



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII ♥ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Why Play?

According to the Center of the Developing Child at Harvard University, *“Participating in play can be thought of as lighting up the circuitry board of a computer, with children’s experiences firing up neuron connections in their developing brains.”* (Bohard, et al., (Eds.) 2015)

Think back to when you were a child. What did you like to play? Was it “hide-and-seek” or marbles? Perhaps it was climbing trees, playing “dress up,” playing a board game, or skipping rocks in the ocean? Whatever it was, no doubt it was something you enjoyed doing.

Children and play naturally seem to go together, and according to years of research, this is a good thing! You see, play is how our brains grow and we learn. For example, if you played with marbles, you learned about counting, gravity, movement of an object, principles of physics, and eye-hand coordination. Seems like a lot for a little game of marbles, doesn’t it? What’s even more amazing is what you learned through play helped to set the foundation for your future learning. The play experiences helped you to grasp more advanced concepts easier. It all starts with play!



This newsletter will address the important role that play has on children’s learning, and will provide you with examples of how you can support children’s learning through play.



In This Newsletter:

To support you in fostering your child’s healthy development and school readiness, this newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child’s development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Community Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

Infants are in a stage of development that child psychologist, Jean Piaget referred to as the “sensorimotor phase.” In the sensorimotor stage, infants learn about the world through actively exploring objects in their environment – first with their eyes, then with their hands and mouths. Babies play by looking, grasping, bringing objects to their mouths, and as they get older, transferring objects from hand to hand, turning them over, giving them to others, throwing them, poking them, etc. Between 4-8 months, infants begin to develop “object permanence.” This is when they begin to realize that objects continue to exist even when we cannot see, hear or touch them; an important milestone because it signals the development of memory and the ability to think



abstractly; the start of symbolic understanding, which is needed for school readiness and academic success.

How can you support and further your infant's learning?

The most important thing you can do at this stage is to develop a loving and nurturing relationship with your infant.

- ♥ Be present and mindful of what your infant is doing; be aware of when your infant wants to engage with you;
- ♥ Respond to his vocalizations and gestures; mimic his facial expressions;
- ♥ Talk about what he is looking at, touching, smelling, tasting, hearing, doing;
- ♥ Read to him;
- ♥ Sing songs;
- ♥ Play games, such as peek-a-boo, clapping games, and other interactive games;
- ♥ Provide toys and objects that he can lift, drop, look at, bounce, pour, roll, hide, build, knock down, or stack; toys and objects that engage his senses such as mobiles, rattles, chew toys and chunky board and cloth books; toys that help him learn about cause and effect, such as pop-up toys, squeak toys and busy boxes.

Activity for Infants: *Clapping Game*

What You Need: None

What to Do:

1. Help your baby bring his hands together and clap. Have him clap his hands then hide them under a blanket.
2. Sing this song as you do the activity:

Clap your hands, one, two, three
Play a clapping game with me.
Now your hands have gone away;
Find your hands so we can play.



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

Toddlers

Toddlers enter into a new and expanding phase of mental activity. They now begin to think in words and symbols; they remember and imagine; they try out materials in many ways (California Dept. of Education, 2006). Through active play, your toddler learns to make sense of the world around him. You may notice him using pretend play by dressing up, assuming different roles, making up stories, and using simple props that represent familiar experiences.

How can you support and further your toddler's learning?

- ♥ Continue to be responsive to your toddler's signals;
- ♥ Show enthusiasm for his discoveries;
- ♥ Encourage him to name things, talk about his experiences and observations;
- ♥ Ask questions that have more than one answer;
- ♥ Encourage him to compare and contrast objects;



- ♥ Provide a variety of new, open-ended materials for experimentation: A set of wooden blocks, modeling clay, take apart toys, musical instruments are examples of open-ended, mind expanding toys;
- ♥ Provide him with a variety of pretend play props such as containers and boxes of various shapes and sizes, dress up clothes, safe kitchen and household items, puppets, baby dolls, caregiving items such as bottles and blankets;
- ♥ Ride-on toys, low climbing toys, large balls and outdoor items like a sandbox are good choices for developing gross motor skills.

Activity for Toddlers: *Let's Roll!*

What You Need:

- Empty paper towel roll
- Hard cover book
- Collection of objects to experiment with
- Container to hold objects

What to Do:

1. With your child, collect a variety of objects from around the house and place them in a container. The variety will show your child that different objects have different abilities (e.g., small ball, tape roll, jingle bell, toy car, etc.). Do not use small objects that are choking hazards.
2. Place the paper towel roll under the book, creating a little ramp.
3. Place the small objects into the paper towel roll and have your child watch what happens. Give your child the opportunity to experiment and come up with ideas on what will happen (e.g., which ones roll and which will slide down the ramp.) .



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

Preschoolers

As your preschooler grows, so does his creativity and imagination in his play. You may notice that, unlike his toddler years, he is now more social and expressive, and enjoys playing with and being around others. He is engaged in more



complex learning, using the information he has gained and practicing what he's learned through his play. For example, pretending to be a police officer, mechanic, daddy, or chef, allows your child to practice, explore and immerse himself into characters or roles that he is interested in. These experiences provide him opportunities to learn important skills that build the foundation for his future learning success.

How can you support and further your preschooler's learning?

