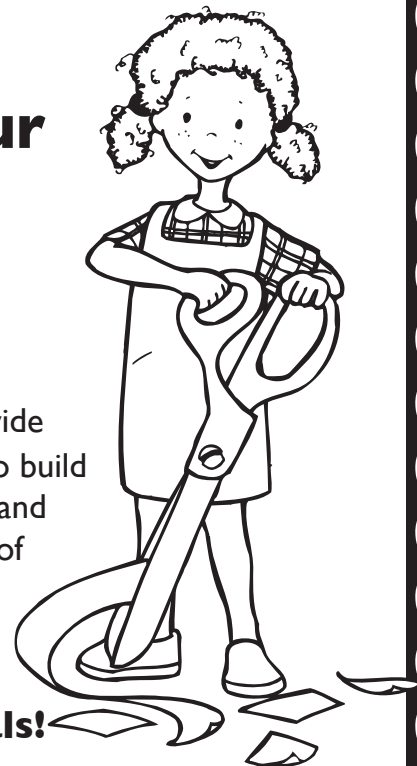


Bargain Hunt, Cut, or Color Your Way to Great Therapy Supplies

By Keri Spielvogel, MCD, CCC-SLP

Do you ever wonder how some people appear to have a wide variety of therapy material? You don't have to spend a lot of money to build your collection of quality therapy materials. All it takes is a little time and some early mornings to build a collection that will make you the envy of others!



Color and cut your way to great therapy materials!

One way to build a large collection of language and articulation cards without spending a lot of money is to make your own. Many companies offer reproducible pictures of targeted articulation sounds and/or language pictures/words to use in therapy. The easiest way to utilize these products is to photocopy the desired pictures, color them using bright crayons, markers, or colored pencils, cut them out, and paste them to index cards. If you have access to a laminating machine, laminate the cards to keep them from being damaged or destroyed. If you don't have access to a laminating machine, purchase some clear contact paper and use this to give them added protection and durability. Then, organize your cards into sound classes for articulation and semantic classes for language and place them into an index card holder or punch holes in each and use rings to hold them together. Before you copy anything for your personal use, however, make sure to check the copyright permission, usually located in the first few pages of the book.

If you're creative and have a little artistic ability, then make your own therapy games! Think of the areas for which you need materials and brainstorm to develop a fun game addressing that area, or make an open-ended game that you can use with your whole caseload. Try to keep in mind that children enjoy interactive activities and games, so make sure that the children perform some sort of activity, like rolling dice and moving pieces, using Velcro® to place pieces, coloring, or any other engaging activity. Some ideas are a Bingo game, game boards, and playing cards.



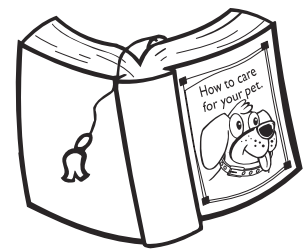
Thrift Shop Your Way to Great Materials

If you have limited artistic ability or limited free time, then hitting flea markets, yard sales, and estate sales might work for you! You can pick up a wide variety of lightly used toys, puzzles, books, and other finds at discounted prices. Start earlier to get the best selection and great bargains.

You might ask yourself, “But what do I look for?” Use the following tips to find materials appropriate for children with a variety of speech and language disorders.

Books

Search for theme-based books for language and social skills. Some themes to look for include the following: getting dressed, going to school, eating, bedtime and/or morning activities, going to the doctor, going to the zoo, going to the grocery store, the arrival of a new brother/sister, recess, going to the farm, and riding the bus. Search for books with colorful, but simple pictures, little or simplified text, and (if you prefer) use popular children’s characters to make it easier to formulate extension activities using contextual toys/objects.



Toys

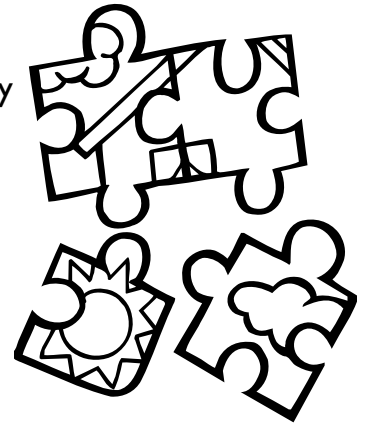
Theme-based: If you look hard and are patient, you usually find all the “props” you need to complete therapy using a storybook. Some common theme-based toys to look for include the following: utensils, combs, brushes, make-up, doctor’s kits, zoo animals, farm set with animals, food, shopping carts, dolls with clothes, dollhouses with furniture, toy kitchens, doll furniture, and common children’s storybook characters. Generally, purchasing these characters in a variety of materials (plastic & cloth) and sizes provides you with a greater selection of therapy tools to use with each child.



Cause-effect: For lower-level or younger children, toys that create a cause-effect action work well for cognitive (thinking skills) development. Look for toys that are battery-powered and have switches or an on/off button. Some examples include: toy pianos (battery-operated), toy cars, toys with lights, and toys that move when the switch is turned on, like a walking dog. Let the children work the switches on these toys to bring about the desired response.

Visual-spatial: An important cognitive process to develop is the ability to perform visual-spatial activities. Look for simple-to-complex puzzles and infant toys that match shapes, stack rings, or interconnecting blocks. All of these allow children to develop age-appropriate visual-spatial skills.

Articulation: Keep an eye open for books and toys that address common sounds in all positions. For an idea of what to look for, refer to Handy Handout, Number 39.



After you have purchased all of the therapy books and toys you need, make sure you take the necessary measures to make the toys safe for the children on your caseload. As a precautionary measure, make sure you sanitize each toy by washing all plastic toys in a bleach-water solution. Sanitize stuffed animals and other cloth toys by machine-washing each in hot water. Be sure to dry all cloth toys thoroughly in the dryer on low setting to prevent mold growth. After you use toys or books with a child, be sure to re-sanitize them to prevent spread of infection. Wash your hands and then use an anti-bacterial wipe to clean plastic toys, and give cloth toys a quick spray with a germ-killing spray. Happy hunting and have fun!