

Cool after school

From Olympics-approved sports to crafting with a cause, these are T.O.'s trendiest extracurricular activities

By Rebecca Hesse

When you have kids, it can be challenging trying to figure out what activities they're interested in. At any given moment, something they thought was the coolest thing ever is suddenly not. But there's nothing like the reward of finding your child a program that brings out their ambition and excitement. Rest assured, there are activities that not only stand the test of time but also happen to be trending in 2024. Try these extracurricular activities to put a spin on your evening routine.

SPORTS 1. Breakdancing

A combination of acrobatics, martial arts and freestyle movement, breakdancing is the 2024 Olympics' newest recognized sport. Originating from 1970s New York City, breakdancing (also known as breaking) became most popular in the '80s and late '90s (and if you have kids, you'll know that anything '90s is in right now).

To get your kids into this energetic (and forever cool) dance expression, contact Break TO or visit Run the Flex north of Yorkville.

CREATE 2. Cooking

From lending a hand at dinner time to concocting messy holiday treats or learning the secrets of a family recipe, it's never too early for kids to get involved in the cooking.

To spark your little chef's passion for food, let them help out around the kitchen, watch a few episodes of *Masterchef Junior*, or sign them up for one of Toronto's kid-focused cooking schools.

Check out the Little Kitchen Academy in The Beaches, Dickie's Cooking School on the Danforth, or the Chef Upstairs in Midtown.

STEM 3. LEGO and robotics

Fidgeting and tinkering with anything in sight, we all know a kid who simply can't keep their hands still. Creative, energetic and inventive, these kids need to be doing.

And there's no better thing to do than building with Lego or dabbling with robotics. Hey, you might find they're engineering naturals. Allowing your kid the opportunity to use their hands to build and create not only strengthens their fine motor



Clockwise from left: Break TO, Little Kitchen Academy, MakerKids

skills but expands their mind.

Visit Brick Labs Inc. or Snappology in North York, Zebra Robotics on the Danforth, or check out the many LEGO clubs hosted by the Toronto Public Library.

SPORTS 4. Badminton

We don't know whether it's because of the kid-friendly racquet size or the unique added element of a birdie, but badminton has taken off among students this year.

Whether you choose a local drop-in program or pop-up nets at the park, getting your kids involved in this age-old racquet sport is always a good idea. Visit your local community centre and reserve a court or register them for racquet and paddle sports lessons with the City of Toronto. Other options include seasonal badminton camps at U of T and the Badminton and Racquet Club of Toronto.

CREATE 5. Hands-on art

If your kids spend more time dabbling with arts and crafts than playing or going outside, you've probably got an artist-in-the-making on your hands.

Help foster their creative spirit by enrolling them in a kids-based art class that's outside of your average painting and sketching. For the kid who loves picking out their own wacky outfit combinations, try sewing classes that will foster their passion for fashion (and teach an appreciation of the work that goes into their clothes). For the kid with stacks of comic books around the room, try cartooning classes, including anime and manga-focused options, and even a Pokémon-specific variation. For the kid who loves to do a mid-day bedroom redesign or could stare up at tall buildings all day, interior design, architecture or urban design classes are meant for them.

Check out Canadian Contemporary School of Art in Leaside or Create Art Studio on the Danforth for plenty of options.

STEM 6. Coding

There's no denying that coding is a skill quickly growing in demand. It's even making its way into the regular classroom curriculum.

Whether your child loves video games or spending time creating and crafting on the computer, signing them up for a coding course will not only help open doors for future opportunities but will improve your kids' math and science grades, too!

To get started, visit Codezilla Kids, Scratch, Exceed Robotics or MakerKids.

SPORTS 7. Rock climbing

If your child was the one who was constantly trying to climb up things triple their height as a toddler and now sees how far they can get up a tree before losing their footing, there's a place to put that energy: rock climbing! Kids pick up on vital hand-eye coordination skills, develop problem-solving abilities as they ponder which rock to reach for next. The sport has grown in popularity over the years, with its Olympic debut at the Tokyo Games helping it hold its own among extracurricular heavyweights including soccer and hockey.

Try Joe Rockhead's School of Rock program or Basecamp Climbing's after school offerings for introductory lessons.