



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII ♥ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Wonder of Puppets

Children all over the world have long been fascinated with puppets! From well-known puppets, like *Kermit the Frog* and *Bert and Ernie*, to furry animal hand puppets – and even simple puppets made out of a paper bag or a sock – puppets have a magical way of capturing young children's interest and attention.

This natural appeal makes puppets highly effective in supporting young children's growth in many developmental areas, in the following ways:

- ♥ **Language and Literacy.** Children are naturally motivated to speak *to* and *with* puppets, helping them gain verbal and communication/conversational skills (such as speaking, listening, turn-taking, questioning), as well as helping to broaden their vocabulary. In addition, puppets used with stories, poems and songs increase children's interest in reading-related activities (e.g., retelling stories), which provides a valuable foundation for reading.
- ♥ **Cognitive Development.** When a child plays with a puppet, she can make the puppet say and do anything she wants. By engaging in pretend play and trying on different roles, children experience an increase in thinking and other cognitive skills such as creativity and imagination.
- ♥ **Social/Emotional Development.** Puppets provide a sense of security that makes it easier for children to express their thoughts and feelings. Studies have shown that children who are often reluctant to talk to an adult, will more readily talk to a puppet. In addition, as children take on different roles through puppet play, they learn to empathize and respect the feelings and perspectives of others. These



social emotional skills play a key role in helping children grow up to be happy, healthy, well-adjusted adults.

In this newsletter, we will discuss specific ways puppets promote children's growth and development at each age level – infants, toddlers and preschoolers, and present tips and ideas for using puppets with each of these age groups.

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,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

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Infants

Puppets can be used to entertain and engage even the youngest infant, during everyday routines, while on the go, and when singing songs and reading stories.

During infancy, babies experience growth in visual abilities. This is when a baby learns to focus her eyes, and coordinate their movement to track an object. She also learns how to use the visual information the eyes send to her brain in order to understand the world around her. Puppets, especially brightly colored puppets that she can track with her eyes, stimulate her developing visual system.

The following are some ideas you can use with your baby:

- ♥ Sing and do a silly dance with a puppet and respond to baby's giggles.
- ♥ Play peek-a-boo with a puppet.
- ♥ Make up a simple story and act it out with the puppet. For example, using a dog puppet say, *"One day, the dog was looking for his bone and could not find it. Where is his bone? Is it **under** baby's chin? (using the puppet, touch beneath her chin) No. Is it **on top of** baby's head? (touch the top of her head) No. Is it **under** baby's blanket? (look under the blanket)*

*No. Where could it be? There it is! It is **inside** mommy's bag! (pull out a toy bone or a piece of paper twisted to look like a bone).*

- ♥ Use a puppet to talk about simple emotions. For example, using two animal puppets say, *"The dog is sad so the bear will give him a hug. Thank you Mr. Bear."*



Activity for Infants: *Foot Puppets*

What You Need:

- Infant booties or socks
- Washable markers

What to Do:

1. Draw a face on your child's booties. Describe the expressions on the booties. For example say, *"That's a very friendly face. See the big smile on the face?"*
2. Encourage her to pat and touch the face or to wiggle her toes while she's wearing the booties to see how the face changes.

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



Toddlers

During the toddler years, children experience growth in language skills. Using puppets during play or while reading stories to your child is an excellent way to support your toddler's growth in this area. In addition, puppets provide valuable opportunities to help her learn to talk about her feelings, and begin experimenting with role playing and imaginative play.

The following are some ideas you can use with your toddler:

- ♥ Give your child a puppet to play with, and encourage her verbal interactions by playing along and conversing with her puppet, asking questions, or simply smiling and nodding.
- ♥ Provide your toddler opportunities to try out different roles by giving her (or making) puppets representing different community helpers or family members, such as a police officer, doctor, waitress, mommy, grandpa, etc.
- ♥ Perform a puppet show to reenact an emotional outburst, such as a tantrum. For example, as one puppet acts out a tantrum, have another puppet calmly approach her and ask why she is angry. Have the first puppet

stop the tantrum and explain the reason (for example, she wanted a turn to bathe the doll). Have the second puppet acknowledge her feelings (e.g., *"You are mad that you didn't have a turn with the dolls."*) and provide suggestions of things she can do instead of acting out through a tantrum (for example, ask and wait for a turn, take a deep breath to calm down, etc.)



Activity for Toddlers: Sock Puppet

What You Need:

- An old pair of socks
- Washable markers

What to Do:

1. Slip a sock onto your hand and use markers to draw eyes near the toe end. Do the same with the other sock.
2. Let your child name the puppets.
3. Show your child how to put the sock on her hand and move her thumb and other fingers to make the puppet "talk."
4. Put on your puppet and start up a conversation between the two puppets.
5. Have the puppets do other activities like pick up objects, tickle one another, or pinch little noses!



