

PLAY & LEARN AT HOME



September 2020

LEARNING ON THE GO



Puppets! Playing with puppets is fun and it helps children grow early literacy skills! It allows children to use their imagination and practice storytelling. Stories have beginnings, middles, and ends, and using a puppet to tell a story helps with learning to fit these parts into a story. When playing with puppets together, try asking your child questions like, “and then what happened?” “Why did they do that?” “How did they feel?” to help expand their thinking and use more vocabulary and language.

Puppet play also helps:

- Grow empathy and perspective skills, as it is a safe way to “try on” another character or personality.
- Build fine and gross motor skills, as we use our hand and fingers to manipulate the puppet.

No puppets? NO PROBLEM! There are lots of easy ways to make puppets at home. Some ideas include:

- Old socks with buttons, yarn, cotton balls or other small things glued on.
- Envelopes: stick the flap down, cut in half, and color. It’s a puppet for your fingers!
- Pictures from old picture books stuck on to popsicle sticks or pencils (or draw your own)
- Paper lunch bag: color and/or glue on items to make a character.

FAMILY PLACE

Let’s pretend! Pretend play, or “make-believe,” engages a child’s imagination, leading to longer attention spans and improved focus. Pretend play also helps children develop their own language and storytelling skills that will help them be good communicators in school and life.

You can:

Set the stage with simple props:

- Sheets over a chair = tents, bear caves, or homes.
- Cardboard blocks and boxes = a fire station, rocket ship, or zoo.
- Hit up second-hand stores to create a prop box with old dresses, shirts, hats, shoes and other “costumes.”

Play a supporting role:

- Let your child direct their own stories and play along.
- Read familiar stories and act them out with your child.



Keep in mind that young children can only pretend about what they know, from direct experience or through reading. Pretending looks different at every age. A one-year-old can pretend to talk on the phone or feed a baby. A toddler will act out familiar routines and conversations that go along with preparing a meal or “doctoring” a baby doll. (There’s a reason play kitchens are so popular!) Older children take charge, assigning roles and making up storylines. Superheroes might arrive on the scene!

LITTLE EXPLORERS

Engineering is a process to solve problems. It's also the process by which young children discover how the things in their world are built and how they work. Children are natural engineers. They love to design and build with almost anything they can get their hands on!

Here are some ways to foster engineering skills:

- **Let them explore!** Give them opportunities to explore and try new things using a variety of items to use to build or create. This provides opportunities for young children to try out learning processes.
- **Outside/Nature play!** Find a good time and place for young children play in the dirt, play with sticks, blocks, sand, buckets... This creates opportunities to explore and create using pretend play and engineering skills.
- **Open-ended activities!** Provide materials and time for open-ended play and let children make their own decisions. They need freedom to play and explore.
- **Use everyday objects like:**
 - Large plastic crates, cardboard blocks, or large, empty boxes.
 - Cooking utensils, dishes, plastic food containers, table napkins, silk flowers.
 - Blankets, or old sheets for making costumes or a fort.

Try This!

Build a habitat together for a stuffed animal or plastic toy. Talk about the kinds of different places animals live in and try to create that environment. Or, create a habitat together based on the child's imagination!



READY, SET, KINDERGARTEN!

Empathy is understanding the emotions of others. When children can name emotions, they are understanding their feelings and recognizing how others feel.

Using mirrors is a safe way for your child to practice making faces to match their emotions. Let them look at themselves in the mirror and call out an emotion for them to try.

As your child is making faces to match emotions, point out the features of each look. "When you're sad, your mouth turns down. An angry person's forehead is scrunched up. Surprised people often open their eyes wide and make their mouths look like Os."



Name your child's emotions as they happen and try to show them their own face in the mirror while they're experiencing it. This will cement the look and feel of the emotion in your child's mind, helping them identify it the next time they feel it.

Want more ways to talk about emotions? Try these ideas!

- **Show me!** Read books or watch shows and point out the faces of the characters. Ask your child how they think the character feels.
- **Cut it out!** Cut out pictures of facial features you find in magazines: eyes, noses, mouths, etc. Let your children arrange them on a table into different faces.
- **Dress up!** Let your child try out the role of someone else. Dressing up is a way to try out new ideas. They also learn new vocabulary and aids in working out conflicts with peers.
- **Gift kindness!** Make a gift for someone else. Explain how giving a present to another person can make them feel special.