

Label Detectives Activity



Welcome & Detective Training

- Kids are welcomed as “Junior Label Detectives.”
- They each get a **detective badge** (sticker or lanyard), magnified glass, mini notebook, and pen.
- Brief intro: “Detectives look for hidden clues. Today, the clues are allergens!”

Game 1: Hidden Allergens Challenge

Materials

- Mock food labels
- Use printouts (cereal, snacks, soup cans, frozen foods, etc.).
- Include a mix of foods: some safe, some with hidden allergens (e.g., “casein” for milk, “albumin” for egg, “whey” for milk, “semolina” for wheat).
- Mini “Detective Books” or worksheets for each child (to record clues, notes, and safe/unsafe findings)
- Magnifying glasses (fun prop)
- Pens

Setup

- Arrange mock food labels around the room, on tables, shelves, etc.
- Divide kids into small detective teams (about 4–5 per team).
- Each child should have:
 - ◊ Their real allergy notes, or
 - ◊ A chosen allergy (of a friend/family member or a “buddy”) if they don’t have one.
- Give each team their Detective Books and writing tools.



How to Play

- The facilitator sets the scene:
 - ◊ “Welcome, Detectives! There are hidden allergens lurking in our food packages. Your mission is to uncover them before anyone has a reaction!”
 - ◊ Teams move from station to station (or the facilitator passes around the labels).
 - ◊ For each food label, teams carefully read the ingredient list, looking for anything that might be unsafe for their specific allergy.
 - ◊ If a term is tricky (e.g., “casein,” “albumin,” “whey,” “semolina”), they can talk to their fellow detectives.
 - ◊ In their Detective Books, kids record:
 - The food name

- The allergens they found for themselves and their team
 - A note or clue (e.g., “casein = milk,” “albumin = egg”) and what items they would be able to eat or not eat
- ◇ After investigating all labels, teams return to the facilitator to compare notes and reveal the allergens for their team together.

3. Game 2: Safe or Not Safe?



Activity:

Materials

- Food labels (from the Hidden Allergens Challenge)
- Two signs or clearly marked areas:
 - ✓ **SAFE**
 - ⊘ **NOT SAFE**
- Use a bell to signal each round
- Kids’ detective books/allergy notes from the Hidden Allergens Challenge

Setup

- Place the SAFE and NOT SAFE signs on opposite sides of the room.
- Have all food labels displayed or in a basket for the facilitator to hold up one by one.
- Each child should have:
 - ◇ Their real allergy notes, or
 - ◇ A chosen allergy (from a friend, family member, or “buddy”) if they don’t have one themselves.

How to Play

- The facilitator holds up one food label for everyone to see.
- Example: The label for a box of cereal.
- Kids take a few seconds to check their notes or think about their assigned allergy.
 - ◇ If a child doesn’t have a food allergy, they play through the eyes of their partner’s allergy.
- Does this food contain my allergen?
- When the facilitator says, “Go!”, everyone moves quickly (walk, hop, or run safely) to one side of the room:
 - ✓ **SAFE** — if they believe the food is safe for their allergy
 - ⊘ **NOT SAFE** — if the food contains or might contain their allergen
- ◇ The facilitator asks a few kids explain why they ran to the safe or not safe side

Notes for the Facilitator

- Remind kids that some allergens can be “hidden” (e.g., eggs in pasta, nuts in granola bars).
- Emphasize that it’s always okay to double-check or ask questions — just like in real life!
- Encourage empathy and inclusion: talk about how to make snacks safe for everyone.

Reflection Questions

- After a few rounds, bring the group together to chat:
- Which foods were easy or tricky to decide on?



- Did any foods surprise you with hidden allergens?
- What can we do to help our friends with allergies feel included at snack time?

4. Game 3: Food Allergy Bean Bag Toss

Materials

- 1 beanbag (the “food” being passed)
- Fake food labels— each with a picture or name of a food (e.g., pasta, peanut butter sandwich, ice cream, salad, sushi, etc.)
- You can print pictures or draw them together!
- Music (for timing — or use a short countdown timer)

Setup

- Set up music
- Break into groups of 5-8 depending on size
- Sit or stand in a circle.
- Before the game, participants can share their allergy information with their group (only if they are comfortable sharing).
 - ◊ Example: “Anna — eggs,” “Leo — peanuts,” “Maya — dairy.”
- Have teams create a list in their detective books with their group’s allergens.



How to Play

- Moderator chooses a food from the basket
- The group checks: does this food contain anything someone is allergic to in our group?
 - ◊ Example: Pasta often contains eggs, so Anna must avoid it!
- Start the music and pass the “food” (beanbag) quickly around the circle.
 - ◊ Rule: If the food is unsafe for someone’s real allergy, you must skip them when passing the beanbag.
- When the music stops (or the timer ends), the person holding the beanbag does a mini-challenge, such as:
 - ◊ Name a safe alternative food (e.g., “egg-free pasta”)
 - ◊ Say one way to keep someone with that allergy safe
 - ◊ Do a silly dance (just for fun!)
- Choose a new food and play again!

Conclusion

- After a few rounds, pause to ask:
 - ◊ Which foods were tricky?
 - ◊ How did it feel to have to avoid certain foods?
 - ◊ What can we do in real life to help friends with allergies feel included and safe?

5. Wrap-Up: Detective Graduation

- Review key detective skills:
 - ◊ **Read labels carefully.**
 - ◊ **Ask questions.**
 - ◊ **Say no if unsure.**
- Each participant gets to keep their props.

