

Learning Happens Every Day!

With just a little imagination and a few items found around the home, you can create learning materials that will provide hours of fun while your child develops skills in language, literacy and problem solving.

Helping children see that many household items can be used in a wide variety of ways (and not only the way they were originally intended) is a lesson in flexible thinking and creativity.

The kitchen provides a host of everyday items that can easily be turned into great literacy and learning experiences. While exploring common items like cookie sheets, muffin tins, cereal boxes, wooden spoons and more, you can help your child turn these articles into fun learning activities.

If this sounds like something you're willing to try, here are a few simple ideas to get you started.

Matching games are always fun and can be adapted for all ages. Create a "Family Match-up" game using juice can lids (or other lids of similar sizes) and cover each with photo doubles of family members. Simply cut the two identical photos to fit the lids. For older children, trace a circle onto the photo and let them help with the cutting. Make as many sets as possible. To build print knowledge, put names on the back of the lid with the first letter bolded. These lids store nicely in a Tetley Tea canister or any container with a lid. Don't forget to make a label to identify the contents. So many language opportunities!

An alternate matching game is to glue real objects onto the lids. Relatively flat items such as paper clips, pennies, buttons, stamps etc. can be used instead of photos to introduce more descriptive vocabulary such as same, different, big, little, rough, flat, round, beige etc.

One of my favourite kitchen items is a cookie sheet. Use it as a magnet board or sensory container. Peel and stick or glue on a magnet strip to the back of juice can lids. Anything can be put on the lids for matching or creating patterns-stickers, photos, found items etc. Add some magnetic fridge letters for even more literacy fun. Cookie sheets with magnetic items travel well so your learning activities can go along for the ride. Cookie sheets are a great place to contain sensory play as well. Sprinkle some flour, oatmeal, cornmeal, salt or Jell-o powder on the cookie sheet and encourage your child to draw shapes, letters, numbers and words using his finger. Simply shake a little to get a fresh printing surface. Sit across from your child (face to face) and provide a model of your child's name or play a copy-cat game along with your child to keep the interest high. For those children with sensory sensitivities, provide a Popsicle stick to draw with or let them choose the material to put on the tray. Add some toy cars and practice directionality of letters as you drive your cars.

Cereal boxes add up to a great deal of fun too. You can promote environmental print by making towers for toddlers using cereal boxes (or any other boxes, cylinders etc). This is a good opportunity to point out letters and symbols on these familiar items as well as talk about the shapes of the various objects themselves. "Can we find the first letter in your name?" Math is fun when we count the boxes as we stack them and predict how many more boxes before our tower tumbles down.

Another great activity is the cereal box puzzle. Cut the front panel from the box, draw lines on the back of it and cut it into puzzle pieces. Remember the younger the child the fewer the puzzle pieces. Younger children would benefit from having a duplicate uncut box to use as a guide to follow. Store the puzzle pieces in a Ziplock baggie or clear container with a lid.

Here's one more idea to use up your paper towel or toilet paper rolls. Attach two rolls together with tape and add string or yarn to make a pair of binoculars. Take your binoculars on a letter or word hunt around the house or through the neighborhood. Play "I Spy" and encourage your children to write down or draw what they find. Now, I bet you can think of plenty of fun learning games to create with your muffin tins and wooden spoons right? Putting coloured dots in the bottom of the muffin tin invites children to find items to put in each section that match the colour. Is that a wooden spoon or a stick puppet? Add some wool hair, googly eyes and more! With a little imagination, lots of conversations, some active problem-solving and a wee bit of flexible thinking, you and your children can turn everyday household items into activities to promote learning through play...the true work of every young child!

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