

Everyday Things Can Be Therapy!

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There are many activities a parent can do with their child to support progress during early childhood. Sometimes a parent may feel lost or unsure of how to help their preschooler who may have developmental delays or a disability. Parents often think they need to be a certified teacher or therapist to “teach” their child when truly there are so many things you can do to help with growth in the areas of Speech- Language, Learning, Self-Help, Physical and Social development. You can learn how to become your child’s own teacher!

We are here to help! We created an easy-to-use list of activities with descriptions to help parents support their own child. These activities can be done at any point in the day in order to continue promoting development in your child.

#1: Speech Language Development



You do not need to be a Speech Therapist to help your child with communication. Children's language development improves when their parents become their own 'speech therapists'. There are many activities you can do as a parent to encourage speech-language development in your child.

Ask your child to:

- Listen to a story that you read. Ask them questions about the story.

- Talk about and label the days of the week on a calendar, every day at breakfast time.
- Name and label objects in your child's room, playroom, bathroom, kitchen etc.
- Talk about family photographs.
- Tell you about a TV program they like.
- Play 'Simon Says' making sure to name/ label body parts.
- Name fruits and vegetables.
- Tell you the names of family members.
- Talk about what he/she sees through the window.
- Name all the colors he sees in the house.
- Tell the names of furniture and the room where it belongs.
- Sort objects according to size, color, shape, texture onto paper plates.
- Look through magazines and talk about the pages.
- "Read" a book to you. Describe book by looking at pictures. Ask him/her questions about it.
- Talk with you during mealtimes about their day, their meal, the weather outside.
- Read Nursery Rhymes and make up your own silly nonsense rhymes.

Physical Development



Small Motor

- Finger plays
- Cut pictures out
- Play with small beads, Legos, Tinker toys
- Knead play-dough or clay and build objects with them.
- Put pegs into a board.

- Move little game pieces.
- Squirt water out of bottles.
- Squeeze air out of turkey-baster to move cotton balls on table.
- Finger paint with Jell-O on paper plate.
- String buttons, beads, or cereal to make necklaces.
- Punch holes on a paper plate.
- Clip clothespins onto a container.
- Lace cards.
- Make Letters with cookie dough, French fries, pipe cleaners, play dough or clay, a flashlight to the wall, sticks.

Write Letters:

- On paper for your child to guess.
- In finger paint.
- With sidewalk chalk.
- In sand or shaving cream.
- With frosting.
- On the carpet.
- With different types of pens or pencils—glitter, puffy paint or markers.
- On your child's back and let them guess.

Large Motor

Areas addressed: balance, motor planning, strength, visual motor coordination, vestibular, and proprioception.

Spring

- Help with cleaning
- Gardening (digging, kneeling, watering, etc.)
- Take a walk and jump in and over puddles
- Take a bike ride
- Play catch
- Climb trees (with supervision)
- Go to playground (climb, swing, and slide)

Summer

- Go swimming
- Go to the beach (swim, sand play)

- Go for a hike
- Go for bike ride
- Play outside
- Play games (hopscotch, kickball, baseball, soccer, tag, basketball, red light-green light, duck-duck goose, London Bridge etc.)
- Sprinklers
- Go on a picnic and have child set up
- Go to playground

Self Help and Adaptive Development



Developing self-help skills provides a child with skills needed to survive and thrive in all settings throughout their lifetimes. Adaptive/self-help skills are extremely important in fostering independence and confidence in a child. Children need to develop confidence in their own ability and to be self-reliant.

Activities to support this area:

Outdoor play:

- Use balls of varying sizes for simple games with rules and following directions
- Provide obstacle courses, swings, climbing apparatus
- Provide adapted equipment to facilitate participation (e.g., built-up pedals on bicycles)
- Block play:
- Facilitate clean-up - outline toys, blocks or other objects on shelves or place pictures on shelves so children know where to put toys

Dramatic play:

- Use toy food, including breakfast, lunch, and dinners items
- Provide a variety of cooking utensils and dinnerware

- Provide dolls and toys to care for the dolls (dressing, feeding with spoons or bottles)
- Provide dress-up clothes or dolls with buttons, zippers or ties

Art/Writing:

- Provide writing or drawing implements (pencils, crayons, paint brushes, chalk) of different sizes
- Provide magazines for pictures that can be cut out for classifying, identification of object function or to support awareness of letter sounds

Fine motor/Manipulatives:

- Provide activities which include stringing of beads or lacing cards
- Provide paper folding activities
- Provide small objects (beads, toys, blocks) to place in containers of varying sizes

Book/Listening:

- Provide a rich assortment of age-appropriate children's books, from a variety of genres - fact, fantasy, fiction, etc., as well as other meaningful print materials (big books, small books, magazines, popular restaurant menus/table mats, toy catalogues)
- Use story felt boards for the telling of stories about skills such as eating, and dressing

Science/Discovery:

- Provide simple cooking experiences (making pudding, gelatin, butter) and activities (spreading soft substances on bread or crackers with a knife)
- Provide water play with small pitchers, glasses

Cognitive Development



Early childhood is not only a period of amazing physical growth; it is also a time of remarkable mental development. Cognitive abilities associated with memory, reasoning, problem-solving and thinking continue to emerge throughout early childhood.

