



December 2009



Focus on Health and Safety



Toy Safety for Preschoolers

A parenting organization (www.parenting.org) has published a checklist for toy safety in preschoolers. Here are some of their suggestions:

- Your child should be able to comfortably pick up the toy.
- Make sure that it does not contain slots or wholes which could pinch small fingers.
- Avoid plastic toys (they can break and expose sharp edges).
- Avoid toys with pointed objects, as a child can fall on them.
- Make sure that no part of a toy is attached to a pin or staple.
- Do not use indoor toys outside, this could cause rusting.
- Stuffed toys should be stitched with strong thread and not filled with small loose pellets (a choking hazard).

Always remember to check the age recommendation by the toy manufacturer (when possible). The suggested age takes into account both cognitive and safety factors.

Check the above website for more extensive safety lists for all age groups.

Celebrating and Supporting Inclusion



The DART program is committed to providing services to children with special needs in appropriate settings, including early childhood settings such as Head Start, daycares, Pre-K Counts classrooms, or other community preschool settings. DART's commitment includes ongoing professional development for both administrators and staff working directly with children. In addition, DART has staff who plans and provides outreach activities (such as in-services) to early childhood providers to support them in building their knowledge base and skills for successful inclusion of children with special needs. We are proud of the growth of inclusive practices being implemented throughout Allegheny County. Bravo!

Listed below are just some of the many professional development activities either attended by DART staff or provided by DART to support caregivers working in early childhood settings:

- *Applying Adult Learning Principles to Consultative Practices*
- *Recommended Best Practices for Early Childhood Classrooms*
- *Inclusive Practices in Pennsylvania*
- *How Down Syndrome Lifted Me Up*
- *Early Childhood Behavior Institute*
- *National Autism Conference*
- *Guiding Children's Behavior: Positive Strategies to Minimize Classroom Challenges*
- *Assistive Technology Institute*

Please let your DART contact person know if you need support in continuing to provide children with special needs the opportunity to participate in early childhood programs or if you have question about how to initiate support for your child or students in these settings.



Early Learning Standards 101 and the Importance of Play

This month's focus is Language and Literacy. This standard is broken into four separate areas: Receptive Language, Expressive Language, Comprehension, and Literacy.

- *Receptive Language* refers to children's ability to understand words and sounds.
- *Expressive Language* relates to children's ability to use speech and to communicate meaning.
- *Comprehension* deals with children understanding information and meaning from stories and texts when they connect new information to prior experiences and knowledge.
- *Literacy* refers to development of emergent skills including reading and writing.

Some goals within this area include

- Following simple and multiple-step directions (receptive language).
- Asking and answering relevant questions and sharing experiences (expressive language).
- Retelling a simple story in sequence using illustrations or props (comprehension).
- Recognizing environmental print including logos and signs (literacy).

There are many ways to help your child increase her language and literacy skills and have a great time doing it. Here are just a few suggestions.

To focus on Receptive Language:

- Act out or retell a favorite story using the pictures in the book or puppets (some books even come with them!).



To focus on Expressive Language:

- Engage your child in a conversation about real experiences and events in her daily routine (you can talk about what you're doing in the house or what your child did at school). Dinnertime is a great time to try this out.

To focus on Comprehension:

- Have your child "read" a book by telling you what is happening in the pictures.

To focus on Literacy:

- Read books that contain rhymes, repetition, and nonsense words (these books can be fun to read aloud together).

Remember, many of these suggestions can overlap and go together while your child is playing in other areas!!



Psych Files

Tips for the Holiday Break



It's the beginning of the holiday season.

As this time of year approaches there are many changes in busy schedules for both parents and children. One of the biggest changes for our children is being on break from school. This can be difficult for any preschool-age child but even more so for children with developmental delays. Children at this age haven't developed a concept of time and don't comprehend the date of coming back to school after a long break. There are some things parents can do at home to help reduce stress for both themselves and their children. Being prepared is the first step to minimizing stress and having an enjoyable holiday season.

- Try to stay on your "home routine". We all like those days when we can sleep in but try to make sure your child goes to bed at the same time and is still waking up at the same time. This will help with the transition back to waking up for those early school days! Perform all the same tasks that normally take place before school and prepare the child for what the day will look like instead: playing at home, running errands, welcoming visitors, etc.
- Ask your children's teacher or therapist about how to keep up progress and reduce skills regression. Incorporate those learning or therapy ideas in your family's holiday traditions to make it fun and keep the child in gear for learning.
- For those children who have difficulty with being in new situations, meeting people or who might be attending a different childcare setting while on break, develop a social story* to help prepare your child.
*A social story shares information about various situations and activities. For our age group - more pictures, less words!

There are numerous resources available online but this website can help get you started:

<http://www.freewebs.com/kidscandream/page12.htm>

*Parents with children diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may find this website useful:

http://autisticchildparenting.suite101.com/article.cfm/5_tips_for_surviving_the_holidays

- As I wrote in the spring, give your child responsibilities! This will help reduce your stress. Your child can put stamps on holiday card envelopes, stick bows on gifts and decorate holiday cooks.

Email me with any questions: Felicia.humenik@aiu3.net

Sources: "Parents Corner" created by Sue Vandervort, DART Preschool Service Coordinator. "Focus on Health and Safety" created by Cindy Callaghan, DART Service Coordinator for Physical Health. "Early Learning Standards 101 and The Importance of Play" information provided by PDE and DPW. "Psych Files" created by Felicia Humenik, DART School Psychologist.