

Who needs toys?

ElBea Stonier, MS CCC-SLP Speech Language Pathologist

Many parents today are bombarded by advertisements for the latest, greatest, and sometimes most expensive toys on the market. These toys are often advertised as a great way to help your child learn new words and concepts like colors and shapes, or even learn new motor skills like walking. But, sometimes those expensive toys turn out to be noisy distractions from where the real learning happens.

With a little bit of imagination, even the most boring objects around your house can be just as good (and often better!) than any toy you can buy:

1. Instead of books, look for ways to “read” through magazines, grocery store ads, even pictures on cereal boxes. When looking at these pictures with your child, point out common objects. Use lots of different types of words to describe what is happening in the picture (“Look, she’s carrying a puppy!”), or even make up a short story. Remember that stories don’t have to be long – they just need a beginning, middle, and end. “This boy looks happy. He is going to the store with his mom. They are buying cereal.” Helping your child pay attention to all different types of pictures and words around them may help them learn about all of the important things they will someday read that aren’t in books.



2. We know that children who are able to spend time experimenting with movement and exploration are often good at solving problems. This type of exploration doesn’t have to be with toys though – an old purse or backpack with tissues, crayons, empty makeup containers, and junk mail in it might help your child engage in many different types of play and exploration. Carrying objects, pretending to be a mom leaving for the store, putting things in and taking them back out are great ways for young children to learn new cognitive skills.

3. Lots of young children love spending time at the playground, but sometimes it’s just not possible to get there. Look for ways to help your child jump, climb, and burn energy at home: Put pillows on the floor and practice jumping from one pillow to the next. Put dining room chairs in a line and have your child crawl under them. Use a belt or scarf to play tug-of-war. Let your child lay on a blanket while a big brother or sister pulls them around the house.

Remember that “play” often doesn’t involve toys at all. Our Provo Early Intervention Program’s Little Explorers activities are a great way to get some new ideas about how to turn everyday objects and routines into exciting ways to learn. If you live in the Provo, Utah school district, have a child under three and are interested in taking part in the Little Explorer’s monthly activities, email peip@esgw.org for more information.