

TOYS FOR EXPANDING LANGUAGE AT HOME WITH YOUR CHILD

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Playing with toys creates numerous opportunities for children to practice communication skills. Communication skills involve social language, which includes processes of turn-taking, waiting your turn, and topic maintenance. Learning new vocabulary words, understanding preposition words (i.e. *under, over, behind, in front, etc.*) and answering 'wh' question (i.e. *who, what, when, where, how*) can all be addressed while playing with your child as well. It is also a great time for your child to practice following verbal directions. All of these skills are important for a child to use within a classroom and social setting.

Studies have shown that [open-ended](#) & [battery-free](#) toys are the best option for communicating with your child. These types of toys allow your child to use thinking skills and imagination to interact during play. Here are some suggestions of [open-ended](#) toys that are [battery-free](#):

- Doctor Kit
- Veterinarian Kit
- Dress Up Clothes
- Sand/Water Table w/Toys (Bury fun items in a box of sand and go hunting for them!)
- Play-dough with cookie cutters, toothpicks, craft sticks, rolling pins, buttons, etc. (See Attached Recipe for making your own play-dough.)
- Pots & Pans w/ Oven Mitts
- Toy Grill Set
- Grocery Cart with Toy Cash Register & Toy Food
- Wooden Blocks
- Colorful Blocks
- Wooden Play Food Sets by Melissa & Doug (Pizza Party, Birthday Party, Cutting Fruit/Food Set)
- Nesting & Sorting Garages & Cars by Melissa & Doug
- Magnetic Car Loader by Melissa & Doug
- Scoop & Serve Ice Cream Counter by Melissa & Doug
- Jigsaw Puzzles up to about 20 pieces for preschoolers

Learning/Pre-Education Toys can help for exposing your child to pre-academic skills like counting, matching, and identification of shapes & letters. Remember that the goal is simply exposure and not necessarily mastery of these academic skills because your child will have frequent opportunities for learning academic skills within the classroom. Here are some suggestions:

- See & Spell Learning Toy by Melissa & Doug
- Catch & Count Magnetic Fishing Rod Set by Melissa & Doug
- Shape Sorting Clock by Melissa & Doug
- Pattern Blocks & Boards Classic Toy by Melissa & Doug

Play is the way that young children learn best because there is sustained back and forth interaction with lots of exposure to vocabulary and concepts in a naturalistic way. Take at least 10 minutes each day to play with your child with the goal of increasing communication skills. You can provide your child with options so that he chooses which toy you will play with. If your child has difficulty making choices, provide him with 2 or 3 options to choose from. Say, "Do you want to play with play-dough, puzzles, or blocks?". Once your child has made a choice, you may begin with a structured play activity or an open-ended play activity.

Two-Ways to Play with Toys

Structured Example of playing with play-dough. This example is focused on a specific skill that might reinforce something that your child is working on. Specifically, if your child is working on understanding concepts of long/short with a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP), think to yourself: "We can focus on making long strips and short strips with the play-dough". Use the words long/short as you play with the dough. This will expose your child to the concepts of long/short and support your child's development of a specific concept.

Example: "I made a long strip of dough. It looks long like a snake. Can you roll out a long piece?". Child rolls out his dough and says, "Mine is long, too". You can then add, "I bet we can make it longer. Let's add more dough to make it long". After you make it longer, then say, "We can use the scissors to make it short".

Open-Ended Example of playing with play-dough: This example is much more focused on expanding your child's imagination and following his lead to develop oral language skills. Instead of selecting what to do with the toys, you can be more open-ended to expand the fun by observing what your child does with the materials first and then follow his lead by imitating his actions and then adding an idea to his. For example, if your child makes a ball of dough and puts it to his nose and says, "I'm a clown", then do the same with your own ball of dough and then add an idea to it. You could then make a clown hat out of the dough or make balls for the clown to juggle and encourage your child to juggle with you. You can also encourage pretending by using your dough to make a snake or make play-dough spaghetti and meatballs.

Remember, play is important for growth in your child's skills. It is a critical, yet fun piece to add to your daily routine of reading to your child each day. Playing in a structured way is helpful for targeting a specific skill and can be done two times a week to address a deficit area for your child. However, open-ended playing should occur daily! Open-ended toys and play that follows your child's lead will allow for imagination, creativity, and oral language skills to develop. All of these skills lay a strong foundation for the social interaction, language, and literacy skills that he will later use in the classroom. Have fun playing at home!

Recipe for Homemade Play-dough

(Taken from www.familyeducation.com)

Materials

1 cup water

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1/2 cup salt

1 tablespoon cream of tartar

Food coloring

Saucepan

1 cup flour

Directions

Combine water, oil, salt, cream of tartar, and food coloring in a saucepan and heat until warm.

Remove from heat and add flour.

Stir, then knead until smooth. The cream of tartar makes this dough last 6 months or longer, so resist the temptation to omit this ingredient if you don't have it on hand.

Store this dough in an airtight container or a Ziploc freezer bag.

Resources

“How to Have Fun with Playdough and Preschoolers 'The Hanen Way'” and “Pretend Play Should Be Fun, Not Work!” By Lauren Lowry, Hanen Certified Speech-Language Pathologist and Hanen Staff Member

6 Homemade Play-dough Recipes from
<https://www.familyeducation.com/fun/playdough/play-doh-recipes>