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Helping Kids Learn

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Information Sheet 30

A day at the beach – all work and no play!

By Fran Schembri, Early Childhood Physiotherapist

You decide to give your child's 'therapy' a miss today and take your family to the beach instead. You feel a little guilty but you also feel you and your family need a break.

Everyone is tired of working on all those goals – to increase movement skills, refine hand skills, improve muscle strength and endurance, increase tactile awareness, learn concepts such as big/little, full/empty and learn numbers and colours.

So off to the beach you go, still feeling guilty, but determined to enjoy your time away from organised activities and thinking about goals, objectives and strategies.

You arrive at the beach and slip, slop, slap so your child is learning about looking after their health. Applying sunscreen also increases their tactile awareness; you have only just arrived and you are already working on a goal!

The next activity is to dig a hole and build a sandcastle. Using a spade – do you want the yellow or the blue spade (learning colours)? Then your child digs the hole and as they dig, they are strengthening the muscles of the hand and arm, improving eye-hand coordination and tactile awareness.

As buckets are filled and emptied with sand and water and castles and holes of differing sizes are created, there are many opportunities to help your child learn the concepts of full/empty, big/little and numbers. Eye-hand coordination – essential for writing skills later on – is being practised and muscle strength improved.

You play a game of jumping on the sandcastle to knock it down and later jumping over the shore waves and are not necessarily aware that you are also practising eye-foot coordination (needed for ball games). You are also gaining more sensory input from the cold water and the cool and warm sand. These games also help strengthen leg muscles and improve balance skills.

Walking on uneven rocks to look at the creatures in the rock pools challenges balance skills and scrambling over and around rocks builds up muscle strength and coordination as well as opening your child's mind to nature's wonders.

Along with all this activity there is lots of communication as you and your children talk to each other about all that is going on – watch me, my turn, you made a big/little castle, swimming was fun, the water is cold, look at the seagulls, etc.

Lunchtime comes and you talk about the shape of the sandwiches – are they triangles or rectangles? Do you want one or two? Look you have a red cup. It is the same colour as your spade. Your child is learning as she eats!

You are all having such a lovely time together that you decide to buy fish and chips for dinner and eat them at the playground. With the energy that children always seem to find, they all begin exploring the playground equipment. Up the ladder and down the slippery dips they go, then on to the swings and flying fox, rope ladders and the fort. While having lots of fun they are again developing their fine and gross motor skills, practising turn taking, waiting and communication skills.

At last you head home and get the children into the bath. They remember the seagulls that were riding the waves and have fun imitating them in the bath as they talk happily about their day.

When the children are tucked up in bed you treat yourself to a glass of wine as you think back over the day.

Learning Links is a non-profit charity assisting children who have difficulty learning and their families.

We raise funds to help children from birth to 18 years by offering a range of services including the following.

Early Childhood Services for children from birth to six years.

- Early childhood intervention and support for very young children.
- An inclusive preschool for children with and without special needs.
- An assessment and consultancy service for families who are concerned about their young child's development.
- Specialist early childhood teaching and therapy.

School Age Services for children from Kindergarten to Year 12 who have low support needs.

- Comprehensive assessments.
- Small group tuition and therapy.
- Occupational and speech therapy programs combining specialist education services and therapy.
- Outreach programs.
- The Ronald McDonald Learning Program for seriously ill children and the Reading for Life Program for children falling behind in their reading.

Family Services helping and supporting families and health professionals.

- Centre and home-based family counselling.
- Parenting Programs and groups for families.
- Case Management Services.

Professional Development for teachers and health professionals.

Presentations, workshops and advice on identifying and helping children with learning difficulties, learning disabilities and developmental delays.

Learning Links has branches in six Sydney locations at Peakhurst, Penshurst, Fairfield, Miller, Dee Why and Randwick. We also offer some services to children in country NSW, the ACT, Victoria and New Zealand. A complete list of branch locations and contact numbers is on the back cover.

