

January 2010

Dear Families,

For those of us that celebrated holidays last month, January is a welcomed time! We can finally relax a bit after all of the running around to stores, the family get-togethers and other obligations. Once again, we can take the time to reflect and daydream about our children and about the choices we make for them. There was an interesting article in the paper the other day about toys that incorporate technology vs. the good old-fashioned toys of yesterday, and which are better for our children's learning. Here are some reflections we had in the Education Department about this topic.

As technology and the Internet permeate people's lives more and more, it makes sense to introduce children to computers and other inventions they will use as they grow older. A toy is not necessarily bad or useless because it incorporates technology. However, as parents, we should examine the stated purpose of such a toy. We can evaluate how and what it teaches, and determine if our children could receive equal or greater value from a simpler, classic toy.

High-tech toys for little ones are often machines such as single-player computer games or programmed toys with only one or two functions. The benefits of interaction with such a machine versus the benefits of real-life experiences where our children can model, create, explore and develop their own ideas through play can not be compared! Encouraging play with open-ended toys instead of playing with closed-ended toys is always a good idea.

What is an open-ended toy?

- An open-ended toy encourages free play with an *unlimited number of outcomes*. For example, a set of wooden or cardboard blocks can be used to create a variety of different structures.

What is a closed-ended toy?

- A closed-ended toy has a *limited number of outcomes*. An example of this is an electronic toy that lights up when a button is pushed. Not all closed-ended toys are bad. After all, a stacker is a classic closed-ended toy. Even though it can only be put together correctly in one way, your child must develop and use logic and fine motor skills to play with it.

Here are some examples of open-ended toys/games for all ages:

For Infants:

- You are usually the best toy! Your child will delight in watching your face, listening to your voice and just being around you.

- Looking at a brightly colored mobile or listening to a wind-up musical toy
- Toys with contrasting colors such as red, black and white are most interesting
- Toys with faces or patterns such as curves or checks

For Toddlers:

- Push-along toys, soft balls, cuddly stuffed animals, board or cloth books
- Toy cars and trucks, blocks
- Buckets and shovels for water or sand play
- Crayons and paper, and Playdough
- Books and hand puppets
- Dress up clothes, and even pots and pans; cupboards

For Preschoolers:

Play-acting is great fun for this age group. Try offering:

- Toy tool box, or an old one with anything dangerous removed first
- Phones, ironing boards
- Fire-fighter's helmet, various hats, and dress up clothes
- Cardboard box that can be turned into a stove, car or boat
- Stuffed animals, cars, trucks, dolls, blocks or Legos

Outdoor Toys/Equipment:

- Bikes, swings, balls, bats of various sizes, frisbees, hoola hoops
- Sandboxes with shovels and scoops
- Chalk and sponges or rags

For School-Age:

- Board games, books, drawing and painting supplies

Outdoor Toys/Equipment:

- Croquet set
- Bikes, jump ropes
- Roller blades and/or skate boards (with helmets and pads)
- Balls and bats of various sizes, frisbees

If you would like more ideas about open-ended toys and fun things to do with your children, there are wonderful resources out there for you. One place to start might be to visit a website that will help spark your imagination like www.create-kids-crafts.com or www.sciencetoymaker.org.

Respectfully,
The Education Team

If you would like to respond to anything you read, have parenting questions or child development topics that you'd like to see explored in future issues of this monthly newsletter, please e-mail us at education@tutortime.com. We would love to hear from you!

An Essential Task of Childhood

To help children learn to live as productive members of society, we need to first teach them how to behave properly. For each family, the rules of behavior may differ, but some of the techniques that you can use to help guide your child are the same.

- **Have realistic expectations** – Research has shown that children's brains are different from those of adults. We also know that children do not have the same ability to control their bodies as adults do. Because of this, children behave, well, like children.

As much as possible, avoid situations in which your child has to behave in a way that is not natural. For example, when children are tired, they will throw fits and find it hard to behave. So arrange short shopping trips when your child is not tired.

