



Pointers For Parents



Build Early Literacy Skills A Fun Way

(NAPSA)—When children grab an object, there's no telling where their imagination will take them. Suddenly, they're creating a rocket ship, repurposing it into princess attire or using it as the first building block of a make-believe world. Children often see things for what they can be, not as what they are, allowing them to concoct a new reality with its own set of rules. To them, it's all in the name of having fun, but this fun also serves an important function.

According to early literacy and children's literature specialist Sue McCleaf Nespeca, play is not time spent away from learning; rather, play is the way young children learn. Through play, children develop motor skills, problem-solving abilities and sensory perception. What many people don't realize, however, is that play also helps to lay the foundation for literacy.

According to "Every Child Ready to Read," a research-based toolkit created by the Association for Library Service to Children and Public Library Association, divisions of the American Library Association, play is actually one of the best ways for children to learn language and literacy skills.

To play is to engage. The more young children engage, the more they absorb, so parents should consider adding fun interactive elements to story time. To help, a pioneer in creative play, LEGO



Children can learn to love books even more when they can build and play with their own versions of the characters.

DUPLO, has created a series of Read & Build sets that combine colorful building bricks with short-story board books that can create a rich and engaging experience. As parents read the books, children can get deeply involved in the story by building the characters and objects they're hearing about. At the end of the book, children can use the bricks to further explore the story or invent new ones; either way, McCleaf Nespeca says, they will be on the way to developing the aural and oral skills that are essential to early literacy.

"I am always looking for new ways to excite my son to read," says one mother. "The combination of reading and building is perfect as it is something we can

do together and is an activity that truly keeps his attention."

McCleaf Nespeca recommends reading a story through once to familiarize children with the story and characters. She then suggests rereading it, adding in ways for children to engage and better understand the story, such as with the building blocks or with simple songs and finger games, to lay the foundation for a love of storytelling and reading.

As children develop an early connection to reading, it propels them to explore other types of play that are also believed to improve early childhood literacy, such as socio-dramatic play—when children create their own stories within pretend realities. By storytelling in their imagined world, they have a forum to express themselves verbally and make a stronger connection to letters, words, language and story.

To encourage this form of play, parents can designate an area of the playroom and stock it with versatile materials, such as books, props, costumes, construction toys, books, empty boxes, paper towel tubes and craft supplies.

By inventing more opportunities for them to play with language and by interspersing play with story time, parents can help their children acquire the essential building blocks for early literacy and develop a lifetime love of learning.