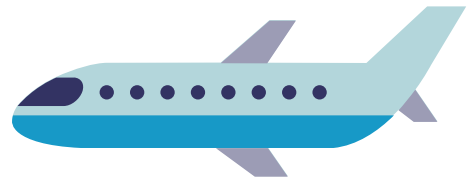
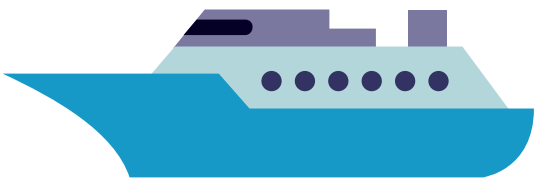
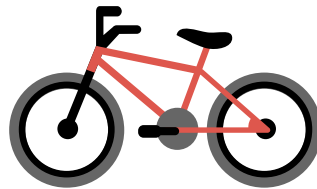
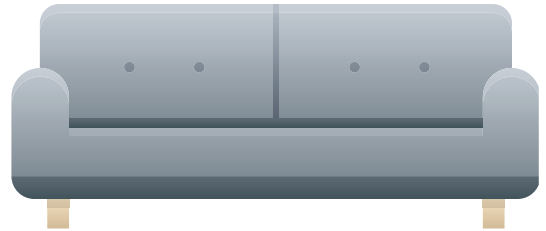
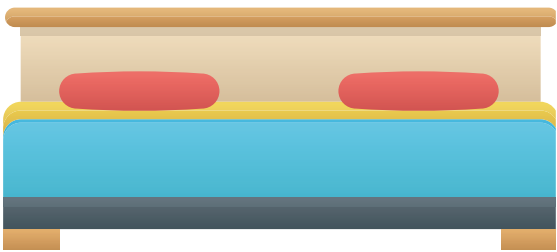


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