Picture This: Using Your Child’s Photo for Learning Experiences
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Displaying your child’s picture in the home can send the message that they are important and that they belong. Involving children in creating photo displays can result in high quality parent-child time spent together and support the child’s learning and development. Professionally taken and framed photos hung on the wall may be the traditional method for photo display, but it is only one of many options. As you look at the examples below, let your own ideas run wild until you come up with ones that will work for your child’s age, the home environment, and your budget. The size of photo, number of copies needed, and paper quality should be decided based on the projects you pick.

**Photo Puzzle:** An 8 X 10” photo printed on heavy stock paper or glued to cardboard can be cut into jigsaw puzzle pieces for your child to work over and over again. The number of and complexity of puzzle pieces should depend upon your child’s age and ability. To make it easier to work the puzzle, trace the cut puzzle pieces onto a duplicate copy of the photo so children can match the cut piece to the outline. Two pieces will be enough for a toddler, 3-8 pieces would be appropriate for most preschoolers, and additional pieces can be added for older children. Children develop muscles in their fingers (fine motor skills), which is important for writing, when using their fingers to pick up and place puzzle pieces. Practice in matching shapes is related to math skills and recognizing and remembering where pieces fit contribute to reading abilities. Working the puzzle with family members or friends adds a social element that can encourage communication skills and develop language. To make the puzzle more durable use clear contact paper (or laminate) the photos prior to cutting the pieces and provide a labeled container for proper storage. More expensive and durable versions can be obtained through the many online vendors, such as JigsawPuzzle.com ([www.jigsawpuzzle.com](http://www.jigsawpuzzle.com)) that will let you upload a photo and pay to have a cardboard or wooden jigsaw puzzle made for you. Local photo businesses may also be able to assist you with puzzle creation from your photos. Of course, if you use a service to make the puzzle for you, then you and your child miss out on the fun of making it yourself.

**Photo Collage:** Grouping a number of photos together and attaching them to any surface gives you a great collection to enjoy. The photos can overlap each other and be turned in all different directions or you can be more orderly and neatly line photos up side by side with only edges touching. Multiple copies of the same photo can be used or try many different ones together.
Hanging collages might include photos glued to a piece of poster board with a frame drawn around the edges, cardboard cut from a box, a shoe box lid, a piece of light weight wood, or the cardboard backing from an inexpensive picture frame with safety glass or plastic on the front. Maybe you can think of other surfaces that a collage can be put on for a hanging display. A collage can also be put on the top of tables for temporary or lasting display. For a temporary arrangement, select photos to place on a low sturdy table top and lay safety glass on top. Photos and children’s art work can be changed as often as you like. For a more lasting display, glue photos onto table tops, book shelves, or even TV trays. For more durability, use white glue and water or any decoupage product (such as Mod Podge) from arts and crafts stores to “paint” on the surface prior to adding photos and again over the photos. After the photos dry, paint over them again multiple times. You and your child can create a more professional looking collage by using one of the many free online services where you upload your pictures and select a format for the pictures to be shuffled into. An example of an online digital photo service is picsa.google.com. Creating an online collage of your photos gives your child experience working with you on the computer.

Photo on Containers: Photos on containers can turn useful and functional items into a personal experience. Any container used to store toys (such as cardboard boxes, plastic buckets, or plastic tubs) can include one or more photos of your child glued onto the side or top. For example, photos of your child playing with blocks can be glued on the box that stores blocks. And a photo of your child playing with dress up clothes can be put on the trunk where dress-up clothes are kept. To secure the photo on the container use the decoupage technique described above for collages or place clear contact paper over the photo. In addition to adding the photo, your child can decorate the whole container using whatever safe art supplies you may have available. Printing their name and the play thing to be stored (Breanne’s Blocks) will introduce letters and words. Small containers with photos added to them can also be created for your child to give as a gift to family members too. The container could include touches like scrap material cut and glued to the inside or be filled with favorite rocks the child selects. For a fee, many businesses, such as Kodak at www.kodak.com, will put photos on products such as coffee mugs, dinner plates, canvas bags, wooden boxes and other containers. Some businesses, such as Make It at http://makit.com/ sell kits to facilitate the process.

Photo Games and Playing Cards: Make a new game with photos or spice up an older one. To create photo playing cards use an existing set of cards and glue a different family member’s photo to the center of each suit card. For example, the preschooler can be hearts, the mother...
clubs, the grandfather diamonds, and the pet dog spades. Alternately, different photos of the same child can be used for each suit or a family photo could be glued to the back of the card set. Make your own cards by adding photos to poster board cards for a game of matching. For a fee, several online businesses can print professional looking playing cards with photos you provide. The same photo printed on the back of all playing cards in a deck is generally less expensive than photos on both sides. See services from Printer Studio at http://www.printerstudio.com for examples. Board games can be created using cardboard and photos (and your imagination) or just add photos to some of the existing board games. Children generally delight in seeing familiar faces. A square box that can be rolled like dice can have a photo on each side showing your child involved in some activity such as dancing, rolling across the floor, drawing a picture, and working a puzzle. When your child is bored suggest they roll the dice/box and then follow-up by doing the activity that lands on the top. You and your child may be able to come up with other games to play that use photos.

**Cards, Stationary and More:** Helping children learn to say “Thank You” or “Happy Birthday” or “Get Well Soon” is an important social lesson that may be more fun if they use their own photo to design greeting cards and stationary. Each individual card or letter could be an original designed by your child’s own hands or you can help your child design a template (or sample) with their photo, a saying, illustrations, and their name and then have multiple ones printed. You could take the template to a local print shop to get as many as you want copied. Or, another option may be to scan the template and print from a computer you have access to. If you design a card online with your child, you may be able to print it yourself or go with a service that prints it for a fee. On the Walgreens web page at http://photo.walgreens.com/walgreens/welcome you can create a card with your child and then pick up the printed cards at your local store that same day. Similar services are available from http://www.shutterfly.com and http://www.snapfish.com. In addition to cards and stationary most services also assist with making calendars, posters, and other products.

There are dozens of more ways to use your child’s photo to bring joy, fun, and learning. You may want to begin by taking pictures of your child involved in many different activities. Discuss the pictures and identify some favorites to begin your photo journey.

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