

# Indoor treasure hunt

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Clues – we used easy peel stickers

Piece of paper

Pen

Fancy dress (optional)

Treasure

## ENGAGED FOR

Around 30–45 minutes.

## PARENTAL ENJOYMENT

This game reminds me what it is like to play in adulthood. Wear hats and get into character!

## GOOD STUFF

Adventure

Body work

Bonding

Confidence

Imagination

Thinking

## POTENTIAL FOR MESS

Depends on what you are using as clues and treasure – we used stickers that peel off easily, which meant zero tidying up because we collected them as we went.



## METHOD

What do you do on a rainy weekend morning when you are unmotivated to leave the house? On this particularly bleak Saturday, we were all home as a family and boredom had struck, early doors. My husband suggested an indoor treasure hunt. I didn't think we had the right gear. What about the clues? What about the prize? What about the energy? I thought, as I stared into my coffee.

There is no denying that I needed a bit of encouragement to get into the spirit of a treasure hunt. I was tired, uninspired and the thought of chasing around and looking for things, pretending I didn't know where the clues were leading us, felt a stretch too far. That's the thing with parenthood, though; I totally believe in self-care but Saturday morning family time is no place for a take-it-easy attitude. No parent is rolling back into bed at 9am on a weekend to watch movies, eat take-away food and sleep until they can sleep no more . . . are they?!

At this moment, husband and daughter march into the kitchen

wearing a policeman's hat, a pirate's hat and brandishing a sort of Crocodile Dundee number for me, shouting in unison, 'Come on, Mummy! Let's play!' How could I refuse? I was put in charge of drawing out the clues; for this we used a sheet of easy peel stickers that were in the art cupboard. I replicated as best I could, on a sheet of A4, pictures of the chosen stickers with a little tick box by each. The stickers themselves were then thoughtfully put around the house by PC Husband (the policeman's hat was a child's size: tacky, plastic and perched adorably on the top of his head – just for the mental image) and with both parents now fully invested creatively, it got a little more serious. A sense of urgency suddenly descended on the treasure hunters, Mabel completely captivated as she held her clue sheet, and we started the search with dedication.



As yet, the treasure hadn't even been decided on, and the reason I am telling you this is that I want to get the point across that improvisation, spontaneity and being in the moment are key components of successful play. Everything was unfolding as it was, with no prep or planning, and there was no need for a big prize at the end, because we were allowing it to happen organically, enjoying the process as much as our daughter was. We trusted that we would think of something 'high stake', something we already had in the house, by the time we came to the final stretch, but the imperfection of this was in itself quite liberating.



We were now hunting for the stickers, ticking off each as we went . . . I had done myself proud on the drawing front, as thankfully everything was easily recognizable on the clue sheet. We were halfway through and I finally decided on the treasure and hid it by the final sticker. I should also mention that as each sticker was located it was unpeeled and stuck onto our clue sheet – that's important to note

because . . . no tidying up afterwards, it's being sorted as you go!

Sometimes we were soldiers crawling on the floor, sometimes rolling from one clue to another – whatever we could think of to make the experience immersive and different, with no prep or tools. The dressing-up items made a difference, too; it was simple but it took us out of ourselves. We looked silly and it didn't matter – it was the not-caring that was so much fun.



Last clue on the page was a rabbit picture . . . and our adventure had brought us to Mabel's bedroom. Stuck onto her cot was the rabbit sticker next to her treasure. She was happy. She felt she'd achieved a great thing in finding the treasure, her favourite food, a Babybel in all of its red, shiny goodness, clutched in the paws of her favourite night-time cuddly bunny. And so did we, we'd achieved quality family time at home, filled with laughter and joy.

# Play dough



## WHAT YOU WILL NEED

2 small bowls  
Large mixing bowl  
Wooden spoon  
1/2 cup plain flour  
1/4 cup table salt  
1/4 cup warm water  
1 tsp cooking oil  
Half a lemon

## OPTIONAL

Colouring – if using liquid colour (i.e. food colouring) add 2–4 tsp to the water.  
For powdered colour (i.e. powdered vegetable such as beetroot or spinach) add 2 tsp to the flour  
Loose parts

## POTENTIAL FOR MESS

Fairly high. A toddler and a bowl of flour will mean a light dusting over all the surrounding surfaces. Also, be mindful that (age dependent) they may try to eat the dough. I have a trick to help reduce some of the mess, but I cannot guarantee a spotless exercise.

## ENGAGED FOR

Roughly 45 minutes–1 hour. They will still be playing with it for days afterwards.

## PARENTAL ENJOYMENT

High. Good news . . . it is proven that creative hand use is stress-relieving and anxiety lessening. Kneading dough is therefore good for our mental health! Add lavender for an extra ‘ahhhh’ factor.

## GOOD STUFF

Bonding  
Creativity  
Imagination  
Listening  
Senses  
Thinking

## METHOD



Play dough is the gift that keeps on giving. There is a reason why the famous brand has existed since the mid-1950s, selling millions of pots a year, with its comforting, familiar smell and endless opportunities for play and craft. Homemade play dough is our favourite activity in this book, because it is so simple and it is the perfect communal or independent activity. If I have the time and inclination, I will make play dough after the kids have gone to bed, ready for the next morning, but I have also found a way of doing this with Mabel that works in a harmonious way.

I measure out the flour, salt and oil myself and put everything into small bowls, set out on a tray or a toddler-height table, with a big mixing bowl, a cup of warm water and a wooden spoon. Allow your 'creative partner' to mix the dry ingredients together in the bowl until flour, salt and dry

colouring (if using) are completely combined. Ask them to squeeze the half lemon into the bowl (pick out any pips!) and continue to stir. If using liquid colouring, add it now – try food colouring, watercolour paint or vegetable dye. Remember: dry colouring should be added to the dry ingredients or liquid colouring (food colouring) to the water before mixing otherwise it won't combine properly.

Now for the messy bit! The warm water needs to be slowly poured onto the mixture, just a little at a time while stirring until it is combined enough to throw caution to the wind and let them start using their eager hands! In no time at all it will become a doughy, crumbly mass that can be tipped onto a clean dry surface, ready to be kneaded.

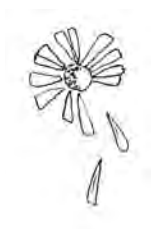


Just to make sense of the whole process and why we use these particular ingredients, I'll break it

down. The flour and water combine to make the base: warm water reacts with the proteins in the flour and makes it stretchy. The salt acts as a preservative, the lemon adds elasticity and the oil produces the smooth, non-sticky texture.

If it is too dry, add a spoonful of water; if it is too wet, add a spoonful of flour then keep on kneading – you want to create a dough that doesn't stick to the hands but holds its shape well. We usually make a little batch each so we can do this at the same time, allowing each of us to choose our own colour to add to our water (this is a good practice session for a playdate, too).

The beauty of this activity is that when we do this together I feel like we are in total harmony with one another. There is a meditative quality to kneading dough, which is clearly effective for even the liveliest of toddlers or stressed-out parents!



## ADDING IN LOOSE PART PLAY

The idea of adding loose parts to the play is to push the imagination and creativity a little further and get everyone thinking outside the box. I have listed some ideas for loose parts in the Inspire Me section (see page 22). To get into the flow of loose part play, why don't you start off with play dough cupcakes using paper cases, or cut out cookie shapes and add sprinklings of dried and freshly picked flowers or herbs?



### TIP

Play dough will be good for about a week if stored in a sealed, air tight container in a cool place. However, as with anything made using kitchen ingredients, if it starts to look weird or smell . . . chuck it out and start again!