Hide and Seek
By Dr. Connie Jo Smith

Hide and seek games have historically been and continue to be an integral part of playing. While hide and seek can be just plain fun, it can also help children learn a wide range of skills at different ages. Consistently, hide and seek encourages the players to solve problems, make decisions, and be persistent - all three skills are important to success in school and in life. Let’s take a look at some of the different hide and seek games and examples of what can be learned from them.

Did you ever play “peek-a-boo” with a baby? This version of hide and seek can be a fun experience for child and adult. And, while having fun the game also helps the baby begin to learn that even when he cannot see something that it is not gone forever. Understanding of object permanence is important to development, especially as a child goes through periods of separation anxiety. Read more about object permanence and other games to teach skills to infants on the web site by Everyday Health Network at http://www.whattoexpect.com/playroom/playtime-tips/hide-seek.aspx.

“Jack-in-the-Box” is another old favorite that falls into the “peek-a-boo” category. A toddler who cranks a handle is rewarded with music playing and then “Jack” popping up at predictable times. You do not see Jack when he is in his box, but then you do see him when he pops up (peek-a-boo style). Some children may be frightened by “Jack-in-the-Box” at first. While the older version of the toy Jack was a jester or clown, many versions exist now and a child may see their favorite character from a story book popping up or hear a familiar tune. As a child turns the handle she is developing muscles in her fingers and hands, which is a prerequisite for writing. She is learning that she has control of the toy and can gain a sense of time. How long until Jack pops up? Toddlers and preschoolers may find this play enjoyable.

Play hide and seek online with your child. Check out the PBS Kids Game “Clifford: The Big Red Dog” at http://pbskids.org/clifford/games/hide-and-seek-game.html. This short game appropriate for toddlers or young preschoolers is narrated and asks children to click on the toy (one of the three possible choices) that Clifford is hiding behind. Sound effects provide a hint. This gives a young child exposure to the computer in a small dose using a character from a book he may have heard read. Skills vary depending upon the technology being used. A touch screen for the younger child lets him touch his answer. Older children can learn to use a mouse to make their clicks.
The Nick Jr. online site offers seven hide and seek games featuring Dora the Explorer and friends. The task is to locate an item, such as Dora's friend Boots or her backpack, hidden in a picture. Children click until they can find the designated object. Some games have an introduction with Dora narrating the directions, some have two levels of play, and some include background music. Preschoolers and young school age children may find this fun.  [http://www.nickjr.com.au/games_items.php?c=2&sc=14](http://www.nickjr.com.au/games_items.php?c=2&sc=14).

Hide and Seek Safari Monkey, a commercial toy based on hide and seek has won toy awards such as Parents' Choice and Toy of the Year. A monkey is hidden and the child uses a magic wand to guide them as they search for the monkey. The magic wand lights up when the child is warm or close to finding the monkey. There is also a Hide and Seek Safari Tiger. See more information about the Hide and Seek Safari Monkey at [http://www.youngexplorers.com/itemdy00.asp?T1=Y730110](http://www.youngexplorers.com/itemdy00.asp?T1=Y730110). Of course, the game could be played with any object available to hide and the parent supplying the signals about being warm. Trading roles will let the child develop leadership skills by deciding where to hide the object and giving the parent help signals.

Hiding objects for your child to find can take many forms. Examples may include: burying toy vehicles in a sandbox to encourage outside time; hide a favorite or new bath toy for a child to find immediately prior to bath time; bake a Three Kings Cake together (for recipes see [http://www.ehow.com/how_2061925_cook-three-kings-cake-epiphany.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_2061925_cook-three-kings-cake-epiphany.html)); create a nature scavenger hunt where your children and their friends can look for a list of items such as a pinecone, blade of grass at least three inches high, a feather, and more; create an inside scavenger hunt; hide coins in a basket of laundry for children to find as they fold or put clothes in their drawers. Depending on the hide and seek game, a child may use pictures as directions or words. Some of the activities can encourage team work and cooperation. Depending on how long and far the search is physical exercise could be included. Be creative and have fun.

Most adults can remember playing hide and seek as a child or teen ager. If you did not play it as a kid, ask your family members and friends if they played and what the rules were. Some variations of the game include Squished Sardines and Kick the Can. Ah, those were the days of playing outside until the sun set. Playing this physically active game gave children plenty of exercise and a lot of social time with friends where they learned to get along with one another. If your family and neighbors do not play hide and seek, give it a try. For a refresher on the rules, consult Fun Games Kids Play web site found at [http://www.fungameskidsplay.com/hideandseekgame.htm](http://www.fungameskidsplay.com/hideandseekgame.htm), or one of the many other online sites with traditional games and rules. Alternatively, be inventive and make up your own rules with the players.

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