

Suggested Activities to Enhance Motor and Language Development

Opportunities to practice motor and speech- language skills over the LONG December break are plentiful. Here are suggestions on how to encourage the children to keep working on skills during the time they are home doing every day and holiday activities.

Fine Motor Activities:

Hand strengthening activities:

- Bake cookies. Have child mix ingredients, knead dough and use cookie cutters to make cookies.
- Tear wrapping paper into smaller pieces and then have child crumble paper into balls. These can be used to practice throwing (overhand and underhand) into or at targets. Child could also practice flicking small balls with the okay sign.
- If there is snow outside, have child make snowballs. Have child practice cupping their hands and alternating right and left hand on top and bottom. Again, snowballs can be used to practice throwing up in the air or at a tree.
- Have child use a squirt bottle (a small one) as often as they can. This can be paired with watering plants, washing away shaving cream on a window or bathtub wall, and/or squirting at the snow to make it disappear. Food coloring dye optional.
- If packaging materials were gotten over the holidays, save the larger pieces of Styrofoam and/or bubble wrap. Styrofoam can be used with golf tees and a small wooden mallet to hammer the tees into Styrofoam (simulates cutting with a scissor). Tees can also be pulled out using pinching fingers. Bubble wrap can be popped with the index and thumb for strengthening, using a fist like a hammer, or can be jumped on in any combination of movements (forward, up and down, side to side, backwards and /or paired with another fine motor activity such as doing a puzzle).
- If big boxes were also a part of the holidays, they can be made into forts, cars, etc using crayons to color them. Have Fun and let your imagination run wild and free.

Upper body strengthening:

- Have child engage in upper extremity (limb) weight bearing activities such as bear walking (walking on hands and feet backside facing up), crab walking (walking on hands and feet with backside off the floor) while engaging in fine motor activities such as assembling a Potato Head, doing a jigsaw puzzle, or some other game that has many pieces that can be assembled by a child.

- Again, if there is snow, going sledding. Have the child pull or push the saucer or sled up a hill. A small amount of weight could be tried if the task is too easy.
- Activities that help strengthen a child trunk (body) include rolling, crawling, pushing up from the floor, lifting their legs in the air (maybe with a small ball held between their ankles to pass over their head into a laundry basket), playing in tall kneel (on knees) and/or half kneel (one knee down on the mat and the other foot on the floor) while engaged in balloon volley ball or a simple game of catch. These activities will help your child maintain an upright posture when he/she returns to school.

Visual Perceptual/Visual Motor Activities:

- Have child do a jigsaw puzzle. Encourage child to get 3 or 4 pieces at a time and pieces that would go together (ie: Dora's eyes, hair, mouth). Having a child visually scan for specific pieces will improve their eye muscles as well as improve their scanning abilities. If difficult, either have the child use their pointer finger to touch each piece to find the correct one or hold up two pieces (one being the piece the other not being the specified piece) to see if the child can get the piece. A great way to build in language skills as well, (ie top/bottom, left/right, concepts and color matching).
- Play I Spy using a flash light when out on a walk or around the house. Works on both visual scanning and tracking, as well as language concepts.
- Play games like Simon Says.
- Use tweezers, tongs to work on reaching, grasping and releasing objects and placing items into a cup. Holding tongs/tweezers in a tripod position (like a pen or pencil) will help with their grasp and strengthen it as well.
- Use shaving cream on a window, patio door, or the bathroom wall to draw shapes and/or letters. Child can also practice printing the upper and lower case letters of their name. Great practice for kindergarten.
- Activities like dot to dots, hidden pictures, and just plain coloring sheets can be obtained from the dollar store or maybe printed off at the local library computer using the internet.

Oral-Motor Activities help the children move and strengthen their tongue, lips, and cheek muscles to help with speech sounds:

Tongue movements:

- Lick frosting from a cookie or cupcake.
- Lick a candy cane.
- Use tongue to clear food from corners of mouth and lips before using a napkin

- Push a cheerio to top of mouth and hold it there with tongue
- Put your finger outside child's cheek and have them push it with their tongue

Lip movements:

- Blow ripped up wrapping papers from hand or across a table
- Blow out a candle with help from an adult
- Blow bubbles
- Cotton ball races, blow cotton balls across the table with a straw
- Use a straw to sip a drink
- Practice using an open cup instead of a sipper cup

Biting/Chewing:

