

Playing for Speech and Language

The following information is taken from [www.playing with words365](http://www.playingwithwords365.com).



Stacking/Nesting Toys

Here are just some of the language, cognitive and other skills that your child can learn by playing with stacking/nesting cups:

- Preposition concepts of in/out as he nests the different sized cups
- Preposition concepts of on, under, next to, in front, behind, top, bottom, on, off, and between as he stacks and builds with them.
- Color concepts
- Shape concepts (especially if you have different sets of cups in different shapes)
- Size concepts of big, bigger, biggest; small, smaller, smallest; small, medium, large
- Concepts of full/empty (by filling some cups up with other things like rice, beans, etc)
- Counting skills
- Problem solving skills: Figuring out which cups stack on others best, or nest within other best.
- Fine motor and motor planning skills
- Cause and effect relationships
- If the stacking/nesting cups have pictures of animals/letters on them you can also teach these vocabulary words.
- Other activity idea: Take another small toy (like an animal) and hiding it under a cup and have your infant or toddler find where the toy went.
- Other activity idea: If you are using plain plastic colored cups, you can draw or tape pictures of any target vocabulary on the cups and use the cups to target this vocabulary (i.e. You can play following directions games with the cups by saying "Put the horse cup on top of the pig cup.")



Wooden Blocks Here are just some of the language, cognitive and other skills that your child can learn by playing with blocks:

- Preposition concepts of on, under, next to, in front, behind, top, bottom, on, off, and between as he stacks and builds with them.
- Color concepts
- Shape concepts
- Letter and Number concepts (if you are using blocks with letters/numbers)
- Size concepts
- Counting skills
- Problem solving skills: i.e. How to create a stable tower that won't fall down
- Hand-eye coordination/Fine motor skills and visual processing
- Cause and effect relationships

- When at school or in a play situation, children can practice their sharing, cooperation, problem solving skills and more while building *with their friends*.
- Math and science principals like gravity and balance (not my expertise! Ha!

Balls



Here are just some of the language, cognitive and other skills that your child can learn by playing with balls:

- Concepts of in, on, off, through, up, down, next to, in front, behind, top, bottom (while using the balls in different activities and with other items like basketball hoops, baskets, tunnels, cups, boxes, etc.)
- Color concepts (using different colored balls)
- Size concepts like big, medium, small, biggest, smallest, etc (using different sized balls)
- Tactile concepts/vocabulary like hard, soft, bumpy, smooth, etc. (when using balls made of various materials).
- Counting concepts
- Problem solving skills (i.e. which balls can fit in which containers?)
- Gross motor, motor planning, and hand/eye skills while throwing, catching, and rolling
- Social skills: Believe it or not, the simple act of rolling a ball back and forth to another person takes quite a bit of social skills! In order to roll ball back and forth, you need to 1) Watch your friend 2) Read your friend's non verbal language indicating whether or not he is ready to "catch" the ball (facial expressions, body position, gestures) 3) Roll the ball 4) Wait patiently for your turn to catch 5) Read your friend's non verbal cues that he is ready to roll the ball to you 6) Catch the ball.



Shape Sorter

Shape sorters can teach many of the same concepts and skills that blocks can, with some added bonuses. Here are just some of the language, cognitive and other skills that your child can learn by playing with a shape sorter:

- Shape concepts
- Preposition concepts of in, out, through.
- Color concepts
- Concepts of full and empty (full of shapes after all the shapes have been put in).
- Fine motor and motor planning skills
- Counting skills
- Problem solving skills



Toy Phone

They are low cost and grow with your child. And think about it...what is it that we do on the phone? WE TALK! We use LANGUAGE! So a toy phone is a GREAT toy that can be used to support speech and language development. Here are just some of the language, cognitive and other skills that your child can learn by playing with a toy phone:

- Social skills/pretend play: Your child can use the play phone to “practice” her speech and language skills and “talk” to an array of different “people.” 😊 Grab yourself another play phone, and have a conversation with him!
- Social skills/turn taking: Many times, your child will talk on the phone, and then will want YOU to talk on it. This is a great foundation for turn taking!



Baby Doll

The baby doll is such a fantastic toy that I wish ALL children (Yes, even BOYS!) can have. It is a toy that can really help open up and expand a child’s pretend play. Let’s look at just some of the language concepts that a baby doll can help teach and support:

- *Body Parts:* Use the dolls to teach all the body parts: eyes, nose, mouth, ears, hands, fingers, tummy, feet, toes, knees, elbows, etc.
- *Clothing Labels:* Using the doll and its clothes, you can teach the names of clothing items like shirts, pants, shoes, socks, jammies, etc.
- *Basic Concepts:* Use baby with other baby toys (bed, blankets) to teach some basic concepts like: prepositions (baby in the bed, baby under the blanket), colors, size concepts (using different sized dolls),
- *Verbs/Feelings:* Use the baby with some other baby toys (bed, bottle, clothes) to teach verbs/feelings/etc. like: eat, drink, sleep, sit, stand, hungry, sleepy, thirsty, etc.
- *Answering “wh” questions:* You can ask your child an array of questions to work on her understanding of these words. Where is baby? Where is baby’s

nose/fingers/belly button? What does the baby want to eat? Why is the baby crying?

- *Social/pragmatic skills:* Baby dolls can be a great tool to use to help teach appropriate social/pragmatic skills. Take turns playing with different dolls. Practice using language to ask questions about the dolls and what they are doing.

Baby stroller and/or grocery cart



Let's look at just some of the language concepts that the doll stroller and/or grocery cart can help teach and support:

- *Food vocabulary:* When used with some simple, inexpensive fake food, you can teach the names for all KINDS of food items. IKEA and Target both sell really inexpensive fake foods.
- *Basic Concepts:* Using baby dolls, food, and any other items, you can work on concepts like in, out, on, under, between, next to, etc. You can work on full/empty, some/most/all, first/then/last, big/medium/small, big/bigger/biggest, etc. You can push the m THROUGH things and AROUND things and BETWEEN things (like chairs, furniture, and other toys).
- *Verbs:* While playing with these toys you can work on the words push, stop, go, run, walk, jump, skip, etc.
- *Answering "wh" questions:* Work on answering Who, What, Where, Why, When, and How while you play with the cart/stroller. Where are you going? Where is the baby? Where is the food? What color is the apple?
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* You can use these items to work on turn taking, a very important social skill. Take turns putting things in, taking things out, and pushing them around the house.

Cars/Trucks/Trains



Here is another toy that I believe all children should have despite their gender. Girls should have at least a couple toy cars and/or trains too! Let's look at just some of the language concepts that toy cars can help teach and support:

- *Basic Concepts:* You can basically work on all the major basic concepts using cars. Pair the cars with a simple ramp that you can make out of cardboard or wood and you can basically target anything you want! You can target colors, numbers (if they have numbers on the cars), counting, big/small, some/more/less/all, fast/slow, all the propositional concepts like in/on/under/over/top/bottom etc.
- *Part/whole relationships:* Cars are great for teaching part/whole relationships. Work on naming all the different parts of the cars: Wheels, windows, bumpers, doors, etc
- *Verbs and Adjectives:* Cars are great for working on all kinds of action and describing words! Go, stop, fast, slow, etc.
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* You can use these items to work on turn taking, a very important social skill. Take turns racing the cars on the floor or down a ramp. Take turns playing with different cards. Practice saying "My turn" and "May I have that car please?"
- *Answering "wh" questions:* Work on answering Who, What, Where, Why, When, and How while you play with the cars. Where is the car? Who is driving the car? What color is the car? Where are the wheels?

