



Luzerne County Head Start, Inc.

NHSA Family Connections

December 2010

The Best Things in Life are Free!

Did you know that you may already have safe and very appropriate “toys” for young children right in your home? The best part is...many of these things are free or can be collected from other family members. These are things we all use in our everyday lives.

Many household objects can be great toys because they can be played with in more than one way by babies, toddlers and preschoolers. You just have to know which are safe to give your child.

Inspect any toys or objects you plan to give your child to be sure there are no sharp edges or points, and no splinters. Make sure any paint is non-toxic and none is flaking. Drop these objects to be sure they do not shatter or break when they hit the floor and that no small parts or pieces can break off.

“How can I tell if a toy or object is too small to give my baby?”

The fourth leading cause of death in young children is from choking! Here’s a simple way to tell if a toy or object is too small for children under 3 years of age:

- Save an empty cardboard roll from toilet paper and cut so it measures 2¼ inches long.
- Try to stick the toy or object inside. If it fits in the tube, then you know it is too small.
- It could fit into a child’s mouth and get stuck in his or her throat.



Small parts or pieces are dangerous! They can become stuck in a child’s throat and cause him or her to choke. Never let your child play with things like safety pins, coins, pen or marker caps, buttons, small batteries, baby powder and bottle tops.

- Do not give children necklaces and ties and other things that might break or that they will put around their necks.
- Do not give your child objects that have electrical cords or hinges. Always stay nearby and supervise young children when they play.



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Safe Toys Around Your Home

- Save cardboard boxes of all sizes and empty rolls from paper towels and toilet paper. Securely tape or glue some boxes closed; leave others open. Children can stack them, crawl inside, and even pretend they are tables and ovens!
- Gather cooking items such as: plastic bowls & lids, small pans, measuring cups, spoons, safe utensils.
- Collect things: large plastic bottle caps, leaves (for children over 3) and other “treasures.”
- Save dress up clothes such as: adult shoes, hats, shirts, dresses, bracelets, purses, wallets, etc.
- Use sofa cushions and pillows to stack and climb on or to build walls of “houses.” (Watch babies closely!)
- Keep newspaper, paper and old magazines. Toddlers can “read” and tear these, and preschoolers can cut these up with child safe scissors.
- Clean out empty packages, boxes and plastic bottles (no plastic bags!) from food or grooming products. Children can use these and pretend to cook and play grocery store.
- Play music and dance and sing together.

Remember to check all toys and objects regularly because they can become unsafe from typical wear and tear. Remove or throw away any that are no longer safe.

Wish or Need?

At this time of year most families give children wrapped gifts and toys for the holidays. If your family is struggling financially you may not be able to buy presents. This is difficult to explain to children. TV commercials and holiday shows are filled with toys and pictures of children receiving piles of presents to unwrap under a decorated pine tree. Even if you do not celebrate Christmas in your faith, your child will probably wish for gifts and toys.

In this season many families struggle to buy their children warm clothes or even the fixings for a special family dinner, let alone a holiday gift. Families of all faiths may be in need of assistance and all children deserve gifts—even if this is not their religious holiday.



A baby or toddler might not miss the presents or might be just as happy unwrapping boxes filled with old dress up clothes or a safe toy passed down from another child. But most children over 3 understand the idea of receiving gifts and wish for “new” toys at Christmas. All are disappointed if they don’t have at least one gift to open.

Help your children learn the difference between “wishes” and “needs.” When we need something it means that without it we will be hungry, cold, unhealthy, someone could get hurt or be unsafe. A wish is something that would be fun to have—but not having it will not hurt anyone or make them unsafe.



Explain that this year your family needs warm clothes or healthy food and that is what you must buy (or what Santa must bring). Even though these are not exactly what you all wish for this year, it might be different next year. We need warm clothes to be safe from the cold and healthy food to grow and stay well.

New toys are fun but they re not necessary to stay safe or keep us healthy. We cannot eat these things or use them to keep us warm! We need coats and boots to wear in the snow or we will get cold and sick.

Don’t get angry if your child asks for something that you know you can’t give him or her, just say, “You wish I could get that for you, so do I! Maybe someday I can.” If your child answers, “I need it!” Explain the difference between a wish and a need again. Then reply, “I wish we needed everything you can wish for!” Turn the conversation into a game of magic wishes.



Share Your Family's Special Celebrations

If your family does not celebrate the Christmas holiday, at this time of year your child may feel left out. We do not focus on holidays in our classrooms even though we make a special effort to help everyone feel included. Tell your child's teacher that you want to visit the class and talk about the special days your family celebrates.

Bring in any special objects to show the children. Tell a story about how you remember celebrating this day when you were a child. Ask the teacher if you can help the children make a special snack served for your holiday. This will help your child feel part of the class and help other children learn about different people in the world.



Family Reading Corner

Wish: *Wishing Traditions Around the World*,
By Roseanne Thong

Help your child learn more about wishes. Read about different wishing traditions from around the world is sure to educate and inspire young readers.

Many local organizations do give toys and Holiday or Seasonal Assistance to help families.

Read the information at the bottom of this page to learn more.

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ATTENTION EARLY HEAD START-HEAD START AGENCY: PUT YOUR MESSAGE TO FAMILIES BELOW!

IF your Head Start /Early Head Start organization does not offer any holiday assistance: contact your local county government, charity organizations, business associations and newspapers in your area to find places where families in need can go to get holiday gifts and/or meals for their children.

Use this space to type a list of local places and events that families can visit to benefit from a Holiday or Seasonal Assistance Program. If you run a program, invite a business or organization to visit to learn about the needs of your families or how to sponsor assistance.

Try one or more of the following groups in your area to ask what they provide: *The Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, Masonic Lodges, Knights of Columbus, Chamber of Commerce, Catholic Charities or faith-based organizations, local Police Department, County Office for Children and Families, Toys for Tots, Salvation Army Holiday Assistance Program.*