- ♥ Extend your preschooler's rich pretending and imaginative play by joining in his play and encouraging further play (e.g., asking "What kind of pizza do you sell in this restaurant?" will cause him to think about ingredients on a pizza);
- ♥ Extend books by acting out the stories through imaginative play;

(continued on page 6)

Activity for Preschoolers: **Silhouette Show**

Adapted from: *Science Arts* by MaryAnn Kohl and Jean Potter

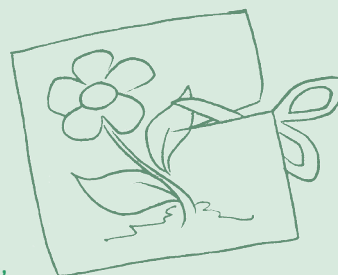
What You Need:

Projector or lamp without shade	Chairs
Table	Paper
Blank wall	Tape
Craft sticks or drinking straws	Scissors

What to Do:

1. Together, draw outlines of characters, animals, people or scenery (houses, trees) onto paper, then cut them out. These cut outs are called silhouettes.
2. Tape the silhouette cut outs to a craft stick or straw.
3. Set up the projector or lamp near a wall. (Be cautious of the electric cord.)
4. Have your child sit on a chair facing the wall (with his back to the projector or lamp).
5. Hold up the silhouette cut outs so their shadows show on the wall.
6. Show your child how to make up a story and act it out with the silhouette cut outs, and have him do the same. He could also act out a favorite story or nursery rhyme.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ♥ use and strengthen small muscles such as facial muscles, fingers, hands, and toes
- ♥ develop eye-hand coordination

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ develop his unique identity
- ♥ feel important and good about himself

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ increase his observation, listening, and understanding skills, and attention span
- ♥ learn to ask and answer questions
- ♥ increase his verbal abilities

Cognitive Development

- ♥ increase his understanding of physical science such as gravity, balance, properties of objects
- ♥ develop his understanding of numbers and counting
- ♥ increase his story comprehension and recall, creativity and imagination

Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons. As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show him how to handle items safely and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

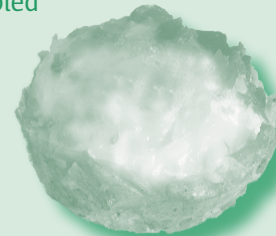
Birds Nest

Ingredients:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 6 bread slices of your choice | 6 slices of turkey bacon, cooked and crumbled |
| Large handful of spinach,
broken into smaller pieces | Salt and pepper to taste |
| ¼ cup cheese, grated | 2 Tbsp. of butter or cooking spray |
| 6 eggs | Circle cookie cutter or cup
(to cut circles out of the bread) |

Directions:

1. Pre-heat your oven to 375°.
2. With your child, use the rolling pin to flatten the bread slices.
3. Cut circles out of the flattened bread slices and spread with butter. Save the excess bread and have your child break them into smaller pieces.
4. Lightly spray or coat the bottom of the muffin tin with butter.
5. Have your child lay ⅔ of the tin full with bread pieces. Then place 1 bread circle in each tin.
6. Together, sprinkle spinach, cheese, and bacon on top of the bread to fill each muffin tin.
7. Then, crack and scramble an egg and have your child pour it into one muffin tin. Repeat with the 6 eggs till all the tins are filled
8. Bake for 15 minutes or until the egg is cooked. Talk about how the mixture will change and how the ingredients will combine together.



Preschoolers (continued from page 4)

- ♥ Provide open-ended materials. These are materials that children can play with and use in many different ways without being bound by an expectation of a “right way” to play with them. Wet sand, wooden blocks, water play, and finger paint are some examples of activities that allow children to explore freely and creatively.
- ♥ Provide many real-world experiences. For example, involve your child in gardening. Together set up a fruit/vegetable/flower stand to “sell” what was grown in the garden.
- ♥ As your child plays outdoors, encourage him to collect a few natural objects (e.g., leaves, twigs). With these objects, he can create his own story or a collage.
- ♥ Ask open-ended questions. These are questions that do not have a right or wrong answer such as, “How did you get that to work?” or “Can you think of a new way to do it?”

Community Resources**National Association for the Education of Young Children**

<http://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/why-toy>
Information about selecting toys, including guidance about electronic toys.

Eastern Connecticut University Timpani Toy Study 2015, 2016

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JPEJ7YWLDg>
(2015 Timpani Toy Study)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ym9p6DEhsAE> (2016 Timpani Toy Study)

The Timpani Toy Studies by Eastern Connecticut University looks at how young children in different preschool settings play with different toys and how it affects children’s play. The purpose of these studies are to guide parents and teachers in selecting toys that have a positive impact on children’s learning.

Suggested Books

Recommended by **Hawaii State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

In My Ocean by Sara Gillingham and Lorena Siminovich

This colorful die-cut board book is about a dolphin that goes on an adventure and explores the ocean with his family. Your child will enjoy bringing this book to life using the attached dolphin finger puppet.

Peek A Who? by Nina Laden

Your child will be eager to peek through the die-cut windows to see who is behind the pages, from Moo! Cow Boo! Ghost and many more characters. Keep your child guessing as you explore through the colorful picture and rhyming text.

Preschoolers

Not a Box by Antoinette Portis

One rabbit uses his imagination and takes an ordinary cardboard box and makes it into a variety of things from a rocket ship, a robot, to a mountain.

Let’s Play by Herve Tullet

Take a journey with a yellow dot and see what your imagination finds along the way...different shapes, colors, and motions.



Learning to Grow is a project of the University of Hawai‘i, Windward Community College, with funding from the Hawai‘i Department of Human Services. Visit our website at www.learningtogrowhawaii.org