

Everyday Learning with Young Children

When you are stuck inside with the same toys and activities, it can be easy to feel like you are not doing enough to work with a little one. However, it is not always what you have, but how you use it. You can create fun learning experiences for children at home, using common household items. This can be just as important as their classroom experiences. The most valuable tool is a caring and responsive adult... YOU!



Recommended Ages: 3-5 years old

Materials You May Use:

- *Cardboard boxes (moving and shipping)
- *Paper towel and toilet paper tubes
- *Take out containers and lids
- *Items in nature (leaves, rocks, sticks etc.)
- *Art supplies (scissors, markers, crayons, tape etc.)
- *Empty milk cartons or plastic bottles
- *Empty egg cartons
- *Plastic cups & eating utensils
- *Dry foods (pasta, rice, beans etc.)
- *Cooking utensils (measuring cups, funnels etc.)

How to Create the Strategy:

Pick 2-3 items from the list above your child would enjoy. Avoid having too many materials available, as this can be too much for very little ones. Young children often put things in their mouths, so consider cleaning items with soap & water and avoid offering anything that may be a choking hazard.

How to Introduce the Strategy:

Young children don't like to be "forced" into things. Consider using phrases such as "How about we..." "I have an idea!" or "I know what we could do!" to give children a sense of choice. As an example, try filling a large container with dry rice and beans and showing your child how to scoop, pour, and dump the rice using plastic spoons and cups. Describe what you are doing, as you do it, to support your child's understanding and language development.

Example - "I am scooping up the rice with my spoon and pouring it into my cup."

How to Use this Strategy:

Now, step back and let your child have a "go," remaining present for supervision and support. Resist the urge to correct how your child is playing. If your child comes up with a new way to use the materials, that is OK! If you have to step in because your child is using the materials unsafely, re-direct him/her using "to do" language.

Example - "We use our hands to play with the rice" instead of "Don't put that rice in your mouth!"

You are already doing a great job by allowing your child to take the lead and explore! Naturally, young children are "little explorers." They are curious about the world and want to discover how things work. When we give children a chance to explore, their brains grow. Consider using these other techniques during play:

***Parallel Talk** (aka "Broadcaster Talk"): Describe what they are doing out loud, without waiting for your child to respond. This is great to use if your child is not very verbal. It is a way to be part of your child's play as well as supporting his/her language development.

Example - "You are putting your hand under the rice and moving it from side to side."

***Open-ended Questioning:** Focus on "what" or "how" questions so your child will talk about their actions. This can be useful for helping children plan their play, explain thinking, and solve problems. Ask one question at a time and give your child several seconds to answer.

Example- "What happens when you put rice in your cup and shake it really fast?"

Example - "How many scoops of rice do you think you'll need to fill your cup?"

***Positive Feedback and Encouragement:** Children love to hear that they are making us proud, so the more you notice their efforts, the more likely they will continue. When we given children lots of positive feedback and encourage them, we help them feel good and become individuals who can work through challenging situations
Example – “You are working so hard at pouring the rice into the cup without it spilling.”

***Labeling Feelings:** This helps children learn more about feelings and builds their “feelings words.” When your child is upset and you label his/her feelings, it gives you a chance to connect with your child and problem solve together.
Example – “You are frustrated because the pieces of rice keep sticking together. How can we fix this?”

There are many ideas about using household items in play on the internet. Here are just a few:

“Driven to Discover: How Thinking Skills Develop through Everyday Play and Exploration”

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/200-driven-to-discover-how-thinking-skills-develop-through-everyday-play-and-exploration>

“What’s In a Cardboard Box? 12 New Play Ideas for Kids” <https://activeforlife.com/cardboard-boxes/>

“8 Creative Egg Carton Crafts” <https://www.parents.com/fun/arts-crafts/kid/creative-egg-carton-crafts/>

“Fine Motor Activity for Toddlers To Do with a Plastic Bottle”

<https://handsonaswegrow.com/fine-motor-activity-plastic-bottle/>

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