Bottle Cap Games for Kindergarten Readiness

Wondering what to do with all those plastic bottle caps? Don't throw them out - reuse them! Plastic bottle caps are not recyclable and often times they end up being eaten by sea life (with fatal results).

Those plastic caps can become simple tools to help your preschooler with essential skills for kindergarten: including fine motor, counting, categorizing and learning the alphabet. These activities work well with a starting base of around 200 caps. It may sound like a lot, but if you leave a container on your kitchen counter to "catch the caps" they will add up quickly!

What You Need:

- Assortment of plastic bottle caps in a variety of colors, around 200
- 2 small sheets of poster board
- Glue
- Permanent marker

What You Do:

1. First, look at your assortment of caps. If you have caps of many different colors, pull out one cap of each color and set them aside. These will be used to help your child categorize and learn all the different colors.
2. Think of about 10 fun symbols that you can draw on the cap: a star, a smiley face, a sun, a moon, a heart, a diamond, a triangle, a peace sign, or come up with your own! Then draw the symbols on each cap. Make three sets, so there are three caps with the same symbol.
3. Next, make a bigger set of "alphabet" caps to help your child learn her letters. Write a letter of the alphabet on each cap . Make two or three caps for common letters such as A, E, I, O, U, C, D, H, L, N, R, S, T.
4. Now, make a set of number caps. Write the number 1 on one cap, the number 2 on two caps, the number 3 on three caps etc... up to ten.

Once you have your caps ready, it's time to play! Here are some ideas for using your caps to learn with your child (but be sure to incorporate free play with the caps, too: you and your child may find some other great activities of your own):

- Take your set of colored caps: How many different colors do you have? What are the names for the colors? Take your poster board and write all the colors down on the board. Then help your child glue the caps onto the poster board underneath the right color name. This is great categorization practice, but also teaches her to recognize color words.
- Go Fish! Mix up your symbol caps and spread them face down in the playing area. Take turns lifting up one of the caps and trying to find its' matching pair. This is great memory practice for you and your child!
- Use the symbol caps to practice patterning. The patterns ABAB and ABCABC are good starting points. Lay out two symbol caps: a heart and a star, for example. Then lay out two more to repeat the pattern. Ask your child to place the symbol that she thinks would come next in the sequence.
- Take your alphabet caps and ask your child to arrange them in the order of the alphabet song, spreading them in a line on the floor or tabletop.
- Using the alphabet caps, help your child to spell out her name. Are there other words she might be able to spell out with the caps, such as "mom", "dad", "dog", or "ball"?
- Place all your alphabet caps in a bag and shake them up. Ask your child to draw one cap out of

the bag and read the letter out loud. Then she has to think of something that starts with that letter. Allow for phonetic spellings, for example if she says "phone" for the letter "f".

- Mix up the number caps and spread them out on the floor. Ask her to find all of the caps with the number one on them, all the caps with the number two, and continue until she has grouped all the different caps by number. Glue them together in groups on the poster board.

Again, be sure to allow for free play opportunities. If you child decides she/he would love to drop the caps into a tin can to hear the “ting!” sound, that’s great! Turn the can into a music shaker and dance around together. Free play and imagination are wonderful and your child’s unique ideas should be embraced, as well as the directed play.

Enjoy!

Learn more about Barbara Blalock’s Cap Catcher idea (Now supported by Intel!)

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