Farm Set



Ahhhh yes. The Farm set. If this isn't a staple in your home/preschool/child care center/therapy tool box it should be. Let's look at just some of the language concepts that the farm set and farm animals can help teach and support:

- *Animal Names and Animal Sounds:* Work on teaching the names of all the animals and the sounds they make!
- *Basic Concepts:* Using the animals and the barn, you can work on all the prepositional concepts like in, out, on, under, between, next to, etc. You can work on some/most/all, first/then/last, big/medium/small, big/bigger/biggest, etc. and all the colors.

- *Answering “wh” questions:* Work on answering Who, What, Where, Why, When, and How while you play with the animals. Where is the horse? Which animal is next to the cow? Who is eating? Which animal makes the Mooooo sound? Etc.
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* You can use these items to work on turn taking, a very important social skill. Take turns with the animals. Work on asking “May I have a turn please?” or “May I have the horse please?” Work on eye contact while you play and talk.

Mr. Potato Head



Let's look at just some of the language concepts that the Mr. Potato Head can help teach and support:

- *Body Part Names:* Obviously Mr. Potato Head is excellent for teaching body part names. Just be sure to teach the child the body part names on her own body as well.
- *Clothing Item Names:* Mr. Potato Head also comes with many different clothing items and accessories. This is a great way to teach items like earrings, purse, hat, etc. If you purchase multiple sets you can have different types of items to target also.
- *Basic Concepts:* Mr. Potato Head is great for working on all color concepts as well as the concepts of in/out. You can also work on concepts such as first/next/last and left/right and prepositional concepts like over/under/top/bottom etc.
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* You can use these items to work on turn taking, a very important social skill.

Kitchen set



Let's look at just some of the language concepts that a kitchen play set can help teach and support:

- *Vocabulary/labels:* You can target all the labels for the items in the kitchen as well as all food items and extras: Food, parts of the kitchen (stove, fridge, microwave, laundry, oven), kitchenware (plates, bowls, utensils, pots, pans), etc.
- *Basic Concepts:* You can basically work on ALL basic concepts while using some simple fake food and maybe some pots and pans too. Prepositions like in, out, on, off, through, next to; Size concepts like big, small, biggest, smallest, bigger, smaller; colors; counting skills; etc. You do this by placing the food or other kitchen utensils in different areas of the kitchen set and manipulating the objects. The possibilities are ENDLESS!
- *Verbs:* Again, the possibilities are endless here also. During play activities you can work on verbs like cook, eat, drink, put, take, give, etc.
- *Following/Giving Directions:* You can use the toy kitchen to work on following or giving directions. Ask the child to do a specific task (i.e. "Can you give me a cup of juice?" or "Can you put the orange in the refrigerator?"). You can also have the child practice giving directions during the play activity.
- *Answering "wh" questions:* You can ask your child an array of questions to work on her understanding of the target vocabulary. Where is the sandwich? Who has the fork? What color is this tomato?
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* A kitchen set is another great way to work on social skills. Eye contact, topic initiation, topic maintenance, topic closure, personal space, sharing, asking and answering questions, etc.

Doll house



Let's look at just some of the language concepts that a doll house can help teach and support:

- *Vocabulary/labels:* You can target all the labels for the items in the house as well as the family members/pets in them!
- *Basic Concepts:* You can basically work on ALL basic concepts using the doll house, furniture and dolls. Prepositions like in, out, on, off, through, next to; Size

concepts like big, small, biggest, smallest, bigger, smaller; colors; counting skills; shapes (i.e. shapes of the windows, doors, furniture, etc.)

