



# The TOTLETTER

Fall 2016



## Pretend & Imaginative Play

***"Imagination is more important than knowledge."***

*~Albert Einstein*

Einstein knew it, and leading researchers, like Stuart Brown, agree that unstructured, child-led, imaginative play is vital for normal social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Children naturally engage in imaginative play and, given a chance, they will imagine, play, and learn with little adult interaction or encouragement. This type of holistic, unstructured learning encompasses all areas of a child's development. Learning is not isolated to one narrow, adult-directed area, as children practice and learn to integrate a wide variety of skills including sharing, problem-solving, math and literacy skills, innovation, language, negotiation, concentration, working together, fine- and gross-motor skills, and so much more.

Offering many opportunities for imaginative play also offers children a way to understand their world and cope with stresses. Since children learn best by doing (rather than reading or listening) and experiencing things in a real, tangible way, imaginative play is one of the best ways in which a child can assimilate new information, work through worries, and practice confidence and problem-solving. Taking on the pretend role of mother, teacher, or tiger, or playing house, doctor, or picnic, a child plays out scenarios in a safe, comfortable environment while they learn and grow.

Imaginative play begins as a young toddler uses one object to represent another - such as a block becoming a car. Three-year-olds are just beginning to become involved in lots of fantasy and make-believe play. Using what you know about their interests and development to set up play scenes, and offering props, will encourage their imaginations to run wild. Preschool children (and older) need little

encouragement to let their imaginations take over. Imaginative play is a fabulous tool and learning opportunity for school aged children also, who often miss out on this kind of free play.

Given uninterrupted time and a variety of open-ended toys and equipment, children will create and engage in complex play scenes for long periods of time. Even the simplest props will excite a child's imagination, and there are many beautiful toys and items you can buy to further build your imaginative play accessories. Dress-up, play props from around the house, sand, water, natural materials, wooden blocks, recycled materials, animals, vehicles, dolls, puppets, play dough or clay, music, and so much more, are wonderful prompts for imaginative play. Once you start using your own imagination when choosing play things, you'll be surprised at all the wonderful options.

Imaginative play offers great value to a child and many learning experiences. Encouraging and supporting imaginative play will not only make our children smarter, it also makes them kinder, helps to alleviate stress, and builds self-esteem. Plus, it's heaps of fun!



## How to Encourage and Support Imaginative Play with Children

### **A Place to Play**

Provide children with a space in your home for imaginative play. It could be a separate room or even just the corner of a room. Wardrobes/closets are great places for imaginative play. Another great place is the dinner table. Remove all the chairs and cover the table with sheets, and it becomes an instant house or even a castle where a beautiful princess is kept captive by an evil dragon. Couches are another great place to begin imaginative play. Again a sheet thrown over the couch can become a tunnel or a cave that an explorer needs to investigate. Canopies and play tents can create a great place to begin the imaginary world. The play corner or imaginative play area should be changed regularly, with different props and toys to keep children stimulated.



### **Provide Props and Toys**

This does not mean that you have to go out and spend a lot of money on toys to help promote imaginary play. You will find that the most simple items found in the home will act as perfect props to spark the imagination. Cardboard boxes can become anything in the imaginary world - computers, cash registers, even beds for sick animals. The plastic cupboard or drawer in the kitchen is filled with props that children can re-invent into other things. Provide a dress-up box full of clothes, scarves, hats, handbags, shoes, and wigs. Dress-up is irresistible to young children and sparks the imagination. Consider creating a props box filled with toys, objects, and props to encourage a child's fantasy world. You might include wash baskets, pretend plastic flowers, old telephones, stuffed animals and dolls, blankets, plastic crockery and cutlery.

### **Be a Child's Playmate**

Children love to play with adults! When a child brings you a pretend cup of tea, play along and ask for a teaspoon of sugar. Call them on their pretend phone asking to put in an order for two large pizzas for delivery. Show an interest in what they are doing as this helps to develop the story and encourage the imagination but let the children be in charge.



### **Provide Them with Experiences to Role Play**

Reading to children will expose them to different scenarios, stories, and experiences. Taking children to many interesting places, such as the zoo, is also another way of exploring new experiences. Even visiting the doctor and the supermarket, will provide children with more experiences and more ideas for their imaginative play.

Taken in part from: [www.naturalparenting.com](http://www.naturalparenting.com) & [www.learning4kids.net](http://www.learning4kids.net)

## **Crafts**

### **Cotton Ball Ghost**

Materials: black construction paper, white crayon, cotton balls, white glue, paintbrush.



1. Draw an outline of a ghost on the black construction paper, using the white crayon.
2. Gently pull apart the cotton balls until they are billowy. A light touch is needed for this, or else the cotton balls will just pull apart completely.
3. Paint glue over the body of the ghost, being sure to leave the eyes and mouth bare.
4. Apply the pulled cotton to the glue until you fill up the ghost's body.

