

What We're Learning

Have you ever heard someone say that their child wants to play with the box a toy comes in more than the toy itself? Why do you think that is? A box, stick, or plastic top can be anything your child can dream up. These are open-ended materials. Most typical toys can only be one thing. Most are not open-ended. When we give our children the opportunity to play with boxes and sticks, they can use their imaginations to dream up new scenarios and possibilities. Best of all, most of these materials are free and can be found in nature or in your home. You can start collecting them together!

**Parents, Did You Know?**

An open-ended material is something that can be used in any way a child can imagine. The item can be put together with other materials in many ways to come up with something new. There is no right or wrong way for the child to play with it.



Take a look at these two materials: a plastic tomato and a wooden “cookie”. The tomato most likely will be played with as food. The wooden circle can be anything a child can dream up—a launch pad, a cookie, a table, or anything, really!

Together Time

Collect open-ended materials together with your child. These can often be found or reclaimed material. Examples are: sticks and other natural items, buttons, cardboard, wooden blocks, and recyclable items.

Ask your child to help find them. Often children are drawn to things like boxes, tubes, and bubble wrap. When you notice your child is interested in a material like this, decide if it is safe. If it is, then add it to where your child keeps toys at home.

Keep in mind that these items can be interchangeable for art material and play material. Be on the lookout in nature and in the home for household items that could be used during play.



Add labels together. As you gather materials, you will want to make sure they are labeled. This is a great time to work with your child to organize and write the labels. Children can begin to sound out words and eventually write. This is a great way to add a literacy experience to collecting and organizing open-ended materials.



Activity

Share a play memory with your child. Think back to a time when you played with or watched someone play with an open-ended material like a box. Share this memory with your child. Sharing memories is a form of storytelling. It can spark your child's imagination and create a bonding experience. Once your child has the opportunity to play with open-ended materials, work together to retell the story of how they played.

Hints for Success

Help increase their vocabulary. When children are creating and constructing there will be opportunities to give them vocabulary and define words for them. An example of this is, when a child is building a tower a new word could be moat, spire, or structure.

Reflections and Next Steps

- When children have access to open-ended materials, they can get creative and dream up something new.
- Watch and listen while children play. We might learn something new about what interests them or that they wonder about.
- Extend their play by adding new open-ended materials. You might add bottle tops to your play area. Then, you might see your child begin to build with the bottle tops.