Use the following strategies to help them:

- Limit distractions and interruptions during the day.
- Express interest in their activities. Observe your child and comment as they play in a positive way.
- Spark curiosity by offering materials in new ways, such as setting the dolls up in the book corner "reading" books, or the farm animals on a green cloth over blocks creating a gentle hill.
- Spark curiosity by noticing things and suggesting, "Let's go see what that is!"
- Motivate them by offering materials that are challenging enough to be interesting but not impossible, by offering a few choices, and by expressing your interest.
- Support motivation by sharing the joy children feel as they show you their accomplishments.
- Support sensorimotor learning by offering play and exploration experiences that provide a variety of sensory modes: sand, water, cornstarch, smelling bottles, and so forth.
- Help children develop memories by keeping the routine and room arrangement predictable; keep toys where children know to find them.
- Talk with children about what they did earlier in the day or the day before.
- Provide many opportunities to categorize, match, sort, compare, and contrast with toys and activities.
- Encourage problem solving by not stepping in immediately when a problem occurs—for example, if a child can't reach the ball that has

rolled behind the slide, ask, "What can we do?" and let the child try to figure it out.

- Play games like peek-a-boo, read stories about mommies being gone and coming back, read books with pictures hidden under flaps to encourage the development of object permanence.
- Provide toys that respond contingently to a child's actions, such as balls, busy boxes, or push lights to encourage the understanding of cause and effect.
- Provide toys and materials such as stacking cups, rings on a post, little houses, or tunnels to crawl through to encourage understanding of use of space.
- Provide markers, paint, and water, replicas of household tools, play telephones, keys, and so forth, to promote understanding of use of tools.
- Provide language, ideas, and materials in ways that make the child's play just a little more elaborate and complex, scaffolding the child's play to the next level.
- Provide toys and language to introduce awareness of shapes, comparative sizes, amounts, numbers, and one-to-one correspondence.
- Talk about concepts of time such as today, now, later, before, and after.

Social/ Emotional Development



During play, children also increase their social competence and emotional maturity. Play is vital to children's social development. Play supports emotional development by providing a way to express and cope with feelings. Pretend play helps children express feelings.

- **Vehicles and Animals.** Playing with cars, trucks and trains as well as animals provides for many new vocabulary words as children learn the names of each, what they do, what they eat or where you can find

them. Children and adults can create all kinds of situations that the vehicles or animals might find themselves in, providing for further language and vocabulary development.

- **Dollhouse and Dolls.** Playing with a dollhouse or dolls allows your child to reenact what happens in her everyday life, using the words and phrases she hears. You are likely to hear your own words come out of their mouth as she recreates events that have happened, perhaps with an outcome more suited to her liking!
- **Dramatic Play.** Provide a few props such as dishes and play food, empty food boxes and a cash register or stuffed animals and a doctor's kit, and your child will be transported into a different place! Watch and be amazed at what she will come up with as she plays.
- **Craft Supplies.** Without a specific project to complete, provide your child with a variety of craft supplies such as markers and crayons, scraps of fabric or paper, empty boxes or containers, glue, buttons and stickers. Allow her to create anything she likes and watch her inner artist emerge!
- **Blocks.** Playing with blocks provides for many problem solving scenarios. How can we make it balance? How tall can we make this tower? Can we build a castle? Children also learn some basic math concepts with the various shapes and sizes of the blocks.
- **Puzzles.** When trying to make puzzle pieces fit, children are gaining important math and problem solving experience. Learning a bit about sizes (is the piece too big for that spot?) and shapes (does the shape of the piece look the same as the hole?) You can encourage this learning by engaging in conversations as your child plays.
- **Stringing Beads and Lacing.** Giving children beads and plastic tipped laces provide a fun way to work on fine muscle control. Your child can create a beautiful necklace while strengthening the fine motor muscles. Lacing cards or child safe needles and burlap will also provide fun "sewing" projects for young children.
- **Balls and Balance Beams.** Kicking balls and walking on balance beams can help your child become more coordinated. Get outside and kick a ball around, create a goal area to make it a game. Anytime you see a narrow brick wall or wooden plank, give your child some assisted practice at balancing.

Disclaimer: These are suggestions only and not meant to take place of therapeutic or physician recommendations.