

Building Basics & Beyond

As we prepare for our Whole School Unit on BUILDING, how can we foster children's natural exploration of the physical, social, and aesthetic properties of their own block structures and the buildings around them?

Please join us for an exploration of opportunities for building and exploring buildings at school, at home, and in the community!

Family Building Basics

**CMU Children's School
Staff / Parent Discussion**

Friday, January 28, 2011

10:00 – 11:30 AM, Margaret Morrison Building – Room 227

Preschool 4's and Kindergarten Children will be in school. Child Care will be provided for children 3 and under in the Red Room.

We'll build together with a variety of materials, view recent video clips of children's developing skills and teachers' strategies for facilitating productive building, and discuss ways to extend children's learning while building at home and observing buildings in the community.

Please RSVP to this email, indicating how many adults will attend and the ages of children needing child care.

We look forward to exploring Building with you!!

Dr. Carver

Family Building Basics

CMU Children's School

Staff / Parent Discussion 1/28/11

Developmental Benefits of Block Building

- **Self-Esteem & Independence** – developing confidence in mastering diverse materials, taking responsibility for following the rules and cleaning up the space, managing emotions when structures fall, etc.
- **Interaction & Cooperation** – sharing materials, coordinating actions, negotiating cooperative designs, etc.
- **Communication** – learning new vocabulary, discussing plans, writing labels or drawing blueprints, reenacting stories, etc.
- **Discovery & Exploration** – exploring concepts of gravity as they relate to balance and stability, counting and measuring building features, strengthening geometric concepts and spatial skills, discovering multiple solutions to building problems, appreciating the value of learning from “mistakes”, etc.
- **Physical Capabilities / Health & Safety** – strengthening eye-hand coordination, building strength to handle large blocks, managing body movements to avoid bumping structures, following safety procedures with blocks, etc.
- **Artistic Expression & Appreciation** – experimenting with design & decoration while combining shapes, colors, textures, noticing varied features of buildings, replicating structure from designs, imagining new constructions, etc.

A 2001 study by Wolfgang, Stannard, and Jones found that “block-play performance in preschool is a predictor of mathematics achievement in middle school and high school.”

Levels of Block Play

Children typically progress during the early childhood years from **carrying** and otherwise exploring blocks, to **building** mostly in rows (either horizontal or vertical), to **bridging** spaces, to **enclosing** spaces, to **making decorative patterns**, to **naming** structures that they build intentionally (e.g., saying they're making a zoo), to **symbolizing** known buildings with blocks.

Adult Support For Block Building

- Build **WITH the children** to gently support their developmental progression without directing or frustrating them.
- Take the **child's lead**, follow the child's interest, and provide only the level of support they need.
- Add people, animals, vehicles, etc. to the selection of blocks to **extend the play**.
- Allow children to combine a **variety of blocks**.
- Allow children to continue working on a structure for a **period of days**.
- Encourage children to **disassemble buildings as they assemble them** – one block at a time (i.e., rather than knocking or kicking them down).

Home Activity Ideas

- Use **recycled materials** for building structures (e.g., cereal boxes, paper cups, paper towel tubes, Styrofoam containers, etc.)
- Play **building & balance games**.
Invented Games, such as the Cardboard Bricks Game
Commercial Games, such as Jenga

Neighborhood Activity Ideas

- Visit the **Toy Lending Library** (www.pghtoys.com) to build with a wider range of blocks than you may have at home.

5401 Centre Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15232-1621
(412) 682-4430

- Visit the **Construction Zone at the Children's Museum**
(<http://www.pittsburghkids.org/>)
10 Children's Way - Allegheny Square
Pittsburgh, PA 15212
(412) 322-5058

- Take walks in different neighborhoods to notice the variety of buildings that give our city its character, as well as to discuss the functions of different buildings.

Here's a song to help you highlight characteristics of buildings. It's an adaptation of "Rock Around the Clock" with lyrics entitled "**Walk Around the Block**" by Marlan Thomas and P.S. 1.

*Chorus: We're gonna walk around the block today.
We're gonna walk, walk, walk in a curious way.
We're gonna walk, gonna walk around the block today.*

Verse 1: We're gonna look at the windows. Look at the doors. Notice all the gargoyles, and even the floors.

Verse 2: What is it made of? What is it for? What is its age? Is it one to restore?

Verse 3: Who were the architects? What did they use? Were they serious or did they just amuse?

Verse 4: We're gonna look at the colors. Look at the shapes. Notice decorations, as well as landscapes.

Verse 5: Won't you come along with us, join with us too. Architecture might just be the thing for you.