

How to Make a Play Telephone

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Do you wish you could have your very own phone? All you have to do is follow these steps to learn how to make your own *tin can and string* (or *cup and string*) telephone. This craft also makes for a good science project to learn about how sound travels.

Things You'll Need

- ☐ Piece of string
- ☐ 2 clean food (soup) cans (empty) or cups.
- ☐ Tool for creating holes

Steps



1 **Get a piece of string and two empty cans (preferably soup cans).** If you don't have cans or you don't want to work with them, you can also use cups (preferably plastic), such as the ones shown here. Plastic is a little easier to work with than metal. Styrofoam cups do not work well because they are soft and spongy and absorb sound instead of transmitting it. In a pinch, you can use disposable paper cups, but plastic and metal take more wear-and-tear.



2 Punch a hole at the bottom of each can just small enough for string to fit through. You might need your parents or teacher to help with this. You can make the hole with a drill, hammer and a nail, or some other sharp, pointed tool. If you are using plastic cups, you can probably just poke a hole with a push pin or any other sharp point. Make the holes only large enough to put the string through and no larger.



3 Pass the string through the hole and into the bottom of one can or cup. It might help to push the string through with the end of a paper clip or thread it through with a bit of wire.



4 Tie a knot in the end of the string that is inside the cup. When you're done, pull the string tight so the knot rests in the bottom of the can. You can tie the string around a little piece of a toothpick if you can't get it to stay with just a knot.



5 Place the untied end of the string through the bottom of the other can or cup. Tie a knot, as before, and pull the string tight.



6 Get a partner.



7 Place the open end of one can over your ear and have your partner speak into the open end of the other can. Make the string as tight as you can. If you've made it correctly, you should hear your friend speak, even if it is a long piece of string. Then, talk while your friend listens.



Community Q&A

Question

What can I do if I do not hear it?



Community Answer

Pull the string tighter. Often, we can't hear the sound because the string is too loose.

Helpful 194 Not Helpful 46

Question

We used a piece of yarn and two tin cans, why isn't it working?



Community Answer

Yarn has a lot of loose threads that works as a vibration dampener. A taut string will carry the vibration much more cleanly.

Helpful 150 Not Helpful 42

Question

Does the size of the cup matter?



Community Answer

Nope, cups of any size should work equally well.

Helpful 130 Not Helpful 42

Question

Why does my partner hear better if the string is tighter?



Community Answer

Because the noise is from the string vibrating and when it is tight allows it to travel through better.

Helpful 160 Not Helpful 50

Question

Should I use a tin can or paper for my telephone?



Community Answer

A foam cup or paper cup will work well. Tin cans have been used to make this for decades, so it works well too.

Helpful 141 Not Helpful 51

Question

How do I make the string tighter?



Community Answer

Have each listener pull on an end, so that it doesn't sag in the middle between the two cups/cans. They must be the right distance between each other.

Helpful 120 Not Helpful 41

Question

Does wire work instead of string?



Community Answer

No, wire is too thick. If you wanted to use wire, you would have to split it in two.

Helpful 118 Not Helpful 48

Question

Can thread be used instead of a string?



Community Answer

Yes, a piece of thread should work just as well.

Helpful 119 Not Helpful 26

Question

Why do foam cups work better than metal cans?



Community Answer

The primary reason is that the foam works as a megaphone for your ears - the sound has increasingly more space to move around before it reaches your ears.

Helpful 113 Not Helpful 50

Question

How do you poke a hole in the cup?



Community Answer

Take a screwdriver or tack and poke a hole into a tin can.

Helpful 77 Not Helpful 45

[See more answers](#)



Tips

- You can hear your partner better if the string is tighter.
- Using fishing wire instead of string helps sound travel a lot better.
- Can you make "phone calls" around corners? Try it and see.
- Check your sound by speaking and having your friend speak both into and outside of the phone. Does it sound different speaking through the phone?
- Decorate and customize your cups to be more exciting.
- Use a paper clip to make phone line better so that it can vibrate more. And also make sure that the string is straight. If it is not, pull hard but not too hard to snap. If it snaps, tie a knot together to work again.
- Try a three-way call (two strings from one can).
- You can decorate it like a real cell phone, if you want.
- Get 2 tin cans and a piece of string and stick the string on the ends of the tins and it is done!



Warnings

- Try to use cans that do not have a sharp edge where the lid of the can was removed.
- Be careful when you punch the hole in the can.

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7 votes - 100%

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