Bridge Builders

Category: Motor skills | Ages: 4–6 | Time: 15 min | Prep: 3 min | Mess: None | Indoor

Why it matters

Testing why a flat paper strip sags and how folding its edges makes it stronger introduces real cause-and-effect thinking. Gently placing small toys on an unsteady surface also builds steady wrist and finger control.

Materials checklist

- [ ] 2 sturdy paper or plastic cups
- [ ] 1 flat strip of cardboard (about 3 inches wide by 8 inches long, cut from a cereal box)
- [ ] 5–8 small toy animals, cars, or blocks for weight testing

Substitutes: Use two thick hardcover books as bridge towers and folded cardstock or junk mail as the bridge deck.

Step-by-step instructions

1. Place two cups upside down on a flat table about a hand-width apart.
2. Lay the flat cardboard strip across the tops of both cups to form a simple bridge.
3. Invite your child to place one small toy at a time in the center of the bridge until it bends or dips.
4. Take the cardboard off and help your child fold both long edges upward to create little side walls.
5. Place the folded bridge back on the cups and test how many toys it holds now.

What to say

- “Look at the middle of the bridge—why do you think it started bending there?”
- “Let’s crease the paper walls hard with our thumbs. Will it hold more toys now?”
- “How many toys did it hold before? Let’s count to see if our new design beat the record!”

Safety note: Use toy figures or blocks larger than 1.5 inches if children under age 3 are nearby.

Notes & observations: