

The Courtyard Chronicle

December 2010



Learn About the Best
Toys for Your Child

Tips for Avoiding
Stress

Learning Activities
for Kids of All Ages

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The Children's
Courtyard®

www.childrenscourtyard.com

The Children's Courtyard is committed to providing an enriching learning experience to every child in our care. But we also know how important it is for families to incorporate educational activities into their home as well. Here are some great things to do with children of all ages!

Infant

Sit on the floor across from your child. Take both of their hands in yours and begin to swing them back and forth. Sing some of your child's favorite songs while swinging your arms around. Sway your bodies back and forth while swinging your arms together.

Toddler

Place pillows (or folded blankets) in a straight or zig-zag path on the floor. Invite your child to jump to the different pillows as he follows the path. If your child is interested, spread the pillows out farther and see if your child is able to jump to them.

Preschool/Pre-K

Tell your child that the two of you are going to be making an obstacle course inside. Choose a starting point and

another place you want to travel to using a certain action. For example, start at the wall and jump until you reach the chair. When you reach that destination, choose another action to do to another area in the room. Maybe you decide to crawl until you reach the table. Continue moving to different areas of the room with your child. Invite your child to come up with suggestions.

School-Age

Ask your child to think of some type of action or movement they think they can do continuously for 30 seconds (jumping jacks, touching toes, push ups, etc). Ask your child to tell you how many of these they think they can do in that time period. Count the number they complete. Was their guess correct? If your child is interested, have them try another action or see how many they can do in a longer time period.

Did you know that in 2006, the box was inducted into the Toy Hall of Fame? Similarly, in 2008, the common stick took its place in the Toy Hall of Fame alongside other classic toys such as the hula hoop, marbles and various blocks. Every adult can probably recount a tale of a child pushing aside an expensive toy in favor of the box it came in. You can likely remember some point in your life where you even played with a stick.

What is it about the stick and the box that make them such wonderful toys? Think about your experience with the stick. Was it a wand, a bat, a sword, or a means by which to draw a picture in the sand? That is the beauty of the stick; its uses are only limited by the imagination of you. It can be anything. While thinking about what toys to buy for your child, there are many lessons that can be learned from both the box and the stick.

The best toys:

- **Are open-ended.** That means that a child can play with the toy in more than one way, and there is no right or wrong answer. The box and the stick do not guide the child in how to use them. Instead, the child is the director in the play that happens.
- **Ignite imaginative thought.** Imagination is the foundation for learning. Before a child can learn a series of facts or build knowledge, she must first build a sense of the possible – that comes from imaginative play. Look for toys, like the stick or box, which inspire imagination and can be woven into pretend play.
- **Involve critical thinking.** When a child pushes a button and something happens, there is very little critical thinking involved. Look for toys that encourage children to consider different possibilities or require various techniques for solving problems. A child must think through different scenarios as they play with a box or a stick, which helps them develop critical thinking skills.
- **Engage children's senses.** Brain research tells us that children learn best when their senses are engaged (but not over stimulated). Look for toys that provide your child with interesting things to touch, see, hear, smell or taste. Natural elements, such as the texture of the stick or the smell of the paper that makes up the cardboard are especially important to a young child's development.

- **May invite social participation.** We are very social creatures, and science has found that social connections are crucial to our physical and emotional well-being. Wonderful toys are those that can be used alone, but become even more fun when more than one child is involved. Both the box and the stick can contain hours of solitary enjoyment, but each is even more exciting when a companion comes along for the ride.
- **Are fun.** More than anything, play, and the toys children use should be fun. Sometimes, as parents, we are very focused on preparing children academically for the challenges they will face as they grow. There are many toys that promise learning. When picking a toy, think about the stick and the box. Children like those items because they are fun, and sometimes that is all that play should be.

Choosing a toy that will create a spark of glee in your child's eye can be overwhelming with all of the choices that are out there. Keep the above ideas in your mind while shopping and you are sure to find a toy that will amuse and delight your child (almost) as much as the box it came in.