- *Verbs:* Again, the possibilities are endless here! While manipulating the dolls they can eat, drink, sit, stand, run, walk, skip, go up, come down, sleep, etc.
- *Part/Whole relationships:* A doll house is fantastic for part whole relationships. You can use the whole house and talk about the parts in MANY different ways (i.e. walls, roof, floor, windows, rooms, etc) or you can pick just one room and talk about its parts (kitchen, for example). You can also pick out different furniture and talk about the parts and the whole (i.e. a table has four legs and a top, a chair has four legs, a seat, and a back).
- *Following/Giving Directions:* Take turns giving each other directions on what the dolls should do! Incorporate the concepts and vocabulary you are targeting. i.e. “Put the doll in the big bed” or “I think the doll is hungry. Put the doll in the chair for dinner time.”
- *Answering “wh” questions:* You can ask your child an array of questions to work on her understanding of the target vocabulary. Who is this? Where is the mommy doll? Why is the daddy sleeping?
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* I always use doll houses in my social/pragmatic language groups. So many things can be targeted including eye contact, topic initiation, topic maintenance, topic closure, personal space, sharing, asking and answering questions, etc.

Doctor/Vet set



Let's look at just some of the language concepts that a doctor or vet set can help teach and support:

- *Vocabulary/labels:* You can target all the labels for the items in the set as well as items in a vet or doctor office that you can create in your home. Stethoscope, syringe, tweezers, band aids, sling, thermometer, scrubs, doctor coat, bed, etc.
- *Basic Concepts:* Work on prepositional concepts like on, off, up, down, etc. (stethoscope ON the heart/chest);
- *Feelings:* You can target different feelings like sick and healthy and talk about how you feel when you are sick vs. how you feel when you are healthy. For example, when we are sick we might feel tired, nauseous, or grumpy.
- *Answering “wh” questions:* You can ask your child an array of questions to work on her understanding of the target vocabulary. How does the kitty feel? Where is the syringe? What do we do with a stethoscope? How do shots feel? Etc.
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* When playing doctor/vet with your child work on appropriate social skills such as eye contact, topic initiation, topic maintenance, topic closure, personal space, sharing, asking and answering questions, etc.

Dress up clothes



If you have a child who is really into superheroes or princesses, you can read a book about them and then use the dress up clothes to act out the book. Let's look at just some of the language concepts that dress up clothes can help teach and support:

- *Basic Concepts:* I think a fun way to work on concepts is to dress up like a superhero and then pretend to be one "flying" around the house/outside. Prepositions like in, out, on, off, through, next to, between, up, down, high low, under, etc.
- *Verbs:* Dress up and target verbs like run, walk, crawl, skip, jump, climb, fly, etc.
- *Following/Giving Directions:* Naturally weave in some directions while you dress up with your child targeting the vocabulary, concepts, and verbs mentioned above. "Let's pretend to FLY like Superman!" or "Let's CLIMB like Spiderman!"
- *Answering "wh" questions:* You can ask your child an array of questions to work on his understanding of the target vocabulary. Where are you going? Where should we climb? What color is Spiderman's suit? What color is Belle's dress?
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* Playing dress up is a PERFECT time to work on social/pragmatic and play skills! Eye contact, topic initiation, topic maintenance, topic closure, personal space, sharing, asking and answering questions, etc.

Sand/Water Play Table and Toys



Sand and water play is SO FUN! You obviously do not need to buy a water table to participate in this kind of play. You can do sand play at your local park or just fill up a large tote with sand. You can do the same with water play! Just grab some plastic cups and spoons and fill up the sink (and place a large towel on the floor, HA!). Let's look at just some of the language concepts that sand and/or water toys can help teach and support:

- *Vocabulary/labels:* You can target water/sand play words like water, sand, cups, shovel, rake, etc.
- *Basic Concepts:* You can basically work on ALL basic concepts while using sand and water. While building in sand or playing with water, you can target prepositions like in, out, on, off, through, next to; Size concepts like big, small, biggest, smallest, bigger, smaller; colors; counting skills; etc.
- *Verbs:* Target verbs like build, move, put, take, rake, push, pull, make, etc.

