

Learning Links' Tip Sheet

Developing problem solving skills using puzzles



You can help your child develop their problem solving skills using simple puzzles.

Before taking a puzzle apart talk about the picture. Identify objects, discuss what is happening, and find features such as the nose and toes if it is an animal. Use words like “top”, “bottom”, “middle”. This helps your child develop language as well as draw attention to aspects which may help put the puzzle together again.

Take the pieces out rather than tipping the puzzle over. Talk about each piece as it is removed; for example, “You’re taking his arm out” or “arm out”. This is reinforcing where pieces come from as well as encouraging fine motor control.

Organise the table and turn the pieces over so the child can see the picture. At first present just two pieces at a time.

Look at the puzzle and encourage your child to find a specific piece; for example, say, “Let’s find the piece that goes here” or “find head”. Discuss pattern, colour, shape and other characteristics that may help to identify the piece required.

From the table identify the right piece. At first limit the number of pieces to just one or two and as your child’s discrimination skills improve increase the number of pieces.

Put the piece in the right spot. Encourage your child to use their fingers rather than the palm of their hand. If possible talk about how to orientate the piece; for example, the hair should be at the top. If your child is finding this stage difficult ask if you can help. Say, “Want help?” or “my turn” and model how to put the piece in. Next say “your turn” and let your child try. Sometimes you may need to say, “Let’s do it together” and cup your hand over your child’s and gently move the piece into position, instead of forcing it.

Give specific encouragement. For example, say, “Great you put in the feet”, “Now let’s look for the legs”.

Finish, using the sign for the word finish if appropriate. Encourage your child to put the puzzle back on the shelf or away.

The information in Learning Links' Tip Sheets is prepared by experienced early childhood professionals. Each child is unique and this material is not necessarily suitable for every child, parent or carer. We recommend you discuss this information with your child's therapist or education professional prior to using these tips.



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