



Learning Through Play

Activities to do with your pre-school child

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Parents are the most important people in a child's life. We love and care for our children and are the best people to support their learning.

Because of the emphasis placed upon 'formal' learning, it is tempting to focus on rote learning tasks too soon. Educational toys are great but don't offer the variety and flexibility that *you* can. Children need adult 'mediation' to develop their understanding.

Sometimes we under value the importance of the everyday ways we encourage our children's development. Activities such as; bedtime stories; singing songs and nursery rhymes; messy play; going for walks/outings; chatting; limiting TV to suitable programmes and talking about them, are invaluable – we want to teach our children to learn to think rather than just to learn 'by heart'.

This leaflet shows some simple games that will really help your child's thinking skills and their ability to be active learners in the future. You will be amazed at the difference short, quality, interactive games make – and they're fun too!

Language gives children a powerful tool that helps them solve difficult tasks, inhibit impulsive actions, plan solutions to problems before executing them, and ultimately, control their own behaviour.'

Lev Vygotsky

AS MANY CLAPS AS...

This game helps develop your child's listening and attention, concepts of quantity/number, same and different, and pattern.

Stamp your foot once and ask your child to 'make as many claps as there were stamps'.

Repeat this with different numbers of stamps and different actions, e.g. winks, finger clicks, tongue clicks.

Swap roles and get your child to check – don't always get it right!

With young children it's important to keep the number of stamps low – no more than five at first and possibly work up to as many as seven. *Remember that a young child who has thoroughly understood the meaning of three claps, one clap too many, one clap too few, is much better of than one who can count to a hundred parrot fashion!*

AND THEN WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

This activity helps develop your child's understanding of the world around them, extends vocabulary and lays the foundation for them thinking through their actions first.

Help your child to understand consequences in everyday situations by asking and talking about 'what will happen if?', 'and then what will happen?'

Some consequences are desirable, others not so – link these to feelings 'how will we feel?'

Make silly mistakes so they correct you, and most importantly, have fun!

For example, what will happen if; we mix flour, butter, egg etc and cook; we put Granny's birthday card in the post; we leave our toys on the floor etc.

SMALL AS A BALL AND GROW TALL

These games can be played at home or out and about and help your child understand size and the concept of transformation.

WATCH ME GROW – Say 'Show me what you were like when you were very small.' Get your child to crouch into a tiny ball. Then get them to say 'Watch me grow!' while they straighten up to end on tiptoes. Then stretch your arms as high as possible to show what they will be like when they have grown even more and get them to copy you.

BIG STEPS, SMALL STEPS – say 'show me how you used to walk when you were very small' and get them to walk in small steps. Then say 'Now show me how you will walk when you are very big!' and get your child to take big strides with arms swinging. Now say 'small again!', 'big again!' until you are both exhausted!

You could use high pitched musical instruments to mark small steps and deeper sounds for big steps.

COMING HOME

This activity helps develop your child's understanding of language and positional concepts.

Using toy animals, tell your child that the animals have been playing in the forest, and now they have to go home to eat. For example, Bear first, BEHIND bear goes fox, BEHIND fox goes rabbit and BEHIND rabbit goes hedgehog. Ask your child to help the animals go home in the right order.

Next, ask your child to help the animals go out to play, again in the correct order.

Encourage your child to use BEHIND by emphasising the word yourself, and praising your child for using it. Use two, three or four animals to make the game easier or more difficult.

This game can be played on another day with another position such as 'in front' or 'beside'.

FIND THE TOY

This game helps your children to develop their planning skills (reduce impulsiveness), visual spatial skills, and understanding that pictures/symbols can give us information/links to the real world (like writing and maps!).

Draw a simple plan of a room together, talking about what is where as you do it – then ask your child to leave the room or use a blindfold...

Hide an object in the room (toy, raisins or similar treat). Use a counter (or any marker you can take off again) to mark the position of the object on your plan. Then ask your child to come back into the room (or remove blindfold).

Show the plan with the counter in place. Ask your child to tell you where they think they will find the object, then let them go and see if they were right. If they were unsuccessful, support them in thinking it through using the plan rather than searching the room.

Again, swap roles—and make mistakes (get them to explain, as best they can, why you made the mistake).

These are just a few ideas – you will already be doing many more.

Remember, talking with your child about what you and they are doing, naming and describing, and thinking about what might happen next are so important – toys can't do that!

This leaflet is based on Galina Doyle's 'The Key to Learning, The Technology of Child Development' GHD Publishing 2007