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Developing Skills with Homemade Games ***-Jaci Diamond, MA CCC-SLP***

As a therapist, I love new toys! But therapeutic materials can be quite costly and not always practical to recommend to the families I work with, so creating materials can often be your best bet.

Identifying objects, pictures, shapes, colors: Another favorite tool I like to incorporate into play routines is a puppet. Puppets provide the opportunity for a variety of learning experiences.

- If you're just getting your toddler to follow some simple directions and retrieve some basic objects, it's fun to put out pretend food items and have your toddler "get the banana", "get the apple" and then feed the puppet.
- If your toddler is identifying and labeling objects, puppets can also provide an exciting way of introducing action words. Encourage action words your child has the most exposure to throughout their daily routines and keep it simple so that you provide a language model your child may attempt to imitate: *puppy eat, puppy drink, puppy sleep*.
- If your toddler is ready to identify colors and shapes, puppets can also be a fun way to incorporate these. During our circle time routines with our preschoolers, we like to pass out foam shapes to each of the children. Our puppet is affectionately referred to as our "shape monster" and we sing "shape monster, shape monster munch munch munch, shape monster, shape monster wants a (name shape) for lunch". The children with the named shape come forward to "feed" the puppet.

Matching: I love to use family pictures whenever possible. I've found children are highly motivated when working with materials that are personalized and familiar. When introducing matching, I like to use family photos as an introduction to matching and memory games, and as children develop these skills move on to pictures of favorite characters, then familiar objects, etc.

- **Sorting:** Developmentally children should be able to sort objects first, and sort by color. Sorting by objects: Sort objects that the children play with because of their exposure to the vocabulary and it lends itself to lots of practice. For example by sorting their toys: blocks and crayons.
- **Sorting by color:** Crayons are fun, but a very motivating option would be M&M's. Start with two to three colors initially so that your child is successful and enjoys participating.

I spy: Our pre-k children love to locate tiny objects hidden in pictures. This concept can be introduced to preschoolers using objects and some creativity. A well-sealed Ziploc bag or a well-sealed water bottle can be filled with familiar objects and rice. The children squeeze the baggie or rotate the bottle to find the hidden objects. Some OT colleagues like to fill a Ziploc bag with objects and clear hair gel. It introduces the same concept and adds a sensory component.

Learning about letters: Its very engaging for children to be able to participate in an activity that comes from a familiar book. The book "Chicka Chicka Boom Boom" is a fun way to begin to introduce letters. Using a baking sheet or magnet board, magnetic letters and a picture of coconut tree, children can replicate their learning experience from the book and begin to identify those letters.