

Helping Children Learn to Recognize Colors



When children recognize colors they are noticing, matching, sorting, and labeling the characteristics of things in the world around them.

Recognizing colors is a skill that is often difficult for children because it is necessary to know

the color words, as well as to identify the abstract characteristic of color.

Mentioning colors and pointing out colors is helpful, but not enough. Children often know more color words than colors and so mislabel colors. For example, a child might say, "I wanted the red one," but be referring to the green car.

- Listen as children use color words in daily activities. Ask children to bring or use items by color word. Put out a blue rug and an orange rug by the door. Then say, "Let's put our shoes on the orange rug." This will help you assess which colors they recognize for planning your teaching.

Children will learn to recognize colors more quickly when you intentionally teach them the color words and color recognition at the same time.

- Begin with a focus on two or three color words and colors, and then add more.
- "This is black. Here is black paint and here is a black marker. This is red paint. Can you find the red marker?"
- Use bright, clear primary or secondary colors, that is— red, yellow and blue, and orange, green, and purple.

Help children notice color and how it is separate from shape. Children tend to notice the shapes and uses of objects before they notice color. Use identical objects that are different colors.

- Provide a color sorting activity using Counting Bears, which are only different in color.
- When pouring a drink, use cups that differ only by color. Ask, "Do you want the red cup or the blue cup?" while you hold one cup in each hand.

Respond to children's learning styles to help them learn.

- Set up an obstacle course with different activities to do at the "red station," "blue station," etc. for children who need to move to learn.
- Children who learn through music could benefit from songs about colors.

Correct children's mistakes by referring to items in their environment.

- This helps a child learn: If a child labels his red shirt as blue, say that his shirt is red, but the ball over there is blue.
- This doesn't help a child learn: If a child labels his red shirt as blue, and you just say, "No, its red," he doesn't have anything to help him understand why his answer was wrong.

Activities families can do to help their children learn to recognize colors

- Families can play the game, "I see something you don't see and it is 'yellow'."
- Folding laundry is a good opportunity to practice colors. "I'm going fold all of the white clothes. What color would you like to fold?"
- While reading a story together, the parent and child can find various colors in the pictures.

When children seem not to be learning colors (particularly red and green) by the age of four, they can have an eye exam that will accurately check for color blindness (see http://www.schoolhealth.com/shop/pe_11115.asp#articles).

References:

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- Barnhardt, C., Block, S., Calder, A., & DeLand, P. (2006). Color vision screening for individuals with intellectual disabilities: A comparison between the Neitz Test of Color Vision and Color Vision Testing Made Easy™. *Optometry - Journal of the American Optometric Association, 77*(5), 211-216.

