



Parent Tips

ready at five

Using Props

Props help children bring storytelling, role-playing, creative play, and imagination-based activities to life. Props don't need to be fancy costumes or expensive toys. Instead, use everyday objects or familiar materials in new or unusual ways: a flashlight as a campfire, a blanket as a cape, or a towel as a magic carpet. Providing these types of simple props and encouragement, releases your child's creativity. Inspire your child by:

INFANT:

- Offer your infant child-safe toys that can be used in different ways. Let him explore!

TODDLER:

- Add props when reading books to your child. For example: have real mittens ready to be touched and worn while reading *The Mitten* by Jan Brett; let your child scribble with a purple crayon before reading *The Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson.
- Draw a face on an old sock and show children how to "talk" with puppets.
- Play "Animal Crackers." Ask your child to choose one cracker, look at it, and eat it. Then, encourage her to act like the animal for 1-2 minutes. Try and guess the animal. Repeat.
- Get creative with a sheet! Lay it on the floor and ask your child to swim or go fishing in your pretend lake. Cover a table and suddenly it's a fort for your cowboy. Wrap it around your princess and it's her gown. Or, let it be your picnic blanket for you and your child. Ask questions to prompt continuous dramatic play.

PRESCHOOLERS:

- Make a "Prop Box." Include child-safe materials that foster creativity – such as drawing materials, objects to make sounds with, fabric, purses, hats, old shoes, blocks. Keep the Prop Box in a place where your child can use it anytime for his pretend play activities. When your child uses these materials, celebrate his creativity.
- Set the stage for your child's role-play. Provide props to help bring the pretend world to life. For example: Going to a restaurant? Offer paper and crayons to make a menu or take an order. Taking a trip to outer space? Give your child a bag and ask her bring you back some moon rocks. Building the world's tallest skyscraper? Provide a hat, spoons for tools, blocks, and string for measuring tape. Visiting the vet? Try stuffed animals.
- Invite one of your child's friends over to play.
- Encourage your child to play on his own for short periods of time with Barbie dolls, action figures, or other miniature figures and animals, such as Little People™, Playmobil™, Mighty World™, Legos™ or Disney sets. Check back frequently to see what and how your child is using his imagination.

Book Suggestion
The Mitten by Jan Brett