

Activities with Children-Playing with Blocks

Many parents think of blocks as Lego bricks and have a supply at home, which provide lots of exercise for parents picking up the hundreds of tiny pieces. Any type of interlocking block provides opportunities for fine motor skill development, but block play can be much more.

Advertising has created an idea that these interlocking blocks are almost the only type of blocks available, or needed. But in any well-equipped preschool and day care centre, you will notice a block play area that looks quite different from a bucket of small blocks. You may see that the area is large, with a flat surface on the floor (not just a table), and that the blocks are easily brought out by children independently. The area is away from high use and somewhat protected from other activities. The blocks are large and sturdy and can be used in whatever way the children choose-no complicated written instructions are included. Parents can provide block play in your own home, that will encourage various areas of child development

Through their play with large blocks, children develop physically in the areas of large motor skills and eye hand coordination. Cognitive skills are enhanced as the children experiment with balance, structure, design, size and shape. Social skills develop as children share, cooperate and discuss ideas to accomplish their building goals. The children also experiment, problem-solve, and achieve a sense of accomplishment. Other learning that takes place as children have fun with blocks, involves learning about size and shapes-parents can introduce new words such as rectangle, square, triangle. A lesson on gravity takes place naturally when stacked blocks fall. Math skills are introduced as you count and talk about concepts of bigger and smaller.

Many types of large blocks are available to purchase; wooden, foam, or cardboard. Be aware that most sets of large blocks do not come with many pieces and this can be a frustration for children. However, you can make your own large blocks by saving milk cartons; washing and sliding them together for sturdier construction, or by using any cardboard boxes or plastic containers. Many parents save scraps of 2X4s from household projects and then sand them for smoothness and safety. You can then purchase some extra types of shapes such as arches and triangles to add to the play. Accessories for block play are any items that will encourage block play. Dollhouse furniture, small animal and people figures, cardboard tubes, toy cars and trucks, can all be use with the blocks as children create roads, cities and other imaginative places.

So if you are looking for durability, play value and learning value, create a well-equipped block play area in your home. It will provide hours of fun and learning.

By Laurie Lafortune, Understanding the Early Years Coordinator. For more information on parenting children's programs and activities, call Family Services of Central Alberta at 403-343-6400 or go to www.fsca.ca