



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Games & Activities

Where's that clock?

Here's a bit of fun that also helps children learn how to solve problems by listening carefully.

First, set the alarm of an old alarm clock to just a few minutes from now. Then have all the players close their eyes while you hide the clock.

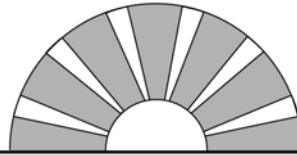
Start out with some place fairly easy like behind a sofa pillow, under a chair, or in a closet.

Next, everybody waits — and when the alarm goes off, all players try to find it.

When someone finds it, show her or him how to turn it off so she or he can do it the next time. Now it's someone else's turn to hide the clock.

Difficulty can be adjusted by making the hiding places easier or harder, depending on players' ages.

You might be surprised at how clever kids can be at finding new and ever more difficult hiding places! □



Child's Day

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Playthings

Save those boxes!

If the supply of boxes is generous and constant, most children will be delighted to show parents how inventive they can be. For example: babies crawl into boxes, sit, and grin. Sometimes they get stuck and cry. Then they learn how to back out.

Big brothers and sisters occasionally think of putting a string through a hole punched into a box. Then babies pull the boxes.

Toddlers think boxes are cars, boats, trains, space ships. They think very big boxes are houses.

Ask at an appliance store for a big box that used to contain a refrigerator. This big box will make a dandy puppet theater where the main character is a fierce shoebox crocodile. (The box top is the lower jaw. Cut jagged edges on the top for teeth.)

Some little boxes fit over hands for hand puppets. Some tiny boxes fit over fingers for finger puppets.

Middle-sized boxes fit over heads, with holes for eyes. Other boxes can make a whole suit of armor where the body pieces are attached by string at the joints. There's also a visor for the helmet with a string to go up and down.

Of course, there's a whole world that can be made of minia-

ture boxes — houses, farms for miniature animals, outer space cities that on closer inspection bulge with exotic cosmetic boxes, cheese boxes and toilet paper tubes. Elmer's™ glue holds it all together.

Oatmeal boxes make rockets. A paper plate with a wedge-shaped section cut out can be bent into a nose cone (with some tape to hold it).

Remember cigar boxes! They still make them. And they still can hold wonderful, secret treasures that can be looked at again and again.

Eggs come in boxes (get the molded kind instead of the folded kind). An egg box caterpillar's easy — kids can tear one strip of bumps from the molded box, draw eyes, and there it is!

Why not start a really fun project everybody can work on: a dollhouse. First, pile up boxes, one for each room. Glue them together; cut doors and windows; fold a piece of corrugated cardboard into a V for the roof; bend cardboard into a zigzag for the stairs, wallpaper with ... no, the rest of the fun is up to you!

Remember: safety first. No long strings or cords around infants; monitor use of scissors and other tools. □

Book of the Month: The Very Hungry Caterpillar

Author: Eric Carle

Publisher: Philomel Books, Board Edition, 1994

On a recent visit to my under-two granddaughter, I took this classic book in my suitcase. We all know the story of how the little egg on the leaf produced the little caterpillar, who ate his way through a number of nutritious fruits and then an orgy of delicious junk foods, before getting a tummy-ache, becoming a cocoon, and then a beautiful butterfly. (If you don't know the story, run, don't walk, to your nearest library and get this and every other Eric Carle book you can find.)

My granddaughter loved it, breathlessly murmuring "again" each time we came to the last page. And I had the pleasure not only of reading it 36 times during my weekend visit, but also of watching her read through the book herself, muttering "a slice of Swiss cheese" and "cocoon" as she examined the pictures.

This delightful experience made me think again about the difference between children's literature and what I call "supermarket books," those books set out to entice buyers near checkout counters. Often these books are related to television characters—"Sponge Bob Tells the Story of the Three Bears"—or commercial products—Cheerios, for instance, with thinly disguised teaching concepts as the book's basis.

The differences in the ways books look, sound, and feel are the critical factors in whether young children get so hooked on books that they can't wait to learn

to read, as in the case of the Caterpillar, or discard the book after a few encounters.

Take the illustrations, for example. Good children's literature displays art worthy of a gallery, in many forms—lovely paintings as Carle uses; collage as in the work of Ezra Jack Keats; pen and ink drawings as in Robert McCloskey. (In fact, Eric Carle has just endowed a museum at the University of Massachusetts devoted to the art of children's picture books.) Details are lovingly included, as illustrators know that children's eyes read the pictures.

