



# TEACHING WITH TOYS



Toys provide an opportunity for children to learn. Use these tips to teach your children valuable skills while they are engaged in play.

- **Increase Oral Language (Talk While Playing)**

When your child is playing with toys that encourage imaginative play (dolls, action figures, housekeeping toys, etc.), you can introduce new words. When working with a preschooler, you can play “make believe” and use position words; for example, “The pots are **above** the sink” or “The baby is **in** the bed.” When working with an older child, you can use adjectives; for example, “The rescue hero is **agile**.” Take this opportunity to help your child use the appropriate terms for the action figure’s accessories; for example, “The rescue hero rides in a **hook-and-ladder fire engine**.” Playing with clay can also enhance a child’s vocabulary and ability to follow oral directions. Encourage your child to **squeeze, pinch, roll, twist, poke, and pound** the clay.

- **Build Math Vocabulary**

When your child is playing with puzzles, building blocks, or shaping clay, you can encourage the use of mathematical words. Children can **slide, flip, or turn** puzzle pieces and compare their size as **long, longer, or longest**. They can create **three-dimensional figures** with blocks and locate the **cubes, rectangular prisms, and cylinders**. Young children can shape clay into **spheres** and use cookie cutters to create **triangles, circles, and squares**.

- **Practice Motor Coordination and Estimation**

Bouncing on a pogo stick, riding a bike, or using roller blades provides the opportunity to practice estimation. Have your child predict the number of bounces on a pogo stick within a given time period or the amount of time it takes to ride a bike up the hill. Then ask if the estimate is accurate. When your child makes future estimates, encourage the use of past experiences to make more accurate predictions.

- **Improve Reading Skills**

Any game can be turned into a reading game. Think of words your child may be learning to read or spell. Write each word on an individual card, and use these flashcards as you play various board games. Have your child read a word from one of the flashcards before each turn.

- **Develop Motor Skills and Practice Problem Solving**

Building sets and craft activities encourage children to use their hands to manipulate small objects. Children may string beads to make a necklace or use blocks to build a castle or motorized vehicle. Whatever the age of your child, various building and craft activities provide practice in following directions and using problem-solving strategies. You can practice problem-solving skills with your child by asking questions that encourage thinking; for example, **“If you used six blocks to build a house with one level, how many blocks would it take for you to build a house with three different levels of equal size?”**

- **Increase Memory and Concentration**

Many different board games are available to support a child’s interests at any age. Young children can use matching games to recall the location of various pictures, numbers, or letters. Older children may use word-building games to strengthen vocabulary and practice spelling strategies. Board games provide children with an opportunity to work with others, share, and follow rules.

- **Explore Scientific Principles**

Children can use their toys or other objects around the house to learn about physical science. Help your child to identify the physical properties of various objects, including the texture, color, size, and mass. Young children love to play in water. Use various objects to help your child find out what makes something sink or float. You can also use containers to explore the concept of measurement or capacity. Older children may enjoy working with you to use a chemistry set. Together you can follow directions to explore chemical reactions. There are many different kits available that help children learn about scientific ideas. Children can build models of the human anatomy, the solar system, or animal habitats. While exploring scientific concepts, children may ask questions that can be answered by searching the Internet and visiting the public library.

Children learn through play. Providing children with a variety of different toys, games, books, and arts and craft materials allows them to explore new ideas and be creative.