Avoid a Mess ... Reduce the Stress

"When you can do the common things of life in an uncommon way, you will command the attention of the world."
– George Washington Carver

Families have a lot on their plate - birthday parties, taking the kids to their extra-curricular classes and team events, shopping for the holidays, raking leaves, making meals, cleaning the house, helping with homework, and so on. And then, in the middle of all this, you hear, "Hey, I was playing with that," or "It's mine!" Sound familiar? Even the most loving brothers and sisters squabble from time to time.

It seems the longer our "to do" list becomes, the friction among us rises. So, whether your children need help getting along with each other or with their friends, you can help reduce the tension by trying out these ideas:

Make respecting one another a family policy.

Try creating a kindness rule, such as: "In our family, we don't hurt each other with words or actions." Give your children examples of respectful behavior, such as taking turns and asking permission before using someone else's things.

Provide calming alternatives.

When your children get upset with each other, teach them ways to appropriately deal with their feelings. Try saying something like, "I can tell you are really mad at Grant. Why don't you go to another room, take a few deep breaths, and then come back and tell him why you are so upset."

Stay out of it whenever possible.

Whenever possible, try not to take sides when your children fuss and fight. If they can't solve the situation themselves, sit down between them and model the words for them to express their feelings in a respectful way. If you think it would be more helpful, have a family meeting. Talk about each child's feelings. Then collect feedback from everyone to formulate a solution. Let the children who were bickering choose a solution that everyone can live with.

Encourage bragging – about the good stuff.

Challenge siblings to share good things about each other like: "Rachel helped me rake the leaves," or "Dillon let me use his new soccer ball." Encourage your children to be mirrors, reflecting respect and kindness. What goes around comes around, and habits can be formed easily. Model this kind of bragging yourself with your partner, your children, or with other family members. Hopefully it can become a habit for your entire family.

When you notice your days are getting busier and busier, remember to not sweat the little stuff, focus on getting necessary things done, and put off what you can. Prioritize. If you have to, add to your day timer or computer calendar, "Fun with Family." You will never regret making for family.

If you would like to respond to anything you read, have parenting questions or child development topics that you'd like to see explored in future issues of the monthly newsletter, please e-mail us at educationteam@learningcaregroup.com. We would love to hear from you.

A Special Holiday Offer for Children's Courtyard Families...
20% Off Music Lesson Gift Certificates

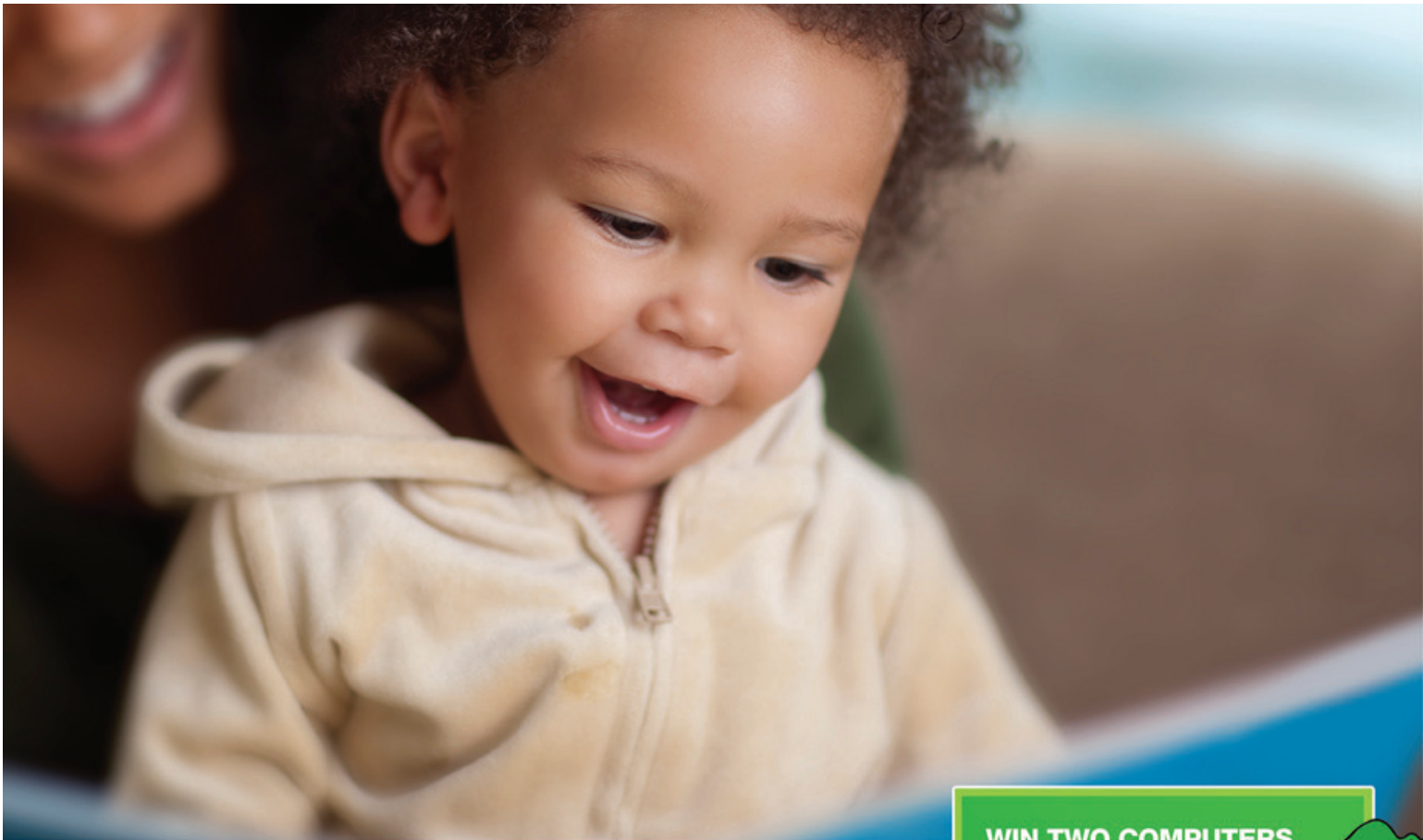
Give your children, friends and loved ones the gift of music this holiday season with a TakeLessons Music Lesson Gift Certificate!

TakeLessons offers music lessons for school-agers in participating Children's Courtyard locations as well as in-home and studio lessons for the rest of the family.

To purchase a Gift Certificate and receive 20% off, call 1-877-356-6425 and mention this special offer.

Piano, Guitar and Singing for all levels!





Making holidays safe and bright

The Children's Courtyard & Underwriters Laboratories

The holidays are a magical time of year. But the season also comes with potential safety hazards for kids. That's why we're excited to announce that The Children's Courtyard and Underwriters Laboratories (UL) are teaming up to promote safety at home this season with the Commit a Minute to Safety campaign and *Safety Time* learning curriculum.

For more than 116 years, UL has been an independent safety certification organization that tests, inspects and validates products for safety. More than 20 billion UL Marks appear worldwide – look around and you are sure to find UL.

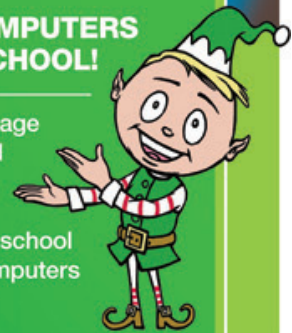
Why is The Children's Courtyard partnering with UL? Because every minute, 17 kids are seen in emergency rooms with unintentional injuries – that's 9.2 million a year.* We'd like your help to change those numbers.

This month, your children will be working on our activity book at school. We hope you'll complete the activities with them at home and return the back page to your child's teacher. Look for more details to come in a backpack note.

With your help, we hope to reduce the statistics together.

WIN TWO COMPUTERS FOR YOUR SCHOOL!

Return the back page of your completed activity book by Dec. 17 to your teacher, and your school could win two computers courtesy of UL!**



Visit SafetyAtHome.com and Commit a Minute to Safety this season

- Water your tree daily
- Always blow out unattended candles
- Look for the UL Mark on lights and decorations



**Underwriters
Laboratories**

www.SafetyAtHome.com

*Source: CDC Childhood Injury Report (2000-2006). **Each school with a 75 percent response rate or better will be entered into a drawing to win two computers (five schools will win) courtesy of UL. Winners will be selected Jan. 5, 2011 by Learning Care Group (Childtime, Tutor Time, The Children's Courtyard, Montessori Unlimited, La Petite Academy). © 2010 Underwriters Laboratories Inc. All rights reserved.