Source: [inspirationmadesimple.com](http://inspirationmadesimple.com)

## Handprint Spider

Materials: orange construction paper, scissors or paper cutter, white colored pencil, crayon, or paint marker, black paint, sponge paint brush, googly eyes, glue.



1. Cut a piece of construction paper in half.
2. Using a white writing tool, draw a spider web in the corner.
3. Cover the child's hand in black paint but do not paint the thumb.
4. Carefully place the child's hand on the paper, covering part of the web.
5. Repeat with the other hand and when stamping the paper this time, overlap part of the palms of the hands.
6. Glue two googly eyes to make your spider come alive! Once the paint has dried, you can add a smiling mouth. 😊

Source: [ipinnedit.wordpress.com](http://ipinnedit.wordpress.com)

## Painting Leaves

Materials: fresh leaves, tempera paint or acrylic paint, paintbrushes, tray/cookie sheet to work on, containers to hold paint (paper plate, applesauce cups, etc.)

This is as simple as it sounds! Children will enjoy using a different surface to create art. Keep in mind that the leaves will begin to dry out in a few days and at that time, the paint will begin to flake. This is a temporary craft meant for fun in the moment!

Source: [simplefunforkids.com](http://simplefunforkids.com)



## Paper Plate Carnival Masks

Materials: paper plates (thicker ones are best), scissors, paint, paintbrushes, glue feathers, elastic band (1/4" width, cut).



1. Using scissors, cut away the bottom of the paper plate, and cut holes for eyes and a notch for the nose.
2. Have the children paint the paper plate using bright colours.
3. Let it dry.
4. Attach the elastic by poking holes on each side and tying it on.
5. Glue feathers around the rim of the plate and let it dry again.
6. Once it has completely dried, have a masked parade!

Adapted from: [happybrownhouse.com](http://happybrownhouse.com)

## **Songs, Rhymes, and Movements**

### Ring Around the Leaves

*Sung to "Ring Around the Rosie"*

*Take the children outside and have them make a big pile of leaves. Then let them hold hands and walk around the leaf pile as you sing the song below. When you sing the third line, have them children grab handfuls of leaves and toss them up in the air.*

Ring around the fall leaves,  
Lots and lots of fall leaves,  
Leaves.... leaves.....  
They all fall down!



**Pumpkin, pumpkin**

Pumpkin, pumpkin,  
Sitting on the wall.

(Sit on floor.)

Pumpkin, pumpkin,  
Tip and fall.

(Fall to one side.)

Pumpkin, pumpkin,  
Rolling down the street.

(Roll on the floor.)

Pumpkin, pumpkin,  
Trick-or-treat!



**Costume Parade**

Sung to "London Bridge"

Help each of the children dress in a simple costume such as a firefighter hat and boots, or a princess cape and crown. Then sing the song below and let the children parade around the room.

Michael\* has a costume on,  
Costume on, costume on.  
Michael has a costume on.  
He's a pirate\*.



\*Repeat, substituting the name of the child and their costume.

**Pots and Pans Marching Band**

Sung to "The Muffin Man"

As you sing the song below, have the children march around the room banging on pots and pans with wooden spoons.

Marching with our pots and pans,  
Pots and pans, pots and pans,  
Marching with our pots and pans,  
In our marching band.

Hear us bang our pots and pans,  
Pots and pans, pots and pans,  
Hear us bang our pots and pans,  
In our marching band.

**Muffin Tin Sorting**

Babies often enjoy sorting, and investigating how objects fit together. With this in mind, gather a muffin tin, an empty egg carton, and a long cardboard tube. Cut the tube into different lengths, and show the child how a tube piece can fit into the muffin tin or the egg carton. You can also show them how the egg carton opens and closes. The child will likely want to investigate whether the tube pieces remain in the carton after it's been closed. This is simple and fun investigative baby play!

Adapted from: [theimaginationtree.com](http://theimaginationtree.com)



**Baby Treasure Basket**

Treasure baskets are virtually free to create, take a few minutes to put together, are natural, and help to develop so many skills and abilities in babies from 6-18 months. A baby treasure basket is simply a basket, or an easy-to-access container, filled with objects that are interesting to look at, feel, shake, and taste, and are non-toxic. There is no particular "purpose" to any of them, yet they can be manipulated, explored and played with in a multitude of ways. The basket promotes curiosity and a natural desire to investigate and think, which are wonderful skills to be seeking to develop in babies!

You can change up some of the objects regularly to keep the basket interesting and fresh to play with. You will be able to tell when there is a need to change the contents. The child may throw the objects out of the basket without even looking at them, which can be very entertaining to watch but probably indicative that things have gotten a bit stale!