- *Answering “wh” questions:* You can ask your child an array of questions to work on her understanding of the target vocabulary. Where is the big cup? How did you make that tower of sand? What color is that cup?
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* While playing with your child work on appropriate social skills: eye contact, topic initiation, topic maintenance, topic closure, personal space, sharing, asking and answering questions, etc.

Ride on Toy/Car



Let's look at just some of the language concepts that a ride on toy can help teach and support:

- *Basic Concepts:* You can basically work on ALL prepositions like in, out, on, off, through, next to as you drive the car all over.
- *Part/Whole relationships:* The car is PERFECT for working on part/whole relationships! Doors, windows, bumpers, lights, roof, etc.
- *Following/Giving Directions:* Give the child directions on where to drive the car...down the hallway, around the corner, between the chairs...etc. Then have the child give a peer directions on where to drive the car!
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* Ride on toys and cars are fantastic for working on social/pragmatic skills including eye contact, topic initiation, topic maintenance, topic closure, personal space, sharing, asking and answering questions, etc. This can be a great time to work on requesting a turn, waiting for a turn, helping a friend get in or out of the car, interacting in play scripts, etc.

Inset puzzles



Not only are they great for fostering cognitive skills such as problem solving, reasoning, visual processing and special awareness skills, puzzles can also encourage fine motor skills and can be used to teach vocabulary and other language concepts. Let's look at just some of the language concepts that puzzles can help teach and support:

- *Vocabulary/labels:* Inset puzzles tend to have items in them in certain categories, so they can be very helpful in targeting vocabulary in specific categories. For example, farm animals, ocean animals, zoo animals, transportation, occupations/community helpers, numbers, letters, shapes, colors, etc.
- *Basic Concepts:* Some puzzles are specifically designed to target basic concepts like colors. However, you can use puzzles to target all sorts of other concepts. For example if the child needs to learn big vs small you can teach this using a farm animal puzzle and using the different sized farm animal puzzle pieces. You can do the same for other size concepts as well as
- *Verbs:* You can target a variety of verbs with puzzles. You can target the verbs that are associated with the items in the puzzles: i.e. animal puzzle can target verbs like sleep, eat, walk, run, and make their different "animal sounds."
- *Part/Whole relationships:* Puzzles are GREAT for part-whole relationships! Depending on the exact puzzle, you can target parts of one object or parts of many.
- *Answering "wh" questions:* You can ask your child an array of questions to work on her understanding of the target vocabulary. What animal goes "moo?" Which person puts out fires? Which vehicle does the police man drive? Again the specific questions will vary depending on the content in the puzzles.
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* Though puzzles can be a great independent activity, they can also be done in pairs or in groups to help promote social skills including eye contact, topic initiation, topic maintenance, topic closure, personal space, sharing, asking and answering questions, etc.

Magnetic letters and board



OK of all the toys I have mentioned, these probably have the least versatility in regards to language support specifically. However I have found that most kids LOVE playing with magnetic letters in one way, shape, or form. My daughter LOVES playing with hers and she really doesn't ID letters yet at age three...but she will put the letters together and make up "words" and the more exposure to letters the more opportunities she will have to learn them in the long run...and reading promotes language development and language development promotes reading! Let's look at just

some of the language concepts that magnetic letters/numbers can help teach and support:

- *Basic Concepts:* You can target letter ID (obviously, right?) and colors. You can also use the magnet letters in a **barrier game** and work on prepositional concepts. I did this once with a preschool student who was VERY into letters and he was VERY motivated!
- *Following/Giving Directions:* As I mentioned above, you can use the letters in a barrier game to target prepositional concepts.



