



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

Got Containers?

“Surround children with the things they encounter at home, plus a generous helping of curious, and watch them learn” -Kirstine Beeley

Did you know that children can learn a great deal from playing with familiar items readily found in their home... like containers? In fact, children do not need expensive toys to learn. All they need are *open-ended* materials that they can freely investigate and explore – and an *attentive adult* who interacts with and supports their learning.

Our world is full of containers! From the food storage containers used for left-over foods – to huge shipping crates...anything used to hold or transport something (such as boxes, cans, jars, baskets, and pots) is a container. This makes containers familiar to children. Our brains crave familiarity (things we easily recognize). Research has confirmed that learning new concepts becomes easier for children when using materials that they are familiar with. A pathway to learning is built when we connect what the child doesn't know with what he already knows.

When a child is given a container to explore and play with (fill it, bang on it, play games with, build with it, etc.) it becomes an open-ended material. An open-ended material simply means that there is not a right or wrong way to use the material during play. Among other things, open-ended materials tend to:

- ♥ Support the learning of concepts (e.g., quantity, size, etc.)
- ♥ Deepen critical thinking (investigating, analyzing, questioning, problem solving, etc.)



- ♥ Promote creative thinking (imagining, discovering, etc.)

In this newsletter we will provide examples of how familiar containers can support the learning of concepts, deepen critical thinking, and promote creative thinking at each age level – infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

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.

Infants

From the moment they are born, babies are actively exploring and learning about the world around them through the use of their senses (sight, touch, taste, sound, smell). You play a key role in building your baby's brain through your warm and responsive interactions with him, and through the experiences you give to him.

Here are examples of how you can use containers that are familiar to your infant to support his learning:

- ♥ **Support the learning of concepts.** When using containers during everyday routines with your infant, use concepts such as "empty/full." For example, you can say, "Look your bottle is **full** of milk." And later, "Your bottle is **empty** now. See no more milk in your bottle." By purposefully using these types of words, you increase your infant's understanding of concepts.
- ♥ **Deepen critical thinking.** Encourage him to experiment with how things work. For example, you can put small blocks into a



container and gently place a lid on it. Then show him how you take the lid off to get to the blocks inside. Next, put the lid back on and let him try it. You can say, "Now you try it. How can you get the blocks out? Yes, take the lid off first. You did it!"

- ♥ **Promote creative thinking.** Encourage him to use familiar containers in different ways. For example, give him an empty pot and a wooden spoon and see what he does with it. Show him how to turn the pot upside down and bang on it with a wooden spoon. You can say, "Look, now you made a drum!"

Activity for Infants: *Shake it!*

What You Need:

- 3 small containers (with lids) that are easy for your baby to hold (e.g., empty plastic water bottles)
- 3 different types of items to fill the containers with (e.g., dried pasta, pebbles, rice, sand, pom poms, etc.)
- Hot glue gun or tape for sealing the lid after filling the containers

What to Do:

1. Fill each container about $\frac{1}{3}$ full (fill each container with a different item).
2. Use a hot glue gun or tape to seal the lid shut to prevent spills/choking hazards.
3. Encourage your child to shake each one.
4. As your child shakes the container, talk about the sounds you hear. Point out which is loudest and which is quietest. Talk about how the sounds are similar and how they are different.
5. Sing a song while you both shake your homemade rattle

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



Toddlers

With their increased mobility, toddlers are eager to explore their surroundings and are very curious about how things work. As their language skills develop, they begin to ask questions such as “what that?” or “why?” Here are examples of how you can use containers that are familiar to your toddler to support his learning.

You can support phonological awareness in toddlers by building on the infant strategies listed in this newsletter and by:

- ♥ **Support the learning of concepts.** For a mobile toddler, the learning of spatial concepts such as “over” and “under” is made much easier with physical involvement. As an example, use your laundry basket to have your child go **under** it, climb **over** it, run **around** it, stand **behind** it, etc. Be sure to use these words as you show your child how to do each action.
- ♥ **Deepen critical thinking.** Give him opportunities to figure out and do things for himself. As an example, provide him with sensory materials (such as water, sand, or pompoms placed in a large box, with recycled containers (e.g., clean milk cartons, yogurt cups, detergent scoops, plastic bottles). As



your child experiments with scooping and filling, make comments such as, “I wonder what would happen if you poured all of the sand from the bottle into the yogurt cup? Would it all fit? How can you find out?”

- ♥ **Promote creative thinking.** Help your toddler discover all the things an empty box can be turned into. Set a large cardboard box in an open area of your house. Let your child decide what he wants it to be – a fort, a rocket ship, a castle, a firetruck, a boat? Together, cut windows out of the side of the box and help him color or paint it.

Activity for Toddlers: *Discovering the Usefulness of Containers*

What You Need:

Small toys (e.g., blocks, cars, etc.) that will need to be put away on a shelf or in a bin
Basket or container for the toys (one that your child can carry)

What to Do:

1. When it's time to clean up say, “We’ll need to get all of these toys back to the shelf over there.”
2. Make a pile of the toys that need to be put away and hand them to your child, purposely giving him more than he can carry.
3. After he makes a couple trips of dropping some toys along the way, ask him, “Would it help if I gave you this basket to put the toys in to carry?”
4. Help him put his toys in the basket and comment as he transports them to the bin, “Putting your toys in the basket really helped to make it easier to carry the toys.”

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



Preschoolers

Preschoolers are beginning to think in complex ways and are curious about why things are the way they are. With a growing attention span, they can also attend for longer periods to an activity they enjoy, making this a good time to play sit down games. Here are examples of how you can use containers that are familiar to your preschooler to support his learning.

