
Toys From Trash

By Dr. Connie Jo Smith

During difficult financial times parents may have to cut back on expenses and new toys may be one of the many things that have to go. While the reduction in new toys could result in disappointment for children and even guilt for parents, it could lead to more creativity and learning. There are many possible opportunities to create simple toys from what may otherwise be trash. Just look around.



Make a Puzzle

The front or back of cereal boxes, magazine covers, the comics, photocopies of favorite photos and more could become a puzzle. Your child can help decide the number of puzzle pieces and level of complexity. While your child has probably worked many puzzles, they may never have made one before. It is empowering to create a toy your own way. Who says puzzle pieces have to look any specific way? It is easy to make a puzzle by cutting the picture into straight strips that get put back together based on the sequence, rather than hooked together with typical jigsaw patterns. If there are two copies of the picture, one can be cut into the puzzle, while the other is used as a guide to work the puzzle. The extra picture can also be attached to the front of a storage folder as a label. Storing these new puzzles so that the pieces remain together when not in use can also be a creative adventure. Try using two pieces of construction paper (or news paper or cut pieces of a cardboard box with three sides stapled for a holder). Once you and your child get really skilled at making puzzles, you can make them more durable by putting the picture between two pieces of clear contact paper prior to cutting.

Make a Game

To make a lotto game, begin by cutting two exact sizes of two identical pictures and repeat this until you have six or more different pictures. Glue one of each picture on a piece of cardboard in a checkerboard fashion. Stack the remaining pictures for your child to use for matching to the pictures glued on the board. Pictures used can be from a catalog, photocopies of family member pictures, or patterns from colorful paper, like gift wrapping. Your child can help create the boards. Remember to identify a storage container for the cards and game board.

Make a checker board using paper, cardboard, or a wood square. Use crayons, markers, or paint for creating the squares or you can cut red and black construction paper squares and glue them onto a surface. Bottle caps can become the checkers. Older children may find it fun to create an original board game, including making decisions about the object, directions, and rules.

Create a Collage

Dedicate a space with containers for collecting collage materials. Use small boxes for different types of materials that the whole family can help collect. For example, one box can be for paper scraps. Colorful and foil paper that hard candy comes wrapped in, holes from anything hole punched, and pieces of aluminum foil may be added to the paper scraps box. String, yarn, thread, ties from bread, or other similar items can be stored together. Another box may be for collecting small items from nature, like twigs or pebbles. Bottle caps may be another category of items saved. Glue and a background surface, like cardboard or paper can be used to create and display a work of art made from a wide range of collectables. These works of art can be displayed proudly or given as gifts.

Match Caps and Lids

Empty and cleaned containers with caps or lids can be used as a matching activity. Your child could decorate the lids and containers with paint. There could be hours of fun in trying to match the lid to the right container. Try all sizes and shapes. A range of caps can be traced onto paper or fabric for your child to match the real cap to the outline. Remember to consider storage.

Save Socks

Socks can be decorated for special occasions, turned into puppets, or become bean bags. Using fabric paint to decorate socks can be a creative experience that may lead to your child helping to sort the laundry so they can find their creation. Older socks can have eyes, ears, a nose, mouth and hair added with glue, markers, or fabric paint. Older children can sew features onto the puppet. Add dry beans (or other similar objects) to socks and use a rubber band to contain the contents. Remember that some dry beans can be poisonous or could create a choking hazard for younger children.

Fly an Airplane

Older children may enjoy making paper airplanes. Free written, animated, and video instructions can be found on the Internet. After making the airplane, flights can be measured, demonstrations can be held and mobiles made from discarded planes. Other creative activities with paper that may be of interest includes creating original gift wrapping, making a Japanese paper ball, mixing up some paper mache, or folding origami.

There are so many ways to have fun with materials. Try doing an Internet search on homemade games or homemade toys and see what you can find. Swap ideas with relatives and friends. You may never want to buy toys again.

Copyright © 2009 WKU Child Care Resource and Referral

*Funded in part by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services through the University of Kentucky Research Foundation.
Equal Education and Employment Opportunities.*