- Take smaller than usual bites of treats or crackers
- Bite specific pieces of shaped treats (point of star shaped item)
- Chew with lips closed to keep food in
- Chew new and different textures of foods (crunchy/chewy)
- Try new flavors and tests (cinnamon, mint, sour)

Language is everywhere, in every activity:

- **TALK**...about people you are with or will be with, places you will be going, activities you will be doing. Encourage the children to talk about what they are doing. If they usually use one word, encourage them to use 2 words together. If they use 2 words, encourage them to use 3 word sentences. If you don't understand what they have said, ask them to repeat it.
- **LISTEN**...to what your child is saying. If they are not using sounds or words, encourage them to talk. If they are using words, encourage them by responding to what they have said and expanding on it (Eg: Child says: Look puppy!... Parent responds: Yes, a white puppy!)
- **REVIEW** and **RECALL**...talk about what you just did, where you just were, what happened there, the activity you are doing or just did together. Immediately after the

activity and again later or the next day to recall the details and work on memory skills. Help them try to predict what will happen next in a schedule or activity. Discuss how things could have happened differently in an activity.

- **QUESTION**...ask questions that need yes/no answers. Use What? Who? Where? Why? and How many? Questions. Help the kids answer if they need help to respond by providing a model or suggestion of what to say.
- **WORD VARIETY**...Don't forget to encourage kids to count items, label their colors, compare sizes of things, use action words (run, walk, sit, kneel, stand), use description words (soft, hard, light, heavy) and use place words (up, down, on top, over, under, next to)
- **SOUND PRODUCTION**: If your child has difficulty producing a sound, try to help them practice saying it more clearly. Practice saying a variety of sounds. Play a "making silly sounds" game where you make a sound and they need to try to imitate it. Play the "copycat game" -you say a sound or word and they have to say the same thing. Ask them to repeat what they have said, but only once or twice, so they don't become frustrated.
 - Playing board games, such as Candyland, Chutes and Ladders, Uno, Hi-Ho Cherry-o, Memory, Scrabble Junior, etc. are great games for the whole family to play. Games are great for language skills and interacting (needing to take turns, waiting for a turn, etc.).
 - Read and look at books.

Gross Motor Activities

Balance/Leg Strength:

- Jumping games (Hop Scotch) or jumping over small objects
- Go for walks, make it part of the daily routine for you and your family. Play games while you walk (see how many things you can find of a certain color or look for objects that begin with a certain letter)
- Go on a Scavenger Hunt: Take turns hiding and finding objects in your home. You can make it educational and fun. The Dollar Store has seasonal objects, foam letters and puzzles that work great!

Body Control/Body Awareness:

- The local library system has several DVD's that you can borrow for free (yoga, exercise, dance, etc.). All you need is a library card.
- Play games with your child. The games that you played as a kid are great! (Ring around the Rosey, Duck Duck Goose, Simon Says, Red Light Green Light)
- Make snow angels

Core Strength/Trunk Stability:

- Animal walking: take turns with your child choosing which animal to be and demonstrating how that animal "walks" (Bear, Dog, Crab, Snake, Fish, Frog)
- Obstacle Courses: Wheel barrow (have the child "walk" with their hands while you hold their hips, as they get stronger you can move your support more towards their feet), walking on a line of tape on the floor (forward, backwards and side-stepping), skipping, galloping
- Give your tables, windows and counters a cleaning! Have your child use shaving cream to practicing "writing" their letters, shapes or name with their fingers. Often kids love the sensation of shaving cream and you will be surprised how well it cleans. Make sure the surface is cleared and the child has on a smock or old clothes.

Coordination/Ball Skills:

- Practice kicking a ball (start with playground sized/medium ball), when your child becomes good at this you can work on balancing on one foot for a few seconds before kicking, kicking with direction to knock over a block tower or slowly rolling the ball to your child as they kick.
- Practice throwing a ball (start with a tennis ball size) overhand and underhand, when your child gets good at this; have them step with the foot that is opposite their throwing hand. You can have your child throw to you or a target taped on a wall, as their throwing skills progress increase the distance of throwing. Throw snowballs.
- Practice catching a ball (start with playground sized/medium ball), stand about 3 feet away from your child. As your child gets good at this, you can increase the distance and decrease the size of the ball.
- Practice bouncing a ball *This is a skill that is more commonly mastered when children are a little older than pre-school age, so don't be concerned if you child has difficulty with this task. Often children enjoy just bouncing and chasing the ball.