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SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS

**AN RCS PREK FAMILY NEWSLETTER FROM YOUR
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST AND SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER**

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FIRST THINGS FIRST. HOW TO PLAY:

LET'S PLAY!

Fred Rogers once said "Play is really the work of childhood." And we believe he was right! When parents ask us and our early childhood colleagues about how they can best help child development at home, one thing we always say is **PLAY WITH THEM!** This newsletter aims to provide tips and ideas about how to promote play at home and how you can use toys as learning tools.

**PLAY IS OFTEN TALKED
ABOUT AS IF IT WERE
A RELIEF FROM SERIOUS LEARNING.
BUT FOR CHILDREN PLAY
IS SERIOUS LEARNING. PLAY IS REALLY
THE WORK
OF CHILDHOOD.
-FRED ROGERS**

- Sit with your child.
- Remove distractions like cell phones & electronic devices.
- Pay attention to your child's likes and preferences.
- Comment on what you are doing and what your child is doing **1** **(see #1 below for more information)**
- Take time to watch your child and listen. Give feedback - instead of saying "good job!" simply notice their discoveries. **2**
- Extend the play by offering different materials or modeling a new skill or idea. **2**
- Have fun together. Be silly, laugh a lot, enjoy each other.
- Repeat daily, even just for 15 minutes every day.

Your child may benefit from additional ideas to interact with you - please reach out to your teacher if you need help in supporting your child's play at home.

TIPS FOR CHOOSING TOYS TO PROMOTE PLAY SKILLS: QUESTIONS TO ASK



"SIMPLE TOYS PROMOTE INDEPENDENCE, CREATIVITY, CRITICAL THINKING, & IMAGINATION. THE MORE THE TOY DOES, THE LESS YOUR CHILD IS DOING — BOTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY."⁴

DOES THE TOY PROMOTE COMMUNICATION AND FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION WITH OTHERS?

For toys to help support speech and language and social-emotional development, you as the parent must help facilitate those skills. In fact, sometimes play involves just people games, or fun, physical activities that you can play with your child to help build interaction and communication skills. One research-based strategy is called R.O.C.K., a strategy that helps you make the game structured and predictable which helps your child take a turn to keep the game going. R.O.C.K. stands for:

- Repeat - repeat what you say and do
- Opportunity - give your child an opportunity to interact and communicate
- Cue - cue your child to take a turn by waiting, looking expectantly so they know it's their turn
- Keep it going and keep it fun! ³

DOES THE TOY PROMOTE CREATIVITY?

The best toys for learning are often open-ended toys that can be used in a variety of different ways. These are the toys you and your child can play with again and again. The oldest toys tend to be the most basic and are classic toys for good reason. Sometimes the toys we think are the most entertaining mean the child is simply a passive observer instead of interacting and engaging. ⁴

DOES THE TOY OR ACTIVITY PROMOTE IMAGINATION?

According to Zero to Three, "The most useful toy is the one that requires the most activation on the part of a young child...The more they have to use their minds and bodies to make something work, the more they are going to learn." Toys that are highly structured can get in the way of pretend play and kids using their imagination. In other words, "the less complicated the toy, the more flexible it is." ⁵



TOYS RECOMMENDED FOR LEARNING TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

These simple toys are just a few ideas to promote interactions, creativity, and pretend play skills.

CLASSIC TOYS

- Dollhouses and variations with objects: Little People, pirate ship, castle, farm set, 'Imaginext' superhero sets
- Trains with tracks, cars with ramps, other vehicles such as link and go magnetic vehicles (Lakeshore), take apart construction vehicles
- Building sets such as gears, magnetic tiles, Legos, K'nex, Lincoln logs
- Large cardboard boxes and other DIY materials for fort-building
- Dress-up costumes - including superheroes, princesses, community helpers
- Kitchen set with pretend food, cash register, Melissa & Doug sets for sandwich-making, birthday party, pizza, etc
- Doctor/ vet set
- Sensory play: play-doh, sand/ water table and toys
- Arts & Crafts: coloring books with markers/ crayons/ colored pencils, perler beads, painting.
- Puzzles, especially wooden inset
- Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head
- And of course BOOKS! **6**



RESOURCES AND FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For tips :

1. <http://www.playingwithwords365.com/strategies-to-help-your-child-talk-parallel-and-self-talk>
2. <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/playing-confidently-with-our-children>
3. <http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/R-O-C-K--in-People-Games--For-Children-with-ASD-or.aspx>
4. <https://www.romper.com/p/why-simple-toys-are-better-for-your-kids-is-honestly-magic-8912230#:~:text=Simple%20toys%2C%20such%20as%20balls,Research%20Lab%20at%20Temple%20University.&text=The%20more%20the%20toy%20does,doing%20%E2%80%94%20both%20physically%20and%20mentally.>
5. <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/26/health/the-problem-with-some-smart-toys-hint-use-your-imagination.html>
6. <http://www.playingwithwords365.com/top-toys-how-they-can-support-speech-language-development-part-one/> (also parts two, three, and four)

BASIC TOYS FOR TEACHING SKILLS

Toy	Can support development of
Blocks	Concepts of color, shape, prepositions (such as top, next to), size, counting, etc., problem-solving, cause & effect, with others: sharing/taking turns
Balls	Concepts of space (in, on, through, up), color, texture (soft, hard, bumpy), gross and fine motor, interactive social skills
Dolls	Body parts, clothing labels, concepts such as size, colors, prepositions, verbs, emotions, answering "wh" questions, social/ pragmatic skills
Cars/vehicles	Basic concepts (colors, counting, some/more, less/all, fast/slow), social skills (turn-taking: practice saying 'my turn' and 'may I have that please?', "wh" questions such as 'Where is the car?' 'Who is driving the car?' 6

GAMES FOR TURN-TAKING

- **Stacking blocks or playing Jenga**
- **DIY Bowling game with ball and plastic bottles**
- **Board game ideas**
 - **Connect Four**
 - **Kerplunk**
 - **Lotto Game: Faces & Feelings/ Outside Sounds Listening Game**
 - **Farm Uno Put In by Mattel**
 - **HiHo Cherry-O**
 - **Matching games: Eric Carle Brown Bear & Panda Bear**
 - **ThinkFun Bingo Zingo Game**

