



# Preschool Connection

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## Inside this issue:

Social Development	1
Techniques for Play	2
Activity Sheet	3

## Social Development

The social play of children passes through three stages. At first, the very young child plays alone. She does not like to interact with playmates her own age, although she will interact with you. Gradually, she will move into parallel play and play nicely alongside a friend doing similar kinds of things but not involving each other. Most of our younger preschoolers are in this stage. In the final stage of social play, the children play together with each contributing something to the play situation. Many of our four year old preschoolers are in this stage of social play.

By the time children are ready to engage in social play, they need language to communicate ideas. You will then see that you can use your play time to give her the vocabulary that she will need in order to play with her/his friends.

Your child learns from you that sharing her/his toys is a fine way for you to play together and that each of you can take a turn. She/he learns that when his/her friends come over it is okay to share with them and wait her turn. These are difficult skills for children to learn, but you can practice

with him/her when you are alone. Through imaginative play, you can play out situations that your child may need some help understanding. For example, you can re-enact a scene in the park in which another child was not being very nice to your child. You can show your child how to be sensitive to another person's feelings through this kind of pretend play.



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## Techniques for play time learning:

***Start with simple words and Phrases***—A strong receptive (understanding) language base must be built first as a foundation for expressive (talking) language which emerges later.

***Use actual names of things when teaching language***—Say "bottle" not "ba-ba."

***Using varied repetition of key words and single concepts is crucial***—This is one of the best ways to pour in all of that extra language that is necessary for learning and is a great tool to aid in memory.

***Speak in short sentences***—Increase sentence length and complexity of meaning as you see your child's language skills improve.

***Pause between phrases***—This allows your child to process the meaning of each word in the phrase.

***Focus on one toy or activity at a time to prevent distraction***—Keep other toys out of sight and keep background noise and activities to a minimum.

***Play with your child at his eye level***—Sit your child in a high chair or at a table or sit or lie down on the floor when playing with your child and his toys.

***Play for a few short periods of time***—Five to ten minutes a day. Increase length and frequency of sessions as your child's attention span increases over time.

***Know when it is the best time for instructive play***—After naptimes or mornings are the times when children are generally the most refreshed and eager to interact with you.

***Know when to end play sessions***—If your child grows restless, stops paying attention, or becomes fatigued, it is time to take a break.

***Offer praise and encouragement***—Children love verbal and physical rewards. Saying "Great job!" or giving a big hug works wonders.

**MOST IMPORTANT—KEEP THE FUN IN PLAYING! BE ENTHUSIASTIC!**

Excerpts taken from *The New Language of Toys*, by Sue Schwartz and Joan Miller, Woodbine House Publisher, 1996.

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We have developed a series of newsletters, which we will be sending home on a monthly basis. Included in each will be parent tips for working with your child, and activities, which you may enjoy sharing with your child a few minutes each day.

These activities are not a test to see whether your child knows the skills. If your child has trouble, give enough hints so that he or she can be successful. If the activity is too difficult or becomes frustrating, stop that activity and do something else that is fun. The main goal is to spend quality time with your child each day and to help your child be successful!

Exerpts of activities copied from First Steps to Success, with permission from Sopris West Publisher, 2001.

# 1

## Rubber Neck Dance

1. While facing your child, identify all the parts of the face and neck that can dance.
2. Try moving the eyes, nose, chin, back of the neck, tongue, and forehead. Tell your child, "Do this" and see if he can imitate you.
3. Now sit in front of a mirror with some rhythmic music on.
4. Dance with the face, head, and neck and see how many dance movements you and your child can make.
5. Experiment with facial expression too.

# 2

## Dressing Up

Materials: Large cardboard carton or wooden crate

Old adult clothes

Bags, purses, wallets

Hats, ties, shoes, belts

Scarves, shawls, and other used accessories

Start a dress up bin for your child! Go through your closet and instead of discarding your old clothes, put some of them in a box for your child to play with. Keep adding to the box as your wardrobe changes. When your child wants to dress up, make available a full-length mirror and have your camera ready!

# 3

## What's missing?

Parent and child look at objects on the table.

Parent holds up a cardboard screen while he removes one object.

The child tries to guess which object is missing.

You can make this game very simple or quite hard depending on the ability of your child. At first, start out with only a few objects (maybe one or 2). When your child can successfully name the missing object several times in a row, add a few more objects or change them altogether. Reverse the roles occasionally: Let your child hide an object while you try to guess.

# 4

## Diary

Materials:

A large scrap book

Scissors

Glue or paste

Crayons or felt-tip markers

Help your child keep a diary. Set aside some time after a trip, a birthday party or any special event to record what happened. Write the date of the event at the top of the page and then ask, "What do you want to say about our trip?" "What did you like best?" Write down whatever he dictates. Illustrate the page with souvenirs or photographs from the trip. If your child doesn't talk try to have him imitate single words that describe what you did, i.e. "car" with a picture of a car. If he/she can't imitate have him/her point to the picture named.