Some examples of what you can include in a baby treasure basket:

- \* various pine cones
- \* ribbons of different patterns and textures
- \* a wooden massager with roller balls
- \* a range of beaded necklaces and bracelets (as long as they are secure!)
- \* felted objects
- \* an interesting wooden toy
- \* a large shell from the beach
- \* a dried salt dough sculpture
- \* a large, sparkly bouncy ball with glitter suspended inside
- \* laminated photos of babies cut out of magazines
- \* a wooden box with a lid
- \* thick pipe cleaners, with sharp ends tucked in firmly
- \* a small cushion with a range of buttons sewn on tightly
- \* a little tin filled with pebbles that makes a noise when shaken (sealed shut)

Keep the baby treasure basket hidden and bring it out once or twice during the day, to keep the novelty factor alive. It's crucial to have other distractions kept to a minimum (i.e. TV off) and sit by the baby and interact when she invites you to. Never leave the child alone with the basket however, as there may be some items that are dangerous if played with, without supervision.

Treasure baskets are wonderful for:

- \* using the senses to discover, explore, investigate and examine new materials/ shapes/ colours/ tastes/ textures/ sounds/ weights/ quantities
- \* developing thinking skills
- \* promoting open-ended and independent play

*Adapted from: [theimaginationtree.com](http://theimaginationtree.com)*

## Activities

### Learning Letters with Sandpaper and Yarn

This activity is so easy, and great fun for the preschool and kindergarten crowd!

You will need: 9.5x11" sheet of sandpaper (one per child), multiple pieces of yarn (different colours and cut to different lengths).

Ask the child to make their favourite letter using the yarn bits. Perhaps they can even spell their name!

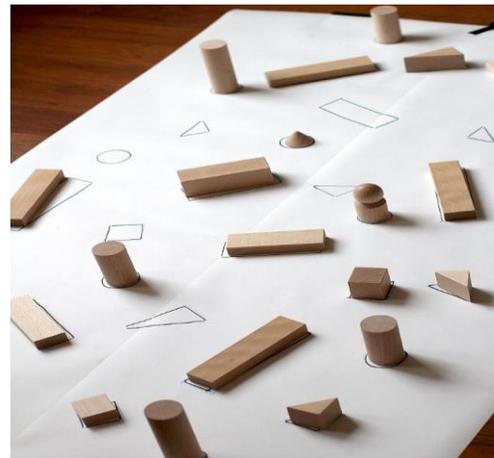


*Adapted from: [heymommychocolatemilk.blogspot.ca](http://heymommychocolatemilk.blogspot.ca)*

### DIY Giant Block Puzzle

You'll need: a large sheet of paper, painter's tape, wooden shapes, writing utensil.

Tape the large sheet of paper to the floor and scatter your wooden shapes over it. Trace each one onto the paper. Remove the wooden shapes and then add the children! You can give them the wooden shapes in a pile or a basket, and watch them go to work figuring out what fits where!



This activity is fun and simple, and stimulates so many areas of development:

- Language- shape vocabulary, descriptive/comparative vocabulary (i.e. short vs. long)
- Social skills- especially when multiple children work together to complete the puzzle
- Motor- both fine and gross motor skills
- Visual-spatial skills
- Problem-solving and reasoning

Plus, when you are done, you'll have a giant canvas to colour!

*Adapted from: [two-daloo.com](http://two-daloo.com)*

## Tasty Treats

### Spider PB&Js

#### Ingredients:

Whole wheat bread  
Peanut or nut butter or nut-free butter  
Jam  
Pretzel sticks  
Raisins

#### Instructions:

1. Cut the spider bodies out using a round cookie cutter. You can use various sizes to make a mama spider and her babies, if you'd like.
2. Make a standard PB&J.
3. Slide the pretzel sticks into the sides to make the spider legs.
4. Use a bit of the peanut butter or jam to "glue" the raisin eyes on.



Source: [thehappygal.com](http://thehappygal.com)

### Lunch Box Kebabs

These are perfect when kids are tired of eating sandwiches!

#### Ingredients:

12 chunks of cheddar cheese cubes  
12 slices of deli ham  
8 cherry or grape tomatoes  
Wooden skewers

1. Place one cherry tomato on a wooden skewer and slide it near one end.
2. Add 3 pieces of ham and 3 pieces of cheese, alternating as you go.
3. Top off the skewer with a cherry tomato.

Source: [itisakeeper.com](http://itisakeeper.com)



### Jack-O-Lantern Quesadillas

#### Ingredients:

1 can of refried beans  
Shredded cheese  
10 whole grain tortillas (6" size)



#### Instructions:

1. Using a sharp knife, cut a jack-o-lantern face out of 5 of the tortillas. You can also cut a notch at the top to make it look like a stem.
2. Preheat oven to 375F.
3. Place the 5 uncut tortillas on a baking tray, making sure they don't overlap.
4. Spread each tortilla with refried beans and cover with shredded cheese.
5. Top each of these with a cut tortilla.
6. Bake in preheated oven for about 5 minutes, or until the cheese has melted a bit and the tortillas have started to brown.
7. Enjoy!

Source: [florassippigirl.blogspot.ca](http://florassippigirl.blogspot.ca)



### **Fall Weather: A Reminder for Parents**

As the days turn chillier, please remember to send your child to care with appropriate clothing for outside play. The sun may be shining but the temperature is dropping!