

IDEAS FOR TALKING AND PLAYING USING FAMILY MOVIES

VERBAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING
FOR CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 8

To reach their full potential children need time with their parents: talking, playing and just being together. **Intentional parents** look for activities that will nurture their children. This article suggests many types of fun activities that a parent and a child ages 3 - 8 can do together based on **family movies**, videos, and television. It also contains suggestions on how a parent can use those activities to maximize verbal, **social and emotional learning**, and supplement **character education**.

WARNING: The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) recommends against putting children age two or younger in front of a screen. For children ages three and above it recommends no more than one to two hours of educational, nonviolent programming each day.)

TeachWithMovies.com has prepared a set of free *Guides* for parents of children 3 to 8 entitled [Talking and Playing for Growth](#).

Talking and Playing for Growth: What an Intentional Parent Can Contribute

In this article we will refer to "movies" or "films", but the same principles apply to any television program or other video, to a play, a puppet show, or a book.

A word of caution. Don't try to do everything. No one can. If, for each movie, you engage your child in just two or three of the activities described below, you will be well on the way to enhancing the value of screen time. If you allow your child to watch the movie more than once, on each occasion start a new conversation or pick a new activity. This will allow you to enhance the lessons your child takes from the film. Studies of childhood development tell us that parents can enhance the academic performance and social-emotional maturity of a child by engaging in conversation and playing games using words in an imaginative manner. This article is a primer on how you can maximize the developmental value of the time your child spends in front of the screen.

The first step is to know what your child watches. Beware of relying on brand names. Take a look at web sites that rate films for children. Then, watch the movie with your child the first time it is played. At a break or when the film is completed, engage in an activity described in this article. Whenever you can, be sure to focus on the use of language and imagination. We'll give you some suggestions in the section on [While You Play or Talk](#).

One comment from a parent taking a concept from a movie seriously, can change the way a child looks at a film. Now it has something to say. Now it's more than just a movie. After such a comment a child will start thinking about the lessons of the film.

Ask Questions: Ask open ended questions about the story, its characters, situations, and themes. Listen to your child's answer and acknowledge its value. Then, if you can, ask another question that refers to the answer. A good time to ask questions is at a break in the film. You can ask what your child thinks of an incident or character in the movie. Another good question is: "What do you think will happen next?" When the film is over, ask again about a character or incident that you had brought up before: "What do you think about [refer to the character or the incident] now?" Or ask what your child thinks of the film or about his or her favorite part. If at any time you get an answer that doesn't explain the reasons behind it, ask "why?" You might not get a response but the question will get your kid thinking. Another question that can get a conversation started is: "Was there anything that confused or surprised you?"

Just about any time is a good time to ask questions and talk about a movie, its plot, its characters and its themes. Good times to talk about the movie include bedtime, in the car going somewhere, or on a rainy day when there is nothing to do.

Remember to treat a heartfelt opinion from a child with respect and, if you disagree, to gently and fully describe your reasons. Be flexible. If your child challenges your position and presents convincing reasons, change your mind.

Retell the Story Together: Encourage your child to retell the story, with or without your help. Notice the events and themes that your child emphasizes. Find opportunities to talk about them, and also to pick up some important themes that he or she may have missed. Use words that might not be in your child's vocabulary and explain their meaning. If your child asks you to retell the story, be sure to enlist his or her help. If you get a detail wrong and your child corrects you, laugh about your mistake and praise him or her for having a good memory. As your child becomes more competent with language, let him or her tell more of the story. The key is to encourage imaginative spoken communication.

Add More Stories: Make up a different ending or create a new story using the characters from the film. See [How to Tell Bedtime Stories -- Any Time: And Enhance Verbal Development, Social-Emotional Learning, and Skills for Reading](#). If a child wants to jump in and add facts and scenes to the new story, that's great. Allow your child to take over the story and make it his or her own.

Read Related Books, Go to a Play: Find books about the story of the movie and read them to your child. Talk about any differences between the book and the film. If

books telling the same story are not available, find books about similar animals, situations or themes. If a play of the movie comes to town, attend with your child and talk about it. One good topic is the difference between the play and the movie. Another is the difference between the experience of watching live characters on a stage and watching a film at home on TV.

Act Out the Stories: A child can be encouraged to act out the story with or without other people assisting.