- ♥ **Support the learning of concepts.** Use “superlative adjectives” (comparative words like, “big, bigger, biggest”). As an example, you can play a game with your child by placing 3 rocks of different sizes into an empty shoe box. Ask your child to feel the rocks (without looking) to see if he can find the smallest rock, and so on. When all the rocks are out, show him how to put them in order while using the terms, “small, smaller, smallest.”
- ♥ **Deepen critical thinking.** Play memory type games to strengthen his ability to think critically. As an example, you can play a game using a cereal bowl placed upside-down, and 3-5 familiar items that will fit under the bowl (e.g., keys, a crayon, a leaf). While he closes



his eyes, place one item under the bowl. When he opens his eyes, have him look at all the items that are in plain view before guessing which one is hidden under the bowl.

- ♥ **Promote creative thinking.** Find new ways of using familiar containers, such as building with them! As an example, give him different types of clean recycled containers (e.g. oatmeal, sour cream, boxes - jello, toothpaste, cereal, etc.) and say, “I wonder if we can build with these.” Then ask if he has something in mind. To increase his thinking and planning skills, have him draw it before he builds it!

Activity for Preschoolers: *Bubble Snakes*

What You Need:

- 1 empty plastic water bottle (500 ml size) without cap
- A sock that can fit over the water bottle (one side, child or adult size)
- Dish soap and water

What to Do:

1. Use a pair of scissors to cut off the bottom of a plastic water bottle (an adult does this first step).
2. Stretch out the sock and slide it over the cut end of the water bottle to cover the bottle. If needed, fold the sock back so that the mouth of the water bottle (the cap side) is exposed.
3. Make a soap solution in the small container by mixing about 2 tablespoons of dish soap in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water.
4. Dip the bottom end of the bottle (the cut end with the sock over it) into the bubble solution.
5. Blow on the mouth of the bottle to make bubble snakes!
6. Wonder aloud with your child about how he can make a “long,” “longer” and “longest” bubble snake. Then get a tape measure and together measure his bubble snakes!

(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

- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination
- ♥ Learn to use his body with intention

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
- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary and use of descriptive language

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop his thinking and problem solving skills
- ♥ Develop his curiosity about how things work



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!

Omelet in a Mug

Adapted from *simplyrecipes.com*

Ingredients:

- 1 microwave-safe coffee mug (12-16 oz)
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 2 large eggs
- 1 T. milk

- 1 T. grated cheddar cheese
- Other optional ingredients:
chopped red bell pepper,
chopped cooked ham, green
onions, etc



Directions:

1. Have keiki help coat the inside of the mug with olive oil.
2. Help keiki crack 2 eggs into the mug, add 1 T. milk and beat with a fork.
3. Add grated cheese and other optional ingredients, if desired.
4. Microwave for 30 seconds on high, then remove mug from microwave and stir with a fork, asking him about the changes that he observes.
5. Return mug to microwave for another 20-30 seconds on high. Remove and stir again.
6. Return mug to the microwave for another 20-30 seconds (on high) until the omelet has set.
7. Enjoy your omelet in a mug!

Resources

Investigating Containers

<https://www.easternct.edu/center-for-early-childhood-education/investigating/containers.html>

In this video from Eastern Connecticut State University's Center for Early Childhood Education, preschool and toddler teachers describe how children engaged in a variety of learning activities while developing an understanding of the properties and uses of containers.

Building a Terrarium

"How Parents and Families Support Phonological Awareness"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69hYVgti_R8

A terrarium is a miniature garden grown inside a covered glass or plastic container. It is an excellent



tool for teaching children about the water cycle as it demonstrates evaporation, condensation and precipitation. This YouTube video provides step by step instructions on how you can make a terrarium with your child using an empty plastic 2-liter bottle.

Suggested Books

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

Infants and Toddlers

Mrs. Wishy Washy by Joy Cowley

Mrs. Wishy Washy washes her dirty farm animals in her large metal tub. But what happens after she washes them? This story is sure to bring giggles.

Not a Box by Antoinette Portis

A box is just a box...unless it's not a box. From mountain to rocket ship, a small rabbit shows that a box will go as far as the imagination allows. This board book edition has sturdy pages and is a good size for the youngest readers.

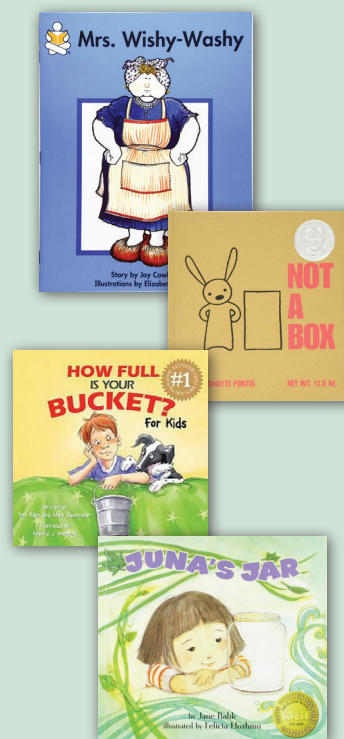
Preschoolers

How Full is Your Bucket? for Kids by Tom Rath and Mary Reckmeyer

Each of us has an invisible bucket. When our bucket is full, we feel great. When it's empty, we feel awful. Yet most children (and many adults) don't realize the importance of having a full bucket throughout the day.

Juna's Jar by Jane Bahk

Juna and her best friend, Hector, have many adventures together, and they love to collect things in empty kimchi jars. Then one day, Hector moves away without having a chance to say good-bye. Determined to find Hector, Juna turns to her special kimchi jar for help each night and goes on many magical adventures to search for Hector.



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