



Childcare Matters

Child Development: Ages Three - Four Social Butterflies Finding Success

Newsletter 110
Parent Edition
January 2008

This Month's Theme: **Little Fingers Workout**

The great thing about exercising little fingers is it happens as a side effect of creative artwork. What could be better on a cold snowy day than soft dough or finger paint to keep fingers moving.

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Child Development:
4 - 5 years

Your three year old needs other children. She has mastered her relationship with you and feels safe and secure enough to move on to other adventures. Play is a necessity and while you have played a very important role in her life, you may not make the perfect playmate. The search for appropriate friends for your child is one reason parents choose to move from family child care to larger child care centers and your concerns are valid. The other reason may be you feel your child needs a more academically centered program. However, some of these programs ignore child development and the very crucial social developments that occur beginning age three. Removing your child from her familiar infant experience may not be necessary if there are three to five children in the program who turn age three the same year. Three to five friends who engage in healthy play, trips to the park, and the occasional field trip coupled with the love and respect your caregiver has shown your child since birth, is exactly what she needs to become a healthy balanced child with great self esteem.

In his book *Miseducation*, David Elkind writes about the pressures felt by parents to place preschoolers in academically competitive child care programs or competitive sports programs. Your child care provider is sensitive to these pressures as well. You need to talk to your provider

about her program and your wish to have your child play with some friends her own age. If this situation already exists or your provider can make some changes to make sure your child sees other children during the day, then the play centered curriculum she has provided for your child's first three years is valid until Kindergarten.



Social skills are learned through free play activities. That may mean playing house, engaging in art activities and playing in a sandbox. Children cannot learn these skills on paper or from a book in highly structured preschool programs. The skills need to be practiced. The art of sharing and showing kindness need just as much practice as the art of defending yourself and resolving conflicts. Your child learns these skills by being in situations that require their use. If a three year old is constantly in structured activities, the adult has become the decision maker, robbing your child of the freedom to experiment with her own skills and therefore tak-

ing away the chance for success. The act of trying new things independently and succeeding is the basis for building solid self esteem.

The Importance of Playing House

Playing house, school, hospital or any other role playing game is crucial to your child's development and any good preschool program should allow hours for this type of play. When children play house they are practicing the skills they have observed adults using. You may notice they repeat your words or phrases while engaged in their fantasy. The learning takes place as they use these adult behaviors and the other "little adults" react. This is truly a "thinking on your feet" activity. Every line and behavior is made up on the spot and when one doesn't work, children will try another. Take the following short scenario:

Julie: Okay Timmy, it's time for bed. *(as she guides the child to a blanket)*

Timmy: *(Timmy is experimenting with power)* I don't want to go.

Julie: *(needing a new plan)* You have to. I'm the mother.

Timmy: No. *(He pretends to have a temper tantrum)*

Julie: *(trying to resolve the conflict)* Okay. I'll give you your brown bear.

Timmy: *(engaging in the deal)* Okay. And my truck.

Julie tucks Timmy into the pretend bed with the truck and the bear.

Each of these children has a social agenda that is dealing with power. In this instance they make a deal, each feeling the other has succeeded. There is no judgement or analysis from an adult telling them whether it was right or wrong. They have freely decided that this was their resolution. Situations like this one occur constantly during role playing, which may take place as the child assumes a role or the child uses a doll or character and gives it personality. There is no paper and pencil substitute for this practice.

Not Just A Sandbox

The sandbox is a boundaries testing ground. There are very subtle but important social cues learned by being in the sandbox with friends and strangers and being able to maintain what your child feels is his personal space and his personal items. Some children will gather their own toys around tightly and become very uncomfortable when someone reaches for one. Others dump their toys in the sandbox and pay no attention to who has what. The rules of engaging and sharing with people we don't know well are learned right there in the sand. These are skills we need when starting a new job or going to a new school. Once their child is three, most parents are content to sit on the park bench while their child plays in the sand, only interceding when necessary. This allows your child to experiment freely with asking others to share and being asked to share. He learns by experimenting with taking a toy, asking for a toy and wheeling and dealing for a toy. The freedom allows them to come up with successful strategies that work for them, while you look on ready to help only if necessary. When things go awry, offer solutions allowing your child to take part in the final decision making process. The next time she has a conflict she will remember the choices and experiment with them until she finds the balance that works for her.

Not Just Coloring

Allowing children to color and engage in art, designing their own pages and projects is not just a small motor exercise. It helps your child define what she likes and what pleases her. Children, just like adults, can only discover what they enjoy by trying new things. Preschool art activities should continue to be open-ended, creative and self directed. When these important qualities are taken out of the project it becomes a simple fine motor exercise with little learning

value. But worse than that, preschoolers often cannot make projects that come out as perfect as the model. The very concept of trying to copy others' work sets them up for failure. A project designed and executed by your child will always lead to a success because if she doesn't like it she'll just crumple it up and do it again, experimenting with the materials until she succeeds at her personal goal.