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

Preschoolers

With an increased ability to think in more complex ways, you may notice your preschooler become more sophisticated in her pretend play. Puppets provide the ideal opportunity to increase her cognitive and imaginative skills, especially when she is prompted to act out more elaborate scenarios, such as an experience that might be new or scary like visiting the dentist for a check up.

The following are some ideas you can use with your preschooler:

- ♥ When interacting with your child's puppet, speak in complete sentences and use interesting and more complex vocabulary. For example, instead of saying "I'd like to order a cupcake please," say, "May I please order your delicious unicorn rainbow cupcake with creamy vanilla frosting?"
- ♥ Increase your child's cognitive skills by encouraging her to plan her play with puppets, including thinking about the puppets and materials she will need, as well as any background scenery she would like to create.
- ♥ Use puppets to help your preschooler learn about perspective taking. Give her two puppets

to role-play a disagreement that needs to be resolved. By role-playing the perspective of both puppets, your preschooler will be able to imagine what each puppet may be feeling and thinking from each point of view.



Activity for Preschoolers: *Puppet Theatre*

What You Need:

- Tri-fold cardboard (approx. 48"x36")
- Utility knife (for adult use only)
- Paint, markers and other materials to decorate the theatre

What to Do:

1. Using the utility knife, cut a square/rectangle stage opening in the middle top-half section of the tri-fold cardboard.
2. Have your child paint the theatre or use other materials to decorate it. Talk about what a theater is used for and demonstrate how to place the puppets on stage.
3. Set it up and enjoy!

Variation: Make a puppet theatre by draping a blanket over a bench or table.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her 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, e.g., facial muscles, fingers, hands, and toes
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Learn to interact with others
- ♥ Develop her unique identity

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language
- ♥ Learn to ask and answer questions

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her creativity and imagination
- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem-solving skills

Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show her how to handle items safely and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Praise her efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

Easy Gingerbread Cookies

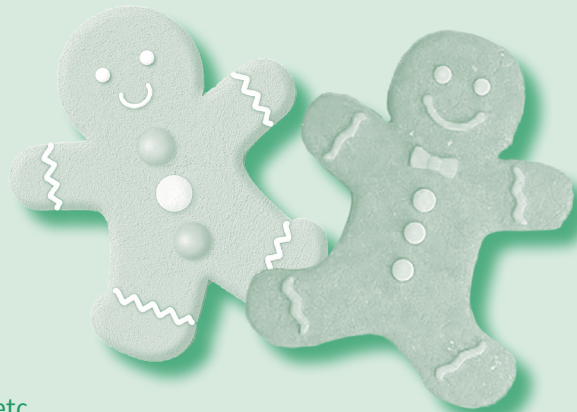
Adapted from www.yummytoddlerfood.com

Ingredients:

- 1 cup white whole wheat flour
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. cinnamon
- ⅓ tsp. ground ginger
- ⅓ tsp. allspice
- ⅓ tsp. salt
- 2 T. molasses
- 2 T. milk
- ¼ cup butter, softened
- Toppings: icing, sprinkles, raisins, chocolate chips, etc.

Directions:

1. Place all ingredients into a bowl and encourage your child to use her hand to mix together to form a dough. Together, make a flattened disc of dough and wrap in plastic. Refrigerate for about 10 minutes.
2. Preheat oven to 370 degrees F. and line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
3. Together, roll the dough ¼ inch thick between two pieces of parchment or plastic wrap.
4. Have your child cut out the dough with a gingerbread man/woman cookie cutter and transfer to the prepared baking sheets. Bake for 8–10 minutes, until lightly browned around the edges.
5. After the cookies are completed cooled, have your child use icing to make a face and decorate with a variety of toppings.



Resources

Leading Kids to Books through Puppets

In this book, author Caroline Feller Bauer explains how to use different types of puppets to introduce a wide variety of literature to children. The book also includes numerous scripts, stories and rhymes to use in puppet shows; as well as a useful list of puppet resources.

Puppetry in Early Childhood Education

Authors Tamara Hunt and Nancy Renfro provide an exhaustive guide to puppetry as an educational resource.



Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

***Five Little Ducks* by Raffi**

Infants and toddlers will love counting down as five little ducks go out to play. This repetitive counting song will invoke squeals of delight. The song also works well when paired with a gloved 5-ducks finger puppet.

***Old McDonald Had a Farm* by various authors**

This classic nursery rhyme can be sung and acted out with puppets to keep even the youngest child engaged.

Preschoolers

***The Gingerbread Man* by Karen Schmidt** (many versions of this story can be found by various authors)

A classic tale about a gingerbread man who outruns everybody, until he meets the quick-witted fox.

***The Musubi Man* by Sandi Takayama**

"Run, run, fast as you can! You no can catch me, I'm one musubi man!" Like the gingerbread man in the classic tale, the musubi man is determined not to be eaten. He leads his pursuers on a merry chase until he reaches the ocean and has to match wits with a surfer. The surprise ending, like the rest of the story, has a uniquely Hawai'i flavor.



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