

Build a Fort!

Fort building invites narrative and creative planning and is a great forum for the three key areas of meaningful play: explorative, constructive, and dramatic. Best of all, children can build forts out of anything—the main ingredient is their imagination. Here are some ideas and tips that you can use to encourage this great play activity at home:

Places

- Inside spaces: Forts can be built anywhere in the home, but those “hidden” places—under tables and desks, in the attic or small nooks, between bunk-beds—are especially conducive to fort building.
- Outside spaces: Build a snow fort, use the space between walk-ways and fences, use out-door furniture, or construct under trees.

Materials

For the structure:

- Furniture like sofas, beds, bed frames, chairs, tables, desks, and cushions
- Large cardboard boxes (i.e., boxes for appliances or other large items)
- Old sheets, towels, or blankets to create doorways, roofs and décor
- Books, yarn, string, rubber bands, and duct tape to secure sheets or decorations

Decorations and other fun props:

- Flashlights for lighting
- Noisemakers, bells, etc. for doorbells
- Coloring materials, paper or recycled cardboard boxes for children to make decorations or smaller furniture
- Plants

Tips and Resources for Parents and Caregivers

- Fort building gives children an opportunity to imagine a world beyond what adults can see, do or build, allowing children to define their own parameters for success. The best way to encourage the imaginative, social and emotional growth that happens in fort building is to give children the freedom, time and privacy to create their own special place.
- Young children age five and under may prefer to play in and add to a space that is already constructed.
- If you are interested in reading more about the value of fort building for children, check out these great books:
 - David Sobel (1993) *Children's Special Places: Exploring the Role of Forts, Dens and Bush Houses in Middle Childhood*. Detroit, MI: Zephyr Press.
 - Tom Birdseye & Bill Klein (1993), *A Kids' Guide to Building Forts*. Tucson, AZ: Robert Rinehart Publishers.



Goals

Social/Emotional Development

- Sharing and negotiating; gaining confidence and a sense of pride for their ideas and ability to follow-through

Cognitive Development

- Goal setting and critical thinking to create a fort

Physical Development

- Using physical abilities to grasp, lift, move and build

Literacy/Language Development

- Language development as children create and communicate play narratives related to their fort