• Magnadoodle OR Dry Erase Board

- Let's look at just some of the language concepts that a Magna Doodle can help teach and support:
- *Vocabulary/labels:* This is where you can get CREATIVE! you can draw whatever vocab you want to work on! Cars, trucks, animals, concepts, numbers, shapes...the possibilities are endless!
- *Basic Concepts:* You can basically work on ALL basic concepts using this tool by using simple drawings: Prepositions like in, out, on, off, through, next to; Size concepts like big, small, biggest, smallest, bigger, smaller; colors; counting skills; shapes
- *Verbs:* Again, the possibilities are endless here! You can target any verb that you can draw!
- *Part/Whole relationships:* You can draw basically ANYTHING and then work on teaching the parts of the whole.
- *Following/Giving Directions:* You can use the Magna Doodle to practice following directions. You can use two (or more) of them and use them in a **barrier game**!
- *Answering "wh" questions:* You can ask your child an array of questions to work on her understanding of the target vocabulary using the pictures you each draw.
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* You can use the magna doodles to practice many social pragmatic skills such as eye contact, topic initiation, asking and answering questions, etc.

Play-dough (you can make your own!)



Let's look at just some of the language concepts that play dough can help teach and support:

- *Vocabulary/labels:* You can target all the different vocabulary related the tools you use (scissors, pizza cutters, rollers, etc) as well as the different shapes you make or the items you make.
- *Basic Concepts:* You can basically work on ALL basic concepts with play dough: prepositions like in, out, on, off, through, next to; Size concepts like big, small, biggest, smallest, bigger, smaller; colors; counting skills; shapes.
- *Verbs:* cut, push, roll, twist, put in, take out, smash, squeeze, etc
- *Part/Whole relationships:* You can even target part/whole relationships when creating different items with the dough...like making a tail for a dog or eyes on a person.
- *Following/Giving Directions:*
- *Answering "wh" questions:* You can ask your child an array of questions as you sit and create things with the dough.
- *Social/pragmatic skills:* You can target eye contact, topic initiation, topic maintenance, topic closure, personal space, sharing, asking and answering questions, etc. as you have the children make different items out of the dough.

****REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE YOUR CHILD'S BEST TOY!!!**

-Toys and Activities must be motivating and interesting to your child. Choose toys that are appropriate to child's cognitive level not age level.

-Joint attention is a crucial preverbal skill

-Engage in attention sharing, and reciprocal interaction

Activities to Increase Interaction and Joint Attention:

*Hide and Seek, Peek a boo, Tickle, I'm gonna get you, silly sounds, etc.

*Physical play

*Mirror play

*Bubbles

*Song and finger play

*Microphones, echo microphones

*Musical instruments

*Dancing

*Puppets

*Simon Says

*Cause/Effect toys

*Picture books

*Board Games

Techniques to use to improve language skills:

*Self Talk- Talk about what you are doing...

“Mommy is making cookies”.

*Parallel Talk- Talk about what your child is doing.

“Wow, you just built a tower.”

“You have the blue block.”

*Descriptions- describe what you see in comments

“Look at the cow. He has black spots. “

“The pig is fat. He likes to play in the mud.”

*Expansions and Extensions(chaining)- repeating and expanding your child’s language without directly correcting

Child says, “Red” then Adult says, “ Yes, it’s a red car.”

Child says, “Car go” then Adult says, “ Yes, the car is going.”

*Repetition- repeat word back correctly

Child says, “Tat”

Adult says, “ Yes, that’s a cat.”

*Model the language you want your child to use...

Child holds his arms up and grunts.

Adult says, “you want up.” Up, up, up...(then picks the child up)

Child says, “uh, uh”

Adult says, “yes, up, up, up”

*Hold things back to increase verbal attempts to request toys and request recurrence (more)

Don't forget to praise your child for all attempts at vocalizing, using a word, phrase, approximations, etc.

Find a balance for using these techniques. Use them on and off during periods of play. Use them naturally. If they are interrupting the give and take of interaction and communication then you are using them too much. Make comments as you are playing but do not ask too many questions or do too much of the talking if your child is using words.

ALWAYS REACH OUT TO YOUR CHILD'S SPEECH-LANGUAGE THERAPIST FOR MORE IDEAS FOR SPECIFIC GOALS!!!!