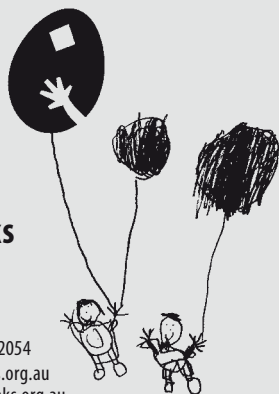
Learning Links

Head Office

12-14 Pindari Road
Peakhurst NSW 2210
Tel: 9534 1710 Fax: 9584 2054
Email: mail@learninglinks.org.au
Website: www.learninglinks.org.au

Enquiries regarding this Information Sheet should be directed to Robyn Collins
Tel: (02) 9534 1710 Fax: (02) 9584 2054 Email: rcollins@learninglinks.org.au

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You think of all the activities you enjoyed together – building sandcastles, digging holes, swimming, looking at the rock pool, playing at the playground – it was such a lovely day.

The guilty twinge returns but it should not for your child has done so much 'work' today, had heaps of fun doing it (as have her siblings) and has practised skills for several hours – something that would never happen in a structured 'therapy' session at home. For 'play' is the 'work' of childhood and children's play, movement and learning is an ever-expanding circle where all aspects are intertwined.

Children have an intrinsic desire to move and to experiment with movement and it is from this experimentation that they learn about themselves and their environment. In turn, the environments they are given to explore will influence the development not only of movement skills but all areas of learning.

These environments can be very simple such as hanging a ball in a stocking on the clothesline for your child to hit with hand, bat or rolled up newspaper. They add to the fun of the backyard and gives more opportunity to practise balance and eye-hand coordination skills.

Cardboard cartons are also a source of fun. Depending on size, a box can be used as a sorting box, car, boat, bed, table, refrigerator, house or whatever your child's imagination wants it to be. Every parent knows the fun a small child has in the plastic container drawer and that saucepans make great drums (if you can cope with the decibel level).

The benefits of varied movement opportunities are many. They lead to improved balance, coordination, auditory, visual, gross and fine motor skills. They promote body and spatial awareness, rhythm and fitness as well as building confidence and self-esteem.

Think back to your day at the beach.

Balance and coordination skills were practised walking on sand and rocks and when climbing on playground equipment; fine motor skills as you dug and made sandcastles and filled and emptied buckets. All the tactile input of sand, water and grass lead to improved body and spatial awareness and as you did not stop all day there must be an improvement in fitness!

Without movement opportunities such as these, learning is limited and the child misses out on enjoyable movement experiences adversely affecting not only the development of movement skills but also the cognitive, sensory, perceptual, social and communication skills.

Children cannot magically develop movement patterns on their own. They require an environment that affords challenges, gives lots of sensory stimuli, is safe to explore and allows them to have fun if they are to emerge with the best motor skills possible.

Rich and wonderful environments include the backyard, beach, park and playground, going for a walk in your neighbourhood or in the bush, having a picnic in the backyard or creating indoor or outdoor obstacle courses. These environments stimulate your child, where they will play games of their own making for lengthy periods and practise a variety of skills in a relaxed manner. In fact, these environments are like the day at the beach – a lot of fun and maybe ALL WORK AND NO PLAY!!



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Early Childhood Services
– all enquiries to Head Office

School Age Services
– contact your local branch

Family Services
– contact your local branch

All other enquiries
– Head Office

Head Office
12-14 Pindari Road
Peakhurst NSW 2210
Telephone: (02) 9534 1710
Preschool: (02) 9533 3283
Facsimile: (02) 9584 2054
Email: mail@learninglinks.org.au

Northern Suburbs Branch
2 Alfred Road
PO Box 634
Brookvale NSW 2100
Telephone: (02) 9907 4222
Facsimile: (02) 9907 4244
Email: nsb@learninglinks.org.au

Western Suburbs Branch
Unit 7/9 William Street
PO Box 1026
Fairfield NSW 1860 (2165)
Telephone: (02) 9754 2377
Facsimile: (02) 9755 9422
Email: wsb@learninglinks.org.au

Southern Suburbs Branch
10 Railway Parade
Penshurst NSW 2222
Telephone: (02) 9580 4888
Facsimile: (02) 9580 4788
Email: ssb@learninglinks.org.au

South West Sydney Branch
88 Shropshire Street
PO Box 42
Miller NSW 2168
Telephone: (02) 8783 7111
Facsimile: (02) 8783 7222
Email: sws@learninglinks.org.au

Eastern Suburbs Branch
1/20 Silver Street
Randwick NSW 2032
Telephone: (02) 9398 5188
Facsimile: (02) 9326 5364
Email: esb@learninglinks.org.au

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