

# THE PERFORMANCE TRAP

Play

## Fun with Blocks

Blocks are a very versatile toy. Blocks also “grow” with your child as s/he learns more creative ways to use them. Funny though how the traditional ABC blocks lead right to those test type questions, “What letter is that?” “What color is this A?”, “How many blocks are here?” It IS appropriate to mention the letters since they are there, but don’t let yourself fall into the “trap” that zaps the fun right out of the blocks. Here are some simple ways to keep your block play focused on the interaction between you and your child.

- **Use “I statements”** Instead of the “What’s this?” and “Where’s that?” use more comments. Starting sentences with “I see,” “I’m going to...” or “Here’s a...” tends to set the interaction into a less “testy” style. You are still exposing your baby to the ABC’s or colors of the blocks but in a more conversational manner with less performance pressure.
- **Basic Concepts.** Young children often enjoy putting things in and taking things out over and over again. Take advantage of this stage to help your baby learn the words that go with basic concepts (in/out/full/empty/more/all gone/none/no more). Although by now you should also remember to use OTHER words not specific to the activity. Examples of these are “me, you, again, first, next, another.” Even though a young baby isn’t likely to use these words yet, you are laying the foundation for further linguistic comprehension. By providing different containers, such as plain boxes, gift wrapped boxes with a hole, a fabric bag, plastic cartons or large tubes, you can make the same task new and exciting. Large coffee cans add the extra “bang.” Covering some shoe boxes or large canisters with contact paper is usually worthwhile because you or your child could use them for other activities or even storage for future “collections” of little toys.
- **Process over product.** Shortly after the “put and dump” fun comes the “stack and crash” phase. As adults we are always trying to build some THING to show a final product. A child might not do that type of building until age three. Young children are more into the process, not the product. Remember, they are learning the basic laws of physics as they stack, drop and push over. Take the time to enjoy the fun of their impulsivity at this age and look for opportunities for repetitive language to use in that play.
- **Be Creative.** Add some other toys to the blocks to change the play opportunities. For example, you might put some plastic take out containers or a plastic spatula with some blocks. For a two year old, introduce some plastic animals and begin to demonstrate some more imaginative play. Remember a baby doesn’t have the ability to pretend the block is something else until close to two years of age. 