

# Noah's Notes

January 7, 2022

With so many of our schedules up ended yet again this season, I've fielded a few questions this week about ideas for activities at home and how to keep your child engaged in some of the learning they'd be doing at school with us. Here are a few tried-and-tested ways to keep your child engaged and learning while at home. I'd love to hear your feedback and questions if you try any of these out!

**Fun activities:** Review [Darci's at-home activities](#) and keep three of them up your sleeve for those moments your child just needs something new and exciting...and you just can't do that puzzle one more time. And don't forget – making a mess is always fun! I've used DIY playdough, gak, and kinetic sand recipes and strategies for years in the classroom and as a rite of passage for my own children through their toddlerhood. The more you commit to the mess, the more fun it will be. [Here is a presentation](#) I put together a few years ago to share the recipes and tips.

**Educational materials:** There are a few key educational materials that you'll see throughout your child's time at the Gan that you can use at home as well.

**Unit blocks** are in all our classroom and a core component of how we teach math. The basic "unit" is a rectangular block that is half as wide as it is long and twice as wide as it is tall, complemented by other blocks such as a square "half unit", a "double" which is a rectangle twice as long as the unit, and a "quad" which is four lengths of the unit. [Take a peek here](#) to familiarize yourself with some of the developmental benefits of the blocks (I worked with the author at my previous preschool, JCC Manhattan), and check out [Melissa and Doug for a home-sized set](#).

**Cuisenaire rods** are math manipulatives used in elementary school for solving simple math problems and are used in preschool classrooms to provoke children into discovering innate mathematical properties. [Take a peek here](#) for the math concepts the blocks push your child into and [here for a home-sized set](#).

**Mat-man** is one piece of a much larger literacy curriculum from Handwriting Without Tears. I've always made a point of having them in all PreK classrooms and they are very accessible for three-year-olds as well. They are a tactile, hands-on way for children to learn the basic shapes of each letter, containing four basic shapes which can be combined to create all capital letters: short line, long line, short curve, long curve. You don't need the rest of the curriculum, just let your child explore the blocks and they'll pick up the learning on their own. [Check here for a home-sized set](#) (personally, I would avoid the workbooks and just use the block pieces). When the pandemic first set in and schools were closed, I put together this piece on "[teaching literacy at home](#)" to walk

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parents through the developmental steps that lead into your child's literacy, applicable for all preschool aged children.

**Concepts:** Most of what we teach in preschool is conceptual, as compared to discrete facts. In 4th grade you might learn the 50 state capitals but in preschool you are learning how to use your brain – not what to fill it with. There are three core concepts that all preschoolers are working on and aren't that hard to slip into conversation every so often at home:

**Sequencing:** What comes first? What comes next? Sequences are everywhere around us and are crucial building blocks for math, literacy, and science. You can pique your child's attention to sequences by using a few sets of words with high frequency: first/next/last, beginning/middle/end, first/second/third, before/during/after, now/later, yesterday/today/tomorrow. For 3s and 4s who have mastered sequencing you can move to patterns (repeating sequences), starting with ABAB and moving from there to ABCABC, ABBABB, etc. Use the block sets above for the patterns!

**Opposites:** Again, a core cognitive concept which is both everywhere around us and crucial for later academics. Focus on opposites that are physical, tactile, and observable: up/down, here/there, in/out, full/empty, heavy/light, wet/dry, dark/light. Point these out as you notice them: "Your cereal bowl was full and now it is empty"; "Your mittens were dry and now they are wet."

**Visual discrimination:** "Time for clean up! Put all the square blocks here and all the triangle blocks here." Being able to discriminate items within your visual field is at the core of so much of your child's later academics. Sorting, organizing, categorizing, stacking, combining – highlight a core quality of the material (legos, blocks, magnetiles, crayons) and work with your child to use that quality to discriminate. Think about shape, color, or size. For older children, combine two qualities: "Large, blue pieces go here, and small, red pieces go here" (if your child has mastered the two-qualities-at-a-time they are ready for the card games Uno and SET).

That's all folks! Shabbat shalom and see you Monday,  
Noah