



FOR WASHINGTON CHILDREN



Fall 2013

Strong Families Begin At Home

Child & Teen Services Newsletter

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PLAY: Build With Blocks!

Develop spatial skills.

"Research in the science of learning has shown that experiences like block building and puzzle play can improve children's spatial skills and that these skills support complex mathematical problem solving in middle and high school," explains Brian N. Verdine, one of the authors of a new study on spatial and math thinking in children.

The study found that children who were better at copying block structures were better at early math. Another skill tested was if children could figure out that a block belonged "above" or "below" another block when setting them up.

Children in the study were 3 years old. Those of you who have participated in developmental screenings with children around this age might find these examples familiar! In our screenings, we ask children to copy our block row (4 block) and bridge structures (3 blocks). We ask children to put objects "above"



Summertime can be very stressful for families. The kids are home from school, and although as adults we can think of a million things to do if WE had a summer vacation, children can get whiny and demanding when they don't know what to do with their time.

If you are stressed, need parenting ideas, fun family activity ideas, or just want to vent and get some support, call the Family Help Line. We are here for you!

FAMILY HELP LINE
1-800-932-HOPE (4673)

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Build With Blocks, continued

and “under” and “in the middle” of other things.

The study looked at children from various income levels. The children in lower income brackets were already falling behind at 3 years old. The researchers posit that the reason for this may be twofold: one, the lower income families reported using words/concepts of “above/under” less. And, building blocks may be less available in lower income homes.

Blocks are fun for children and can be found cheaply at most used toy stores and online. Simple versions can be found at most toy stores; wooden blocks tend to be more expensive but no need for fancy sets or kits. Children can also build with spools of thread and empty plastic containers with lids.

Here are some basic structures that we ask

children to copy when we do developmental screenings. A 3 to 3 ½ year old child should be able to copy both—but it's ok to play and work with them for a while. If your child can't do it at first, that's ok! Play some more, and try again another time.



You can also incorporate spatial concepts by asking them to play an “above/under” game. Put the teddy bear “above” the table, and put the crayon “under” the desk. Let it be a game; after they follow your directions, they can give you directions!

Study: Child Development Sept/Oct. 2013

CREATE: Pipe Cleaner Art!

Recently at a Parent Trust potluck I brought out a bag of pipe cleaners. There are so many art projects you can do with pipe cleaners but the staff weren't given any instructions or themes. Those

who were in a playful mood went ahead and just created! Sometimes having no instructions is best for creativity. But for many kids, it can be helpful to have a theme to get started.

Then, it's perfectly fine if they want to deviate and make whatever they want. Don't worry about sticking too close to the craft idea...always remember that having fun is the goal. However, if you choose to create for a Thanksgiving theme, maybe as table art or for a project for the kids while everyone is waiting for dinner...here are some great pictures/ideas.



Finger puppets:
<http://www.craftjr.com/>



Turkey Pine Cone, pipe cleaner (centerpiece?)
<http://www.multiplydelicious.com/>



Courtesy of Parent Trust Program Director, Thelma!



Courtesy of Parent Trust's Executive Director, Mark!

EAT: Soft Drink Consumption

A recent study of approximately 3,000, 5-year-old children looked at soft drink consumption and its relationship to behavioral problems.



The children were all part of a large cohort group being studied in 20 US cities (Fragile Families and Child Well Being Study). Children have been followed since birth.

The mothers reported their child's soft drink consumption and completed the Child Behavior Checklist (looking at behaviors retrospectively over the previous two months). 43% of the children consumed at least 1 serving of soft drinks per day and 4% consumed more.

The researchers adjusted for socio-demographics, maternal depression, intimate partner violence and paternal incarceration. Still, soda consumption was associated with increased aggression, withdrawal, and attention problems. In fact, children who drank 4 or more soft drinks a day were twice as likely to destroy other's property, fight, and physically attack others.

Now, keep in mind that this study shows a

relationship, but not necessarily a causal one. We still don't know the exact nature of the relationship, but the researchers did see that with every increase in soft drink consumption per day, aggressive behavior increased.

Limiting your child's soft drink consumption may be a strategy for your family. Water and water flavored with fruit (not sugar) are the best alternatives for children over 2 years old. Soda, caffeinated drinks, sports/energy drinks are not good options for children.

For more information:

Seattle Children's has a nice summary of different beverages with nutritional content and guidelines:

<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/kids-health/page.aspx?id=62410>

And finally, Team Nutrition recommends that if you incorporate sugary drinks into your child's diet, think of these as desserts, not beverages.

http://www.teamnutrition.usda.gov/Healthy_Portions_Kit/portion_sizes_school-age.pdf

RELAX: Balloon Breathing

When we slow down our breathing we send our brain the message, "it's ok, calm down". Our brain then sends that message back to our body.

