

Early

Learning & Education
PROGRAMSWhat's
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Expressing Thoughts and Ideas

Last night it rained, and when the children went outside to play, they made some discoveries. Linda and Reina found worms in the mud that they put into buckets, Xuan stood under a tree catching raindrops that dripped down, and Daniel stood looking into a puddle. A teacher near Daniel joined him at the puddle and squatted down to look at it. The water was still and reflected the grey clouds above. Just then, a bird flew across the puddle.

Daniel gasped as the bird disappeared, then looked up and said, "There it is!" Daniel looked back down at the puddle and back up at the sky. The teacher asked, "What are you wondering?" Daniel replied, "I'm wondering how it got from the puddle to the sky." "Hmmm," said the teacher. "That is an interesting thing to wonder about." Daniel leaned

forward and touched the water. It began to move, and the images of the clouds rippled and danced across the water's surface. Once again, Daniel looked up and then back down at the puddle. The teacher asked, "How do you think it happened?" The water stilled once more. Daniel said, "When the water doesn't move, I can see the sky like a mirror." The teacher said, "I wonder if anything else that isn't a mirror can act like a mirror." Daniel smiled and said, "Let's go on a mirror hunt!"

The teacher gave Daniel time and space to reflect on his ideas and how to express them, only interrupting to ask a question or make a statement that would extend his thinking process. Take a moment to consider what Linda and Reina were discovering about worms, or what Xuan

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BOX PLAY

Boxes are a tool for creative play because they have endless possibilities. Ask children, "How can we use this?" For example, cut the top and bottom off a box to create a vehicle children can step into and carry.

Make a board game. Gather box lids, paper, scissors, glue, stickers, markers, dice, spinners, index cards, large buttons, small plastic animals, and cars. Ask children to think of a board game idea. Glue paper onto the box lid. Children can use markers and stickers to create trails with a "start" and "end" point. Use the buttons, animals, or cars as game pieces.





Encourage Talking

Children need rich language experiences. Setting aside time for meaningful conversations benefits their language, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Children practice putting together words, sentences, and ideas whenever they engage in rich conversations. Children also develop their concept of the world and social roles by talking about their experiences, or acting them out through dramatic play. They learn about who they are and their family culture by asking questions and listening to family members tell stories about their own childhood.

When adults listen to children and validate their ideas, children learn that they are important and that they have something to contribute to their community. Children use language to analyze new information by making predictions, expressing opinions, making comparisons, requesting information, and evaluating experiences. The following ideas can help support the language development of young children.

- Gather old party costumes and adult clothing you no longer wear and create a dress-up box. Encourage children to act out favorite songs or stories.
- Suggest that children write a letter to a family member or friend. Give guidance and support when necessary while children draw or write. An adult can write as the child dictates the letter. Make a mailbox out of a cardboard box where they can put pretend letters to mail.

- Sing rhyming songs with children and encourage them to sing along or create their own songs.
- Create a Talk Box. Ask children to give you ideas of things they like to talk about, such as their favorite animal, places they like to go, favorite games, etc. Write them down on slips of paper and add them to the box. When you sit down for meals, pull a topic out of the box to discuss.
- Read books with children, and discuss the characters and story. Ask questions like, “How do you think he felt?” or “Why do you think she did that?” Encourage children to share their ideas.

Source: *Family Communication: 42 Discussion Starters to Keep You in Touch* by Karen Stephens (Exchange Press, 2007).



Disaster Preparedness

Are you prepared for an emergency? Familiarize yourself with the potential natural disasters and emergency services in your area. Common disasters that you may need to prepare for are wildfires, earthquakes, high winds, floods, and civil unrest. To learn about the potential natural hazards in your area and discover links to resources, visit <https://myhazards.caloes.ca.gov>. Once you know about potential hazards in your area, you can make a disaster plan.

Use the California Child Care Disaster Plan toolkit at <https://cchp.ucsf.edu/content/disaster-preparedness> as a reference. Be sure to include areas you may relocate to, such as a nearby school or park, and include phone numbers where parents can reach you. If possible, include a phone number for an out-of-state contact person. Make sure each parent receives a copy of the disaster plan. Keep copies of current emergency information for each child in your emergency backpack, a first aid kit, and some books or drawing materials to keep children entertained. For further ideas regarding emergency/disaster kits, visit <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies.html>.