My four-year-old granddaughter once gleefully pointed out to me that even the birds were wearing ponytails in Robert Munsch's delightful "Stephanie's Ponytail." Supermarket books often use cartoon-like pictures that do little to enrich the soul or nurture aesthetic sense.

Then there is the language. Authors of children's literature recognize that young children love the sounds and rhythms of words, and delight in acquiring new ones. At 22 months, Rose murmured "cocoon" as if she had been given a treasure.

A librarian friend pointed out that good illustrations help children figure out the meanings of the new words so that we don't have to change from those carefully chosen by the author. For

example, in Donald Crew's "Freight Train," the lovely phrase "crossing trestles" would please far more than a parent's translation "going over the bridge." Mass-produced trade books often tell a story without any magic in the writing.

Lastly, children's literature draws the child into the wonder of the book without heavy-handed attempts to teach. Oh, they learn, but it is a subtle process. As I think about the Caterpillar, I realize that children are gently exposed to the following concepts: days of the week; counting; categories of food; nutrition principles; and the process of metamorphosis. Wow! All Rose knew was that she loved the book.

Another book she has was clearly written to teach the concepts of up, down, and behind. Did it delight at first reading? No, and she read it only once.

Children who have been exposed to the beautiful little treasures that exist as children's literature are getting the very best preparation for school readiness that there is: They know and love books, and wholeheartedly want to be able to unravel their mysteries. And the best part is that we get to enjoy the books with them, happily responding to that whispered "again."

P.S. Your children's librarian probably has a list of suggestions of the best literature appropriate for your child's age. □

Baby power

Around six or seven months of age, a baby is in the habit of making noises and “babbling.” Babbling is the repetition of sounds such as “papapa” which continues when the adults in her life reward her with smiles, affection, and other demonstrations of their satisfaction.

She is also in the habit of listening to sounds when the adults in his life talk to her and cause her to pay attention.

In addition, at this age, we have something new: baby power! She knows that she can attract attention by expressing her interests and her needs. She knows that when she cries, someone will come and feed or comfort her. Also, she is aware that when she babbles, someone nice shows delight with her.

Gradually these pleasant experiences will become strong incentives to babble more and more. However, if no one responds, the drive to continue babbling will weaken.

Likewise, if Baby is allowed to cry for long periods of time without any attention, then she will not associate her needs with the satisfaction of her needs, and her crying will be aimless.

On the other hand, a child’s communicative development may be slow if the adults in her life anticipate all of her needs. For example, if she never has to cry because the family routine is so exact that everything is on schedule, or if the instant she

starts to cry someone always responds quickly, the incentive to cry may be weakened.

Likewise, the incentive to babble may be weakened if there is always someone ready and waiting to entertain and play with her.

What Baby needs is a good balance between too much and not enough help — between over-anxiety and indifference.

What changes about the babbling of a six- or seven-month-old? Until now, sound making has been associated with the body states of comfort and discomfort. Now, however, she not only babbles to express contentment, but she produces sounds at will and just for the pleasure of making them.

She enjoys the results of feeling and listening to the sounds themselves, their patterns, rhythms, and tunes. She repeats their pitch; combines and inter-weaves to make new tunes.

How does this babbling also affect speech development? It gives her tongue, lips and throat muscles plenty of practice and increases their efficiency.

As she plays with sounds, she learns how it feels when she makes the movements necessary to produce them, just as she is learning about the movement of her body and limbs. □

Practicing ABCs

Here’s an easy, fun way to practice making letters and words.

Start with a big roasting pan. Pour a thick layer of salt into the pan and shake it from side to side until the salt is spread evenly. Now you’re ready to write.

Children get the “feel” of letters better when their fingertips shape them than when a stubborn pencil point does. They can make letters as big as they like without wasting paper.

And if they are unhappy with the way something looks, they don’t have the frustration of scribbling over it or the tedious job of trying to erase. All they have to do is give the pan a shake. The mistake disappears and there is a clean “page” on which to start over.

If your child is too young for writing, he can make swirly designs with fingers or cookie cutters.

For those kids who love tiny bulldozers and dump trucks, the salt’s fine, dry texture works better than sand for moving, dumping and piling up. □

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are available at
Child's Day

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