

March Madness Activities

March Madness is a popular U.S. college basketball tournament. In childcare and early learning programs, you can use a playful “March Madness” theme to teach **movement, counting, graphing, teamwork, and good sportsmanship**—without focusing on specific teams.

Learning Goals (Ages 0–8)

Children will practice:

- **Gross motor:** throwing, rolling, balancing, coordination
- **Math:** counting, comparing, simple graphs, patterns
- **SEL:** turn-taking, teamwork, encouragement, handling winning/losing
- **Language:** describing actions (bounce, shoot, roll), sportsmanship words (try, practice, cheer)

1) “Baby Ball”

Ages: 0–12 months

Time: 5–10 minutes

How:

- Sit on the floor with babies and a soft ball.
- Roll the ball slowly to baby (or side-to-side within baby’s reach).
- Narrate: “Roll... stop... again!” “Your turn!”

Skills: tracking, reaching, social interaction, early language

Safety: use soft, larger balls (no choking hazards)

2) Toddler Basketball: Roll & Drop



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Ages: 1–2

Time: 10–15 minutes

Set-up:

- Place a laundry basket/box on the floor.
- Use soft balls.

How:

- Toddlers **roll** the ball to the basket first (easier than throwing).
- Then try **drop-in shots** from close range.
- Celebrate effort: “You tried! High five!”

Extensions:

- Count: “1...2...3 rolls!”
- Color sort balls (if different colors)

3) “Shoot, Score, Sticker!” Simple Scoring Game

Ages: 2–5

Time: 15–20 minutes

How:

- Each child takes 3 shots (beanbag toss into basket).
- If it goes in, add a sticker to their score strip.
- Count stickers together.

Differentiation:



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- **2–3:** stand close; use big target
- **3–5:** move back; smaller target

Teacher talk:

“We cheer for everyone!” “Try again!”

4) Class Bracket “Which Activity Wins?”

Ages: 3–8

Time: 10–20 minutes + follow-up

How:

- Instead of teams, use classroom choices:
 - “Rainbow Toss” vs “Bounce Pass”
 - “Roll Race” vs “Hoop Jump”
- Children vote with stickers.
- The winning activity becomes the day’s “champion.”

Math skills: voting, comparing, simple data

Inclusive tip: keep it about activities, not colleges/teams.

5) Teamwork Passing Challenge

Ages: 3–8

Time: 10–15 minutes

How:

- In pairs or small groups, pass a ball:



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- **bounce pass** (older)
- **roll pass** (younger)
- Goal: complete 5 passes without losing control.

Add SEL focus:

- Use phrases: "Your turn," "Nice pass," "Let's try again."

6) Mini Skills Stations (Rotation Centers)

Ages: 2–8

Time: 20–40 minutes

Set up 3–4 stations:

Station A: Toss to Target

Beanbags into a basket.

Station B: Dribble Path

Follow tape lines while bouncing (or rolling for younger kids).

Station C: Jump & Land

Jump into hoops (or taped squares), count jumps.

Station D: Balance & Carry

Carry a ball on a spoon or on two hands across a short path.

Tip: Post picture directions at each station.



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7) March Madness Math: Graph the Scores

Ages: 3–8

Time: 10–15 minutes

How:

- After a shooting game, graph results:
 - “Shots made” vs “shots missed”
 - or “Station favorites”
- Preschoolers use stickers; school-age makes tally marks.

Questions:

- “Which has more?”
- “How many altogether?”

8) Good Sportsmanship “Cheer Cards”

Ages: 2–8

Time: 10–20 minutes

How:

- Children make simple cheer cards:
 - “You can do it!”
 - “Nice try!”
 - “Good game!”
- Use them during games to practice positive language.



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SEL skill: encouragement, respectful competition



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