



Getting Creative and Stimulating Your Children's Imagination and Curiosity

With Mother's Day this weekend, it got me thinking of my own journey through this world of parenting. One thing I've learned by way of personal and professional experience is the undoubtably huge benefit of understanding child development. Knowledge of developmental milestones provides parents and caregivers a better understanding of where most children are and should be in regard to ability, skills, and understanding. When parents have a better grasp on this fundamental information, we have a tendency to become less frustrated with our children's behavior, more empathetic, and better informed as to how we subsequently provide rules, limits, and expectations. This all ties into our own perceptions of appropriate and healthy behavior. For example, I didn't expect my children to do the dishes at 3 or 4 years of age, but now that they're 8 and 11, you bet they're not only loading and unloading the dishwasher, but also setting the table and helping cook on occasion!

Once we have a better grasp of what is developmentally "normal" for a child at a particular age, it is easier—and sometimes beneficial—to adjust our perception of situations and behaviors. Children need comfort, care, guidance and consistency from caregivers. They also need freedom to play and explore. During these times of social distancing at home, we can reimagine common household items into children's toys. Think pots and pans as musical instruments and bed sheets as fortress walls. Reimagine household items as unique and fun learning tools. Can your child count the spoons on the kitchen floor while you're cooking? Can they play with cheerios and place them into a Tupperware container? What does a wooden block versus a lego or a bunch—or a handful of legos—sound like when it's falling into metal mixing bowl? If your kids are a little older, can they help measure out ingredients while you're cooking? Fill a container with popcorn seeds or dry beans, tape it securely shut, and you've got an oversized baby rattle! Or use it as a mini treasure chest, filling it with pebbles, leaves, twigs and other special finds. When you sense a meltdown coming on, present the box to your child like it's some exciting gift for an instant diversion. With just a bit of imagination, a laundry hamper, old storage bin, large bucket, or baby bathtub can transform into a rocket ship blasting off to the moon, cruise ship sailing to sunny shores (add a mop, as a mast) or a pirate boat out hunting for treasure (a bandana or eye patch is a nice touch). Put your child in the driver's seat and push or pull them along!

How about playing the “alphabet game” while having dinner. This is one of our favorites and doesn’t require anyone getting up from their seat during the meal! Simply go around the table and name things that start with each letter of the alphabet. For kids who are a little older, decide on a theme (animals, peoples names, etc.). Play eye-spy while sitting on the couch or flashlight tag before bedtime. There are so many fun, creative learning opportunities at the tip of our fingers. These activities provide physical, emotional, intellectual and social benefits to your child.

Perception is an interesting thing. I’ve always tended to be an optimist, but I’ll admit that has taken a blow from COVID and all the changes it has brought to our lives. Today I’m reminding myself that we’re *safe at home, not stuck at home*. For many people, the perception around play is that it’s unimportant. But the opposite is really true: PLAY is how children LEARN and GROW. Just for a bit today, remind yourself as parent or caregiver that you have unique and interesting learning tools all around the house that will be fun for both your child and you, if you just change your perception and think outside the box!

[Check out this link](#) to the CDC with developmental milestones for children birth – 5 years old and learn about children’s language/communication, cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving), physical and social-emotional development by age.

And [this link to the CDC’s FREE developmental tracker](#) app where you can track your child’s milestones from age 2 months to 5 years. This app has illustrated checklists, tips from the CDC for encouraging your child’s development, and photos and videos that illustrate each milestone.

Have fun, stay safe and be well.