Play With Stuffed Animals and Toys: Encourage your child to select stuffed animals, dolls, puppets, or action figures to represent characters from the movie and use them to act out scenes from the movie or additional scenes that the two of you make up. (The toys selected don't need to look anything like the characters in the film.) When you participate in this type of play, include situations which refer to the themes of the story and use words that will help expand your child's vocabulary.

Draw Pictures: Draw pictures with your child that include scenes from the movie (or have your child draw them) or find coloring books with its characters. As you draw or color, talk about the characters, scenes and themes of the story using words that will extend your child's vocabulary.

Prepare Food Suggested by the Movie: If there is cooking or eating in the movie, you and your child can cook the same or similar food, or a character's favorite food. Again, while you do this, talk to your child and use words in an imaginative manner.

Field Trips: Take a field trip to a location that is similar to a location in the film or which relates to the film in some way. While you are there help your child to point out similarities and differences between what you are seeing and what was portrayed in the movie.

While You Play or Talk -- How Intentional Parents Make Activities With Family Movies into Opportunities for Verbal, Social and Emotional Learning

Verbal, **social and emotional learning** are transmitted to children by their parents. **Character education** is one of the primary obligations of a parent. During each activity based on a **family movie** as an **intentional parent** you can engage in the following developmental exercises with your child.

Word Play: Pay attention to the words in the movie. Use, demonstrate, and illustrate those that your child may not know. Try to use these words when you tell stories based on the film. Use them in other contexts, as well. Especially with very young children, make the concepts expressed by the words real and concrete. Show a physical object,

a picture, or engage in play that demonstrates the meaning of the word. Then use the word in a sentence. Then try to get the child to use the word.

Work with the sounds of words, especially words that sound like what they mean or have an interesting sound. Make a game of words with some of the syllables having the same sound and some having different sounds. Show how the different sounds change the meaning. Examples of words that sound like what they mean are: buzz, crash, tinkle, moan, whirr, clang, pop, hiss, crunch, purr, click, squeak, mumble, hush, boom, and whopper. Work with the meanings of words. Many words have a meaning that are the opposite of what other words mean (e.g., light/dark; fat/thin; hot/cold). Some words mean almost the same thing, like damp/wet; hot/scalding; light/bright. There are prefixes and suffixes and you can work with their sound and their meaning. (Examples are: prefixes: mis-; sub-; pre-; un-; & a-; and suffixes: -s; -es; -ed; -ing; -er; & -ific). Then there are compound words such as cupcake, newspaper, thumbtack, etc. Finally, there are words derived from Latin or Greek. You can invent fun games with them all.

From an early age, work with the alphabet. Show younger children the first letter of the word and, as your child becomes more sophisticated, expand into showing the full spelling of the word and how different combinations of letters change the sound of the word. Most children will want to watch good movies many times. Your vocabulary work will be reinforced as they watch the film. As children get older and start school, turn on the subtitles so that they can see the words on the screen.

What's Going On in the Characters' Minds: Talk to children about what the characters in the film must have been feeling and thinking when they took certain actions. Try to get below the surface if you can.

Teach Good Habits: Most movies don't make much of an impression. But if you find a film with good lessons that will help to develop your child's character, take it seriously when you talk about it. Your child will then take the movie seriously, too. Praise the actions of characters who: (1) talk about their feelings rather than bottle them up; (2) resolve their conflicts peacefully rather than with violence or passive aggressive behaviors; (3) are compassionate and nurturing; and (4) act ethically (for example, follow The Golden Rule). When a character in a film acts badly, talk about it and explain why you disapprove of the conduct. When a child faces an issue that was dealt with in an appropriate manner in one of the movies, ask the child how the character in the movie would react in this situation. If there was a movie in which a character faced the same situation and did the wrong thing, you can talk about that, too. Finally, go to your child's strengths. If a child loves one activity, pursue it, vary it, and include in it the developmental lessons described in this article.

Talking and playing based on **family movies** is an excellent way to enhance verbal skills and foster **social and emotional learning**. It's also a great opportunity for **character education** and increases communication between parent and child. When fathers and mothers take the time to make entertainment an engine for their child's growth and development, they are practicing **intentional parenting** at its best.

And remember, we all make mistakes. We could all be better parents. All we can be are "good enough" parents. So, good luck and good parenting!

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