- **Set your child up for success** – When families have realistic expectations about their child's behavior, they can make plans to help them succeed when a situation is unavoidable.

This might include putting items that you do not want your child to touch out of reach. Holding a child's hand when you are headed into a place where she should not run is another way that a parent can help a child be successful in meeting an expectation. Finally, bringing toys and snacks to occupy a child who has to wait is another way to help set him up for success.

- **Pick your battles** – When a child hears the word "no" too much, it can easily become background noise. Families can make the job of learning rules a lot easier by focusing on certain things at different times. For example, is it important that your child wear a shirt and pants that match? In the grand scheme of things, this issue is probably not worth the battle that might ensue by insisting on a particular outfit.

- **Give choices** – Children are basically powerless in their lives. They are told when and what to eat, where to go, with whom they can play and how they will spend most

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What is Tutor Time® LifeSmart™?

Tutor Time® LifeSmart™ was designed by early childhood specialists and national experts to prepare children for kindergarten, elementary school and beyond. Because we know that our society places a strong emphasis on particular academic disciplines, the Tutor Time LifeSmart curriculum gives children particularly strong foundations in:

Reading & Writing

Our WordSmart™ and Phonics Express programs support and guide emerging writing skills in large and small group activities. The Book Center provides children with a quiet place to explore quality literature. The Language Center provides them with the tools and materials they need to explore the written word. Journaling and interactive activities extend learning at home.

Mathematics

Our MathSmart™ program means that counting, numbers and mathematical concepts play an important role in Tutor Time classrooms. The Math Center gives children daily opportunities to join in number games, sort and investigate patterns. During MathSmart Circle Times, teachers lead activities that allow children to actively explore important math concepts.

Science

Our NatureSmart™ Circle Times give children the chance to perform experiments, investigate properties and observe cause and effect. The Nature Center provides children with a rich array of natural materials and tools, encouraging them to explore their understanding of the natural world and actively build scientific thinking skills.

If you have questions about the Tutor Time® classroom experience, please speak with your director or contact us at ttinfo@tutortime.com.

TUTOR TIME
CHILD CARE / LEARNING CENTERS

www.tutortime.com

Creating Character

This program invites children to explore what it means to be a person of character. This month's book is *My Friend is Sad* by Mo Willems. The story demonstrates why we need important people in our lives, like our friends. Tell your child what makes him or her so important to you!

Continued from previous page

of their time. All human beings (including children) have a need for power. When you give children choices, you are fulfilling their need for power in a healthy way.

The trick is to give choices from two options that are acceptable to you. Would you like to brush your teeth or put on your PJ's first? Do you want to put your coat on by yourself or would you like me to help? Either way, your child is doing what you would like them to do and they feel like they had some power in the matter.

- **Natural and/or logical consequences** – Because children are just learning rules of behavior, there are times when they will make mistakes. The best “teachers” are natural and/or logical consequences. If your son throws his plate, the food is gone and he may be hungry. If your daughter hits a playmate, that friend may not want to play with her for a time. When a child runs toward the street, he has to go inside or be carried.

Allowing for these sorts of results helps children connect actions with the consequences. However, we must still protect children from consequences that are harmful, such as learning to not touch the stove by getting a painful burn. Those are the times when a parent must intervene and remove a child from the situation.

Along with talking, walking, reading, writing, and a multitude of other skills, learning to live alongside others is an essential task of childhood. These simple ideas can make the learning process much easier on your child ... and you.

Extend the Tutor Time® Experience Into Your Home

There are many ways to support your child's growth and development at home. Here are some activities you can do together that will build all of your child's Smarts.

Infants – The next time you give your child a bath, recite this chant: “Hickory dickory dock. The mouse ran up the clock. The clock struck one, the mouse ran down. Hickory dickory dock.” Take the bar of soap or wash cloth you are using to wash your child, and move it up his arm as you are saying, “The mouse ran up.” Slide the soap or wash towel down his leg and into the water as you say, “The mouse ran down.” Have the item make a splash in the water.