Another important aspect of preparedness is to educate children on emergency procedures. Conducting emergency drills where children learn to duck and cover, exit a building safely, and follow directions can limit injuries, confusion, and stress when an actual disaster strikes. When practicing drills, you may choose to use the fire alarm, loud whistle, large bell, or personal alarm as a signal to children that they should stop and listen for directions. To see a video from Community Care Licensing about disaster planning and drills, visit <https://cclcd.childcarevideos.org/child-care-center-operators/disaster-planning-and-fire-safety>. Be sure to check fire extinguishers, smoke/carbon monoxide detectors, and emergency supplies once a month. Being prepared will help keep you, children, and families safe.

Source: The website <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/child-care-licensing/public-information-and-resources/disaster-resources> was accessed in October 2022.



Expressing Thoughts and Ideas

was learning about the effects of rain. What might those conversations look like? How could these children be encouraged to express their thoughts and ideas?

Avoid interrupting children when they are in the process of wondering and thinking. Instead, **stop** and **observe** what is happening, try to **understand** what they are thinking or trying to do, and then **listen** to the child's thoughts, feelings, or ideas when you notice a natural pause in their work. This process of observation is often referred to as **SOUL**. Closely observing the situation allows adults to focus in on what is interesting to children, and use that knowledge to engage in conversations and offer a question or idea that will stretch their learning.

Engage children in activities that encourage them to express themselves physically and verbally. For example, consider Linda and Reina from the story above. What support can the teacher offer them in expressing their ideas about worms? Perhaps they could draw a story about the worms, and then use the drawings to organize their thoughts and talk about them. Asking them to draw encourages them to focus their attention and ideas. Children can also use blocks and other materials to create three-dimensional representations of their discoveries or ideas. These creations can then be displayed and discussed with others, offering children many opportunities for rich conversations that build their knowledge and understanding of language, strengthen their ability to express themselves, and grow their confidence.

Source: *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume I* by the California Department of Education (Sacramento, 2010).



ENGAGING DISPLAYS

If your walls could talk, what would they say? Creating displays for children is an important part of the learning environment. The word *display* refers to a collection of photos, artwork, educational posters, and other work created by children. Take a moment to reflect on your displays.

- Is everything at the children's eye-level?
- Are materials generally appropriate and inclusive?
- Are there at least two pieces of individualized artwork displayed for each child? Individualized artwork is initiated and created by children, not a pattern created by an adult.
- Is three-dimensional art included?
- Are there photographs of the children, families, pets, and friends?
- Do you talk to the children about the displays?
- Are displays changed at least monthly?

If you answered "yes" to these questions, then your walls are talking in ways that make families feel welcome.

Source: *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Revised Edition* by Thelma Harms, Richard Clifford and Debby Cryer (Teacher's College Press, 2005).

RECIPES

Tomato Basil Pizza

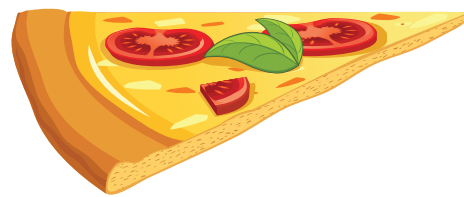
Cooking with children provides an opportunity to build math, science, and language skills. As you cook together, talk about the colors, shapes, sizes, and textures of ingredients. Children can use plastic knives to slice their tomato and English muffin, or measure and mix ingredients. Talk about how cooking can change ingredients. For example, try tasting the ingredients before they are cooked (if it is safe to eat them raw), and then compare that to how they taste after being cooked. Introduce new vocabulary and discuss other changes, such as how the oven will melt the cheese and make the muffins crispy in the recipe below.

Ingredients

- 1 wholewheat English muffin
- 2 tablespoons shredded mozzarella cheese
- 2 tablespoons tomato sauce
- 1 tablespoon fresh basil, chopped
- 2 slices of tomato

Preheat the broiler in your oven. Children can use a plastic knife to split their English muffin in half. Top each half of the muffin with tomato sauce, and add the tomato slices. Sprinkle cheese on top of the tomato. Top with basil. Place the English muffin halves on a baking sheet and broil them until the cheese is brown and the sauce is bubbly. Enjoy!

Source: Recipe adapted from <http://kidshealth.org/kid/recipes/> in October 2022.



Winter Activities



Activity: Scarf Pull

Age group: Infants

What you need: Four or five textured scarves or material squares, an oatmeal box or clean empty box of baby wipes, and scissors for adult use.