The same goals and methods used by your child care provider when your child was a toddler are valid for your preschooler. If your child has engaged in great free play, play centered activities such as art and cooking, visits to the playground and reading great books, then the program she's already attending may be perfectly suitable through Kindergarten, as long as she has playmates. Do not be pressured to change your program, rushing your child into academics and skipping over this incredible window of social learning opportunity. Solid self esteem is built on experimenting and succeeding. Telling a child she's done well doesn't matter if the child is not happy with her success. Trying to make perfectly formed letters and recognize written words will be unsuccessful for most children. But conquering the social landscape of the sandbox results in skills that can be self learned and used for the rest of their lives. They will become scholarly when the time is right. You can practice forming letters at any age, but you can't return to experience childhood. It's a precious and fleeting opportunity.

Adult Education

This book is a must read for parents and child care providers.

If you haven't already done so

pick up a copy of

Miseducation

by David Elkind

Mudworks by Maryann F. Kohl

Mudworks is a must have for the family bookshelf. The one hundred forty nine pages contain recipes for every type of modeling material. Included are chapters on play dough, bread dough, plaster of paris, and a toddler favorite, edible dough. The final chapter includes recipes for your more exotic modeling materials using jello, toothpaste, soapsuds, sand and of course..... mud. The recipes are written in large clear text with black and white illustrations. You may find yourself pulling this recipe book out when the children aren't around. (all ages)

Art by Patrick McDonnell

Watch out Harold. There's a new artist in town and his name is Art. He's a small boy in comparison to his large art that fills the crisp white pages with pastel squiggles. "When Art is in play, get out of Art's way. He zigs, he zags, he really gets wired. There's no stopping art....when Art is inspired." Does Art create the art? Or does the art create Art? Perhaps there's no difference. There is genius in how the author illustrates art as an action not an outcome. Art's mother loves to put the art on the refrigerator door but for Art it's all about the creation. (ages 2 - 7)

Andy Warhol's Colors by Susan Goldman Rubin

Color is everywhere. Especially in modern art. Andy Warhol's artwork is illustrated in this small board book, so toddlers can appreciate the colors in red cows, green cats and black and white pandas. The rhyming text has few words, just enough for toddlers to understand. "Golden monkey with a bow. Pink cows lined up row by row." Fits nicely in a diaper bag for car trips. (ages 1 - 3)

The Art Lesson by Tomie dePaola

Tommy loves to draw. He spends his days drawing pictures of all the things that are familiar to him, and his family hangs them in their homes and places of work. His big cousins who are studying to be artists tell him to never copy, but to practice, practice, practice. However, when Tommy gets to school not only is he told to copy, he is told to do so with just eight colors. The same eight colors everyone else has. He is horribly disappointed. Luckily his teacher is open to compromise and she promises him an extra piece of paper to draw what he wants if he participates in the class activity. You can use the conflict resolution to talk to your child about how he would resolve the conflict. (ages 3 - 8)

Play Clay (from Mudworks)

This dough is very white (perfect for snowmen), will keep for several weeks in an airtight container and dries quickly so your child can paint and decorate their projects.

Materials

1 cup baking soda
½ cup cornstarch
⅔ cup warm water

Optional:
food coloring
poster paint

1. Mix baking soda and corn starch in saucepan.
2. Add water and stir until smooth.
3. Boil over medium heat until the mixture looks like mashed potatoes.
4. Pour onto the counter or wooden board to cool.
5. When cool, knead well.
6. To color the clay, knead the food coloring into the clay and continue kneading until color disperses.
7. When sculptures dry you can use the poster paints to decorate.

Fun Finger Workout

Three Dimensional Art

Children love to play with clay and dough, first squashing, flattening and rolling big pieces, then eventually shaping the dough into creative three dimensional forms using multiple pieces and colors. This is an excellent exercise for the fingers and arms as well as a creative and fun activity. Use a recipe from *Mudworks* on page three, making sure it's the right consistency for your child. Children three and under need a very soft dough. Preschoolers can handle a bit more firmness.

Make Your Own Beads

Children who have mastered making simple shapes, can begin to make their own beads using a baked clay recipe. Have them shape their beads and then put holes in them using a small size knitting needle or a large wooden skewer. The hole must be big enough that they can easily string them after they are done. Bake the beads according to the clay instructions and then have your child paint them. You can also use colored clay. **(Supervision is necessary while your child uses a pointed object to make holes in their beads.)**

Don't Forget The Music

Artwork isn't the only fine motor exercise. How about playing musical instruments, like the piano, guitar or the flute?