In the last newsletter edition, I discussed the technique called, "mirror breathing". Balloon breathing can also be very relaxing and pretty easy to teach to young children.

Start by telling your child that they will be using their imagination, so they don't have to really move their arms, or legs...they just need to sit quietly. Then, show them how to take a gentle, silent breath—breath in through the nose, out through the mouth. If you place your hands on your belly, you can feel a slight rise and fall



Balloon Breathing, continued

as the air goes in and out. Shoulders should stay relaxed and should not shrug up when taking an in-breath. Demonstrate this to your child and practice.

Now ask them to close their eyes and imagine a balloon floating in front of them. What color is it? They can picture any color. When they breathe out, they can imagine the balloon slowly floating away from them. Practice this a few times. Now, tell them this “magic” balloon will float towards them with every in-breath. So the balloon floats away with every out breath, and back with every in breath.

Remind them that the balloon floats gently. So if they are blowing too hard with the out breath, the balloon will rush against the

opposite wall and burst! Slow and gentle, in and out.

You can do this sitting or lying down. If sitting, use “towards the wall” imagery for out breath. If lying down, “up towards the ceiling”.

If you practice this activity when your child is already calm, then they will learn it well enough to use it when they *need* to calm down. But don’t try to teach a relaxation strategy during a tantrum melt down. Learning something new *increases* stress, so trying to teach when already stressed will just escalate the behavior. Practice at bedtime, or maybe before or after story-time.

MOVE: Balancing Act

Physical fitness is not just about strength. When thinking about fitness activities, one can think about four categories: balance, flexibility, strength, and cardiovascular fitness.

This article focuses on balance. It’s a frequently forgotten skill with children. Many children have natural opportunities to run and stretch, but playgrounds these days aren’t always designed to also promote balance and strength. There *are* activities you can do at home with your children to work on these important skills.

Having good balance means you can control your bodies position whether still or in motion (static and dynamic balance). Although most young children teeter-totter a bit and stumble every once in a while, balance activities are just as important for



young children and older as other types of physical fitness.

Here are some ways to practice balance at home:

1. Heel-toe walking. Focus on a point in front of you. Place the heel of your front foot just barely touching the toes of your back foot. Now bring your back foot up so the heel of that foot is barely touching your other foot’s toes. Ok? Now try it barefoot!
2. Beanbag balance. We used to use books balanced on our heads, but beanbags are probably better for young children because they won’t slide off the head yet you still need to balance as you walk across the room, not letting it fall.

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Move, continued

3. Weight shift. Stand with feet a few inches apart. Shift all weight onto the right side. Balance without toppling over! Now shift weight to left side. Hold. Come back to center. Now, keeping feet on the ground, shift weight slightly forward. Now back. See if you can go round in a small circle. Try going the other direction. You can give your child the imagery of a tree, rooted in the ground but blowing in the wind.
4. Weight shift into tree posture. Stand with feet a few inches

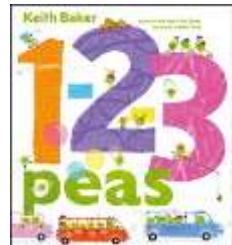
apart. Shift all weight onto the right side. Now slowly, peel the heel of the left foot off the ground until you are barely touching your toe to the ground. When you have your balance, lift your foot off the ground and place the sole of your left foot on the inner calf of the right leg. Don't put it against the knee; you can go higher and press against the inner thigh, but the inner calf is fine. Try bringing your hands together in front of your chest and pressing inward to help balance. Switch sides.

Parent Trust Reads: Book Review



1-2-3 Peas
by Keith Baker

I have to admit, I'm a sucker for illustrations in children's books. If I don't like the drawings it doesn't matter how brilliant the story. So I was thrilled to find 1-2-3 Peas. Without the fabulous pictures, it would have been a cute, but nothing-special counting book. But I dare you to read through without cracking up. Especially when you get to the 80 peas laughing. I smiled and chuckled up to 70 peas, but 80 got a huge belly laugh. Keith Baker is a local, Seattle author and this book is invites multiple reads, complete with learning and giggles.



Looking for more book reviews? Check out the Parent Trust Reads section of our website:
www.parenttrust.org/books-and-reading

Parent Trust for Washington Children is an Amazon Associate partner. This means that when you buy anything through the amazon.com links on our website (like in the books/reading section) part of the proceeds go to Parent Trust!



Also by Keith Baker: LMNO Peas and 2 Peas in a Pod!

If you have any comments, or suggestions for future articles, please contact:

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Parent Trust's statewide, toll-free phone number provides callers with a greater understanding and awareness of child development, guidance and resources.