What you do: Tie one corner of each scarf to the next one in order to form one long scarf. Cut a slit in the lid of the oatmeal container. A baby wipe box will already have an opening. Stuff the long scarf in the container and pull part of the end through the slit. Secure the lid with tape. Babies and toddlers can enjoy pulling the scarf slowly out and then stuffing it inside.

What they learn: Infants explore the concept of cause and effect, which builds their cognitive development. They also practice motor skills such as grasping, pulling, and pushing. Caregivers can introduce vocabulary by asking questions and narrating their actions, or by introducing the names of the colors, describing textures, and counting scarves.

Source: *The Complete Resource Book for Infants* by Pam Schiller (Gryphon House, 2005).

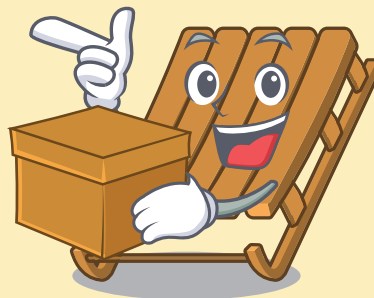
Activity: Homemade Sleigh

Age group: Toddlers

What you need:

A large cardboard box (12"x18"), scissors for adult use, rope, bells, and stuffed animals or dolls.

What you do: Cut the top flaps off of the box. If the box is deep, cut it down so that it is no more than 4-6 inches high. Make a hole in each of the long sides of the box about 2 inches from the corners. Inset a rope through each hole and knot it to make a pulling strap. Add bells to the rope. Have a few stuffed animals or dolls available for taking rides in the sleigh. If you do not have a box, you can also use a laundry basket.



What they learn: Children are introduced to new vocabulary words such as *sled*, *sleigh*, *slide*, *snow*, and *downhill*. By pulling the sleigh, children develop muscle coordination and have the chance to create stories or plots that involve the sleigh as a prop. Children can also experiment with pulling different weights of objects.

Source: *Everything for Winter: A Complete Activity Book for Teachers of Young Children* edited by Kathy Charner (Gryphon House, 1997).

Activity: Snowmen Chant

Age group: Preschool

What you need: This rhyme can be used as a fingerplay or flannel board story. To use as a flannel board story, create five snowmen out of felt to place on your flannel board.

What you do: Use your five fingers, or snowmen, to chant the following math rhyme. *Five little snowmen with buttons from the store. This one melted, and there were four. Four little snowmen beneath a pine tree. This one melted, and then there were three. Three little snowmen glad that they know you. This one melted, and then there were two. Two little snowmen playing and having fun. This one melted, and then there was one. One little snowman left all alone. He melted all away, and then there were none.*

What they learn: Children can practice addition and subtraction skills while chanting or singing this rhyme. They can also explore new vocabulary. Leave the flannel story out, or set out five stuffed animal snowmen to provide an opportunity for children to practice and learn independently.

Source: *Everything for Winter: A Complete Activity Book for Teachers of Young Children* edited by Kathy Charner (Gryphon House, 1997).



Winter Activities

Activity: Blindfold Snowball Game

Age group: School Age

What you need: Cotton balls, spoon, 2 bowls, blindfold, timer, and dice.

What you do: Place the two bowls on a table and fill one with cotton balls. Have children roll the dice to see who will go first. The child playing wears the blindfold. The player has 60 seconds to transfer as many cotton balls as possible to the empty bowl using the spoon to scoop them. When the timer goes off, count the cotton balls in the bowl and reset the game for the next player. If children are playing to win, then the child who moves the most cotton balls is the winner.

What they learn: Moving cotton balls is a challenge because you cannot feel their weight on the spoon. The movements involved in this game help improve their balance, dexterity, coordination, and motor skills.

Source: Adapted from the website http://www.familytlc.net/issues/january2012/games_8_6753.html in October 2022.



ABOUT CHS

For over 130 years, Children's Home Society of California (CHS) has adapted to the changing needs of children and families. Since 1891, CHS has worked diligently to protect our community's children and strengthen their families through diverse programs and services.

At CHS, we view a child not in isolation, but in the context of each family's health, stability, and resources. We believe that families are fundamentally strong and resilient. The mission of CHS is to reach out to children and families at risk with a range of services to ensure every child the opportunity to develop within a safe, healthy, and secure environment.

Therefore, CHS provides a variety of services to children and families in California and nationwide, working to improve their quality of life by offering vital information, education and resource services, and child care assistance.

CHS also serves as an expert resource for child care providers, other social service agencies, and government agencies at the local, state, and national level. To learn more about CHS and resources available to you, please visit our website at www.chs-ca.org.

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