

Playing with Puzzles

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Puzzle play can be a cooperative activity. As children understand the process, they independently place pieces, developing self-confidence, fine motor skills, and hand-eye coordination. Through sequencing, problem-solving, and persistence, they complete a picture. Guidance from an adult will boost their communication skills of listening to directions that include prepositions (location words) and verbs (actions), and describing the completed product. Consider these ideas as you assemble puzzles together:

With an inset puzzle (pieces are separated),

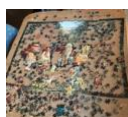
- ❖ count the pieces.
- ❖ have the child predict where the piece will go prior to manipulating.
- ❖ have the child ask for a particular piece before placing. This helps with labeling.
- ❖ place all the pieces, then ask the child to close their eyes. Take away one piece and ask, *What's missing?*

With a connected puzzle,

- ❖ first complete the outside border, then fill in the rest. OR work from the center out. This is more challenging for even the best puzzle doers but give it a try.
- ❖ find matching colors. This is often a clue for where pieces go.
- ❖ present choices between two pieces. *Which comes next – this one or that one?*
- ❖ place a piece into the wrong place. *Hmm. Why doesn't this fit?* Let the child correct.
- ❖ take turns giving each other pieces to place.

With the completed puzzle,

- ❖ label things, colors, or actions in the picture. Then count each category.
- ❖ discuss the shapes of the pieces. Categorize them into piles. *Which has the most?*
- ❖ talk about similarities and differences of pictured items.
- ❖ play I Spy for things in the picture.
- ❖ create a story about the picture.
- ❖ Big challenge! Turn the pieces upside-down and see if you can fit them together.



Have fun constructing together!