Big Beads and Shoestrings

Beads and shoestrings help children practice hand eye coordination. Slipping the string through the bead will be challenging at first, but once they get it, they'll move along quite quickly and thread colorful projects. You can purchase large



beads at craft stores and educational toy stores. If they don't come with strings, purchase shoe laces in different lengths and colors. Please be aware that almost all preschool beads are marked for ages three and over. **Play must be monitored because of the choking hazard. Infants and toddlers should be occupied with another project while preschoolers play with beads.**

Additions for Dry Clay

If your child has graduated to permanent clay sculptures then you can extend that activity by picking through your box of scraps and pulling out objects that can be used in their projects. Buttons, wood sticks, beads, foil or even faux flowers can be used to decorate projects. Please remember if your clay requires baking, the objects must also be able to stand up to the heat.

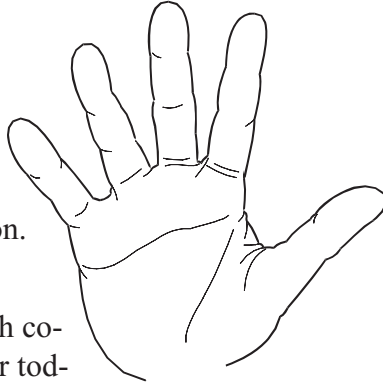
Clay Tools

Tools can make clay play more interesting for children. You can add play knives, small rolling pins, textured rolling pins, cookie cutters, letter or number cutters. Be creative. The best place to look for interesting tools for clay play is the kitchen. Just make sure nothing is too sharp or pointy.

Why Fingerplays?

- Children enjoy them.
- They allow children to practice playing cooperatively.
- They exercise fine motor development and coordination.

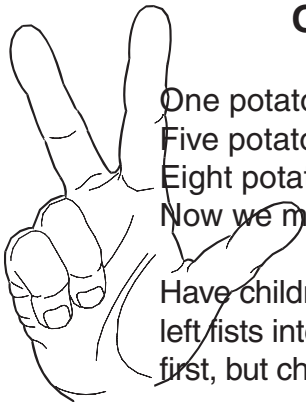
Engaging in fingerplays may be your child's first experience with cooperative play. Never make your toddler or preschooler sit for this experience. This is an activity that should be fun to do together, like dancing. Remember all children develop fine motor skills at different ages. They can't do these right or wrong. Any attempt uses the same intellectual skills as a successful attempt.



One Potato, Two Potato

One potato, two potato, three potato, four
Five potato, six potato, seven potato, more.
Eight potato, nine potato. Where is ten?
Now we must count all over again.

Have children make fists and pound the right and left fists intermittently. This is surprisingly hard at first, but children succeed with repetition.



I Wiggle

I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle my fingers.
I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle my toes.
I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle my shoulders
I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle my nose.
Now no more wiggles are left in me.
I am standing still as still can be.

Follow the directions of the words. At the end see who can stay still the longest.

Two Little Blackbirds

Two little blackbirds sitting on a hill.
(Point one finger on each hand up.)
One named Jack
(Put one hand forward.)
The other named Jill.
(Put the other hand forward.)
Fly away Jack.
(Place one hand behind your back.)
Fly away Jill.
(Place the other hand behind your back.)
Come back Jack.
(Return the first hand.)
Come back Jill.
(Return the second hand.)

Little Snowmen

Six little snowmen all made of snow.
(Hold up six fingers.)
Six little snowmen standing in a row.
Out came the sun and stayed all day.
(Lift arms overhead.)
One little snowman melted away.
(Cascade fingers down like melting snow.)

Continue counting down snowmen until the last snowman.

One little snowman all made of snow.
(Hold up one finger.)
One little snowman standing in a row.
Out came the sun and stayed all day.
(Lift arms overhead.)
The last little snowman melted away.
(Cascade fingers down like melting snow.)

For Barbara Fedoroff

It started with an idea. Then it was a few people helping other people. It was your faith in the individual spirit of each human being and each child that made Programs for Parents a nurturing place where many help hundreds of families every day. May you enter into your new adventure feeling the blessings of all those you've helped to reach their full potential: every employee who has learned to approach her job as a chance to grow and help others grow; every caregiver and teacher who has learned the power that love and respect bring to education; every child who spends his days laughing and playing freely as his journey begins. It is time for you to play again, growing and moving through life as life moves you. Enjoy the freedom of your new and best journey to come.

Thank you

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