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Water Play Isn't Just For the Bath Tub!

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Water play isn't just for the bath tub or swimming pool. When the weather becomes warm, everyone thinks about ways to stay cool. Children of all ages enjoy playing with the hose, squirt toys, and buckets of water. Did you know that water play has educational value too? It can be a year-round sensory educational activity for children.

What is the value of allowing your child to engage in water play activities? First, young children acquire language and develop vocabulary when they interact with a supportive adult in multiple activities. Water play activities, for example, provide an opportunity for parent and child to exchange ideas and develop logical reasoning skills, all while spending time together.

Parents of very young children know that water play can be soothing. Some parents put their child in a warm tub for an early bath time as a way to release the day's tensions and calm the child in preparation for bedtime. Water play can also be used to introduce science and math concepts. A child may be given measuring cups of various sizes and plastic pitchers. As the child pours the water from one container to the next, problem solving skills are being developed. The child is observing how much liquid each container can handle before it overflows. An adult can encourage the child to pour the liquid so that it just touches the top of the container

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without overflowing. This task requires motor control. The parent can stimulate the child's reasoning by asking thoughtful questions such as, “Which container can hold the most liquid?” “Which cup is the smallest?” or “Which cup is the largest?” These questions introduce math, vocabulary words such as “largest” and “most.” In this

way, parents encourage their child to think about the volume of the container and make comparisons.

Water play can be easily managed in the tub, at the pool, or outside with buckets of water. For two year-old children, pouring water from one bucket to another will develop motor skills and eye-hand coordination.

Three and four year-old children can use tools with buckets of water. A paint roller dipped in a paint tray filled with water can be rolled up and down on a flat surface. A paint brush dipped in a bucket of water can be used to paint the sidewalk or fence. These activities encourage up and down motion and develop coordination. Chalk drawings on the sidewalk can be washed away with a water-soaked paint roller or sponge. This activity develops motor skills and strengthens muscles.



A turkey baster may be a kitchen tool, but can also be a fun water play tool. The motion required to make a turkey baster work properly helps a child use their hand muscles as he rubber end is squeezed to suck water in and push it back out of the tube end. These are the same hand muscles used for writing.

Plastic eye droppers use the same muscles that are required for holding a pencil. As the child squeezes the dropper to capture water and squeezes it again to release water, the pincher grasp is

strengthened. This grasp is the same used to hold a pencil. During this activity, an adult can ask the child questions like “How many eye droppers do you think it will take to fill this ½ measuring cup?” The child can estimate the number then perform the experiment to find the result.

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Dish soap can be added to buckets or bowls of water and an egg beater can be used to create bubbles. Please note, bubbles are not recommended for children under three because they may attempt to drink the water.

For children ages 3-6, using pitchers to pour water into containers is a great way to develop fine motor control and can be carried over into meal time when the child is permitted to pour their own drink. This teaches independence and encourages the child to take care of their own needs. By doing things themselves, children build positive self esteem and take pride in their successes. If spills occur, relax and allow your child to help with the clean-up. This, too, is a learning experience. Sometimes our failures can be as valuable as our successes if we learn from the mistake.

Reasoning skills are employed as the child determines how much liquid a glass can hold. Is a tall, thin container going to hold as much as a short, fat container? These are questions that can be directed to the child. Experimentation will provide them with the answer.

A hard plastic tub can be purchased at a hardware store for about \$5 and is a

Continued on next page

Water Play cont'd

portable water play station for use indoors or outdoors. The pan is normally used to mix cement and can be found with the tile supplies. Plastic storage tubs can also be used if they are not too deep. Caution! Adult supervision is required for any water activity. Drowning can occur in a very small amount of water.

In addition to water play in containers and with buckets, the kitchen sink is another area to be explored. Be sure to prepare the water play area for splashing. An old shower curtain can be used as a drop cloth to catch spills. Keep towels handy as well as plenty of paper towels. Clear away all items surrounding the sink. Dress your child and yourself appropriately and plan to get wet. Prepare a tub of plastic kitchen items such as a colander, measuring cups, ladles, pitchers, plastic glasses of various sizes, plastic tubing of varying lengths (for 5 and 6 year olds), and pots and bowls. Depending on the age of the child, limit the number of items available. A younger child requires fewer containers than an older child, who requires more choices. Decide how much time you want your child to experiment and set a timer, if necessary, to indicate when the play time will be over. Give your child your full attention during

water play time. This will allow for time to exchange ideas and think aloud about the observations being made. Example: "Did you see how much water the tall, thin container can hold?", "What will happen if we pour that water into this large bowl?", "Will it fill the bowl?", "Will the bowl overflow?" or "What makes you think so?"

These are the beginnings of scientific observation and experimentation. For older children, you can introduce words like "hypothesis" and "outcome." Hypothesis is your idea about how the experiment will turn out and is also known as the "outcome." Children enjoy learning large new words like these.

Siblings can be paired during water play. Older children can teach younger children through their behavior and through discussion. Parents can photograph the play experience. Kindergarten age children and older children can be encouraged to write about their water experiments. Younger children can dictate their ideas for an adult or older sibling to write. Water play activities have educational value and are a fun way to



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Here are some educational resources for water play activities, bubble activities, and more!

Book:

Rainy Day Magic by Joey Green, ©2006, (ISBN 1-59233-204-8)

Web sites:

- <http://fun.familyeducation.com/early-learning/family-learning/33372.html>
- <http://www.littlies.co.nz/page.asp?id=396>
- http://www.nationalgeographic.com/ngkids/trythis/trythis_water_splash.html
- <http://www.preschoolrainbow.org/preschool-outdoor.htm>



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