Feed the Monster

Description

Take what you would otherwise throw away, like an empty wipes' container or tissue box, and make it into a toy that teaches object permanence. Decorate the opening with some eyes, teeth, etc. and teach your child to play "feed the monster."

Instructions

1. Take an empty tissue box or hard plastic wipes' container and gently clean it if needed.
2. Use your decorations to make the box look like a face, using the opening the box already has for the mouth. Eyes, eyebrows, nose, hair, and teeth around the opening can all be added. Glue everything on securely since your child will be very hands-on with this toy.
3. Collect some age-appropriate items that will fit in the opening, but that are large enough for your child to grasp on their own.
4. Teach your child to use the toy by placing items in the box and then emptying it with them. Repeat this process a few times, and before you know it, they'll be able to do it themselves!

Materials Needed

- Empty hard plastic wet wipes container or empty tissue box
- Items that fit into the opening, such as bottle caps, large pom-poms, large buttons, poker chips, etc.
- (Optional) Materials to decorate the box with, such as googly or sticker eyes, pipe cleaners, pom-poms, cardboard cutouts, and glue

Why is this a great thing to do?

Your child can play their way to a better grasp of the concept of object permanence and work on their fine motor skills after you upcycle this toy for them.

Reinforces object permanence.
Learning that an object still exists even when it is out of sight is called object permanence. Peek-a-boo is another classic way to practice this concept. Object permanence is an essential concept for babies to learn and practice between the ages of four and eight months old. This skill is a prerequisite to long-term memory that is critical for all kinds of animals.

Enhances fine motor skills.
Picking up, holding, and manipulating small objects is a great way to hone fine motor skills. Anything your child holds between their thumb and index finger develops strength and control in the pincer grasp, the skill needed to wield a writing implement.

Teaches your child how to upcycle.
Reusing something that would typically be thrown away and making it into something new is not only environmentally friendly, but it is also a great way to encourage your child to think about things in a brand-new way. What else could be transformed?

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Make STEM Connections

Help your child develop a more in-depth understanding that animals have body parts that capture and convey different kinds of information needed for growth and survival. Animals respond to these inputs with behaviors that help them survive.

Play a memory game.

Play a simplified matching game to help develop your toddler's memory, or at younger ages work on other memory-boosting strategies such as teaching your baby their name and sticking to consistent routines.

Make faces.

Make faces at your baby! From the moment you bring them home from the hospital, making a variety of facial expressions at your baby and mirroring their facial expressions is a great way to connect with them. It is also laying the foundation for your child to be able to engage in imaginative play as they have memories of many loving experiences to mimic. The chance to use their imaginations to role-play from a wide variety of perspectives and situations is incredibly important to child development and the formation of their ideas about themselves and others.

Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Correlation

1-LS1-1: Use materials to design a solution to a human problem by mimicking how plants and/or animals use their external parts to help them survive, grow, and meet their needs.

When you "feed the monster," your child is developing an understanding that humans and animals use their mouth and their teeth to eat with; humans and animals eat to survive. This activity can be extended by looking at and discussing examples of inventions by humans that were designed by observing animals. Examples: look at an image of a flying squirrel and then look at and compare an image of a wingsuit that is commonly used by base jumpers to glide through the air; look at the fins on a fish or the webbed feet of a duck and then look at an image of a scuba diver with fins. Ask your child (if they are old enough to speak) to think of one or two more examples of human inventions that were created by imitating animals.

K-ESS3-3: communicate solutions that will reduce the impact of humans on the land, water, air, and/or other living things in the local environment.

By repurposing materials rather than throwing them away, your child is learning that there are many uses for common household objects and that by finding new uses for materials, there is a positive impact on the environment. Your child will understand that less trash means a healthier and happier planet. This activity can be extended by cutting squares of old fabric to make a quilt, or (if your child is too young to sew) have them use cloth scraps to design a collage.

Talking Tips

"Where did it go? There it is!"

"We put it inside! Can you do it?"

"It went in the mouth. Can you get it?"

"Let's do it again!"

"Let's put the (pick your color or describing word) one in now. Where did it go?"

"Let's dump them out. Whoa! There they are."

Tips & Extensions

This toy will work best when your child can sit up, but sitting with support, if needed, is also fine.

Decorating the box would be an excellent project for an older sibling.

Once the child is older, you can use the box for any kind of category-based sorting game, like colors, soft things vs. hard things, small vs. big, etc.

You can achieve the main goal of this activity (learning object permanence) without decorating the box at all if you'd rather skip those steps.

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