

Your little jumping bean will love becoming a favorite toy.

or driving a car—by bringing an experience to life and giving him an enjoyable way to repeat it over and over until it becomes his own.

### Jolly Jump-Up

Expand vocabulary and improve coordination by being a jack-in-the-box.

Food isn't the only thing you can recreate in a game. Most kids adore the surprise of a jack-in-the-box toy and will love reenacting the magic moment when the doll springs out. All you need is a child-size box—or simply imagine your own pretend box on a bath mat or a towel.

Now help your Jack “fold up” into the box as you name all the separate body parts that move to make this possible: “Curl your fingers, bend your knees, tuck in your elbows,” and so on. Once she is folded snugly into her box, sing or recite this rhyme:

*The jack-in-the-box is folded up,  
Nobody knows she's there.  
She sits there very quietly,  
then JUMPS into the air!*

On the final phrase, of course, Jack jumps! out of her box.

**Variations:** Find different ways to pop out of the box: spinning, hopping, marching, dancing—let your child decide! You can also accompany your chant with percussion by tapping on spoons, drumming on a pot, and so on. Be sure to take your turn jumping up, as well. Your child will love helping you fold up, naming your body parts, and giving you precise directions about how to emerge from the box.

**What your child learns:** Playing this game teaches your child to name her body parts—fingers, elbows, knees—as she folds up into the box. And, like all movement games, it encourages her to explore different ways of moving, to learn the names of the various movements (jumping, hopping, dancing), and to gain better control of her body.

### Exploring We Will Go!

Develop math readiness by navigating a homemade obstacle course.

Have a little wiggle-worm on your hands? Create an obstacle course (indoors or out) with chairs, cushions, quilts, towels—whatever you have on



hand (a sheet draped over two chairs makes a great tunnel). Then give simple directions: “Climb over the sofa... Creep through the tunnel... Walk around the pillow... Crawl under the table.”

**Variations:** Be sure to adapt your obstacle course to the age and abilities of your child. A 2-year-old can probably handle only one or two directions at a time, whereas a 4-year-old may enjoy the challenge of stringing together three or four movements or doing them forward and backward. A toddler may also want to repeat things over and over again. Saying and going “up” and “down” several times provide a chance for her mind and muscles to master both movements and words.

Once your child's comfortable with the obstacle course, ease up on the directions and encourage her to explore on her own. You might even join her!

**What your child learns:** Moving in relation to other objects (under the bench, over the pillow) helps your child build a stronger sense of her body and herself. This spatial sense is particularly helpful in strengthening math readiness and skills. When she's getting ready to jump down from a bench, for example, your child needs to estimate the angle of her descent and calculate the distance from where she is to where she's going. This is great preparation for geometry lessons later in life.

And, of course, your child will be learning new words (*crawl, wiggle, hop, climb*), practicing her listening skills, and strengthening her ability to follow directions. Finally, all movement games give your youngster an opportunity to enjoy inhabiting her body and to experience the deep satisfaction all human beings feel when their mind and body are working together. ■

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