Toddlers/Twaddlers – Look into a mirror with your child. Have her do different things as she watches her face. Some things to try: smile, stick out her tongue and look at it, open her mouth wide and look at her teeth, puff out her cheeks, or let your child think of some fun things to do in front of the mirror.

Preppers – Chant or sing the following song using the tune of London Bridge is Falling Down. “I can do a funny trick, funny trick, funny trick. I can do a funny trick. Here's what I can do (jump up and down).” Repeat the chant and add a second action to do besides jumping up and down. Keep saying the chant adding on new actions such as: shaking a leg, clapping your hands, turning around, or letting your child come up with things to do.

Preschool/Pre-K – Clap a pattern with your hands and see if your child can repeat it. Switch roles and have your child clap a pattern for you to repeat. You could also try snapping your fingers in a pattern, or stomping your feet or clicking your tongue.

Kindergarten/Adventure Club – Gather some ice cubes (or help your child fill small plastic containers with water and than freeze them) and place them in a bowl. Encourage your child to stack the ice cubes onto a plate making ice structures.

Working Together

You're at home with your child, getting ready to go to the grocery store. In the process of gathering everything you need including the coupons, your wallet, car keys, and your child, you stub your toe on a toy lying on the floor. An automatic response triggers as you yell, “Ow!” Your child comes into the room where he finds you sitting on the floor holding your toe.

In your mind you're thinking, “Why did you leave your toys out?! I wish I had put my shoes on! I don't have time for...” As these thoughts are racing through your mind, your child puts his hand on your shoulder and says, “Are you okay?” You look up to see your child bending down with compassion flowing out of his big brown eyes. As he rubs your back, you start to feel better and he says, “I can help you. Do you need ice? I can get you some.” You think, “Wow! My baby sure is growing up fast! Where did he learn to do this?”

No longer is the grocery store in your thoughts. Instead, you are amazed at the loving care your child is providing you.

About a week later, after a long day at work, you are enjoying the beautiful weather as you stroll down the sidewalk towards your child's school. Once inside the building, you pass a teacher who is walking down the

hall with a child who is obviously upset. You hear the teacher say, “I see you're upset. I get upset when I get hurt too. Some ice will make you feel better.” The kindness and compassion that the teacher shows the child in her words, tone and body language reminds you of the day you stubbed your toe. At that moment, you realize this is where your child learned the compassion and care he showed you a couple of days ago.

One of the goals of the LifeSmart™ curriculum is to prepare children to be lifelong learners, not only in math and language, but in relating to people. Teachers are supported in helping your child learn to be PeopleSmart™ on a daily basis. Children experience how to communicate with others by both listening and speaking during Circle Time activities. Children build relationships as they role play being adults in the Pretend Center. During small group activities, children are invited to work as a team to accomplish the same task. The next time you enter your child's class, ask your teacher to tell you how she is supporting your child in becoming a PeopleSmart™ kid!

Focus on Learning

At Tutor Time, you may see children sitting on a rug or at the table playing with marbles, coins or crayons. You think to yourself, “How are they getting ready for Kindergarten if all they do is play?” While it looks like child's play, children are actually busily working as they learn to sort these objects by color, value or size. Children learn to sort when using hands-on materials in a meaningful context.

Our teachers support your child in learning this pre-math skill by putting out different and fun objects for children to organize. When children work with these materials they learn:

- To notice details, similarities and differences in objects
- To form categories, which are essential concepts for reading and math
- Concepts of color, size and shape
- Logical reasoning
- Numerical concepts like more and less

The next time you are in your child's classroom, notice how your child's play introduces them to pre-math skills and logical reasoning experiences. You can see this in the photos of displays, the written descriptions of what children learn during experiences, or by observing a group of children engaged in dividing a pile of marbles into groups of the same color.

