

# *Cognitive Activity 3: Assembling a Simple Puzzle*

## **Primary Goal**

Developing spatial organization skills.

## **Secondary Goals**

Developing concentration and fine motor skills; laying the basis for the idea of fractions.

## **Material**

Work mat.

Work tray.

Simple two-piece puzzle. Make the puzzle as follows:

- Draw or paste a picture on 8 1/2- x 11-inch (22 x 28 cm) cardboard or construction paper. For durability, laminate the picture. As much as possible, use pictures showing primary colors. Ideas for pictures: a photograph or drawing of a face; house; car; insects; fruit; vegetables; farm animals; jungle animals; pets; fish; sea creatures; clothing; household items; musical instruments; vehicles; trees; flowers; buildings; people; coins; simple scene. (See NAMC's Curriculum Support Material.)
- Cut the picture into two pieces, making one jagged diagonal or horizontal cut so that the puzzle can be put together only one way. Locate the cut so that neither side of the picture will look complete when the pieces are separated.

## **Presentation**

- This activity appeals particularly to the interests and abilities of toddlers 15–18 months old.
- In advance, place the assembled puzzle on a work tray.



- Put the work mat in place and put the tray on the work mat. Encourage the child to help.
- Sit facing the child with the tray between you. Remove the puzzle from the tray and place the puzzle on the work mat. Put the tray aside.
- Touch the puzzle and name it, saying, “Look. This is a puzzle. A puzzle is a picture made up of pieces.”
- Slowly move the pieces apart, then back together, a few times. End with the pieces apart.
- Pause and smile at the child.
- Invite the child to make the picture whole again. For example, say, “Now you put the picture together again.”
- Sit quietly and give the child ample time to start the activity.
- If the child begins to move the pieces together, and is focusing on the activity, get up quietly and let the child work undisturbed. Intervene only if the child becomes frustrated or asks for help.
- If the child picks up a piece, but does not seem to know what to do, ask, “May I help?” Then gently guide the child’s hands to push the pieces together. As soon as the child begins taking hold of the pieces, gently remove your hands and let the child continue. Once the child is focusing on the activity, get up quietly and let the child work undisturbed.
- When the child has finished the activity, involve the child in putting the assembled puzzle back on the tray, then returning the work mat and materials to their proper places. This completes the activity.
- Make sure that the puzzle presented stays available — on a low shelf, for example — for the child to work on again when she/he wishes.

### **Extension 1**

- Once the child has acquired some experience and skill, move one of the pieces upside down so that the child has to turn the piece this way and that to make the complete picture.



**Extension 2**

- As the child acquires experience and skill, offer a variety of puzzles to the child, and gradually include puzzles with three or four pieces. Increase the number of pieces by making another horizontal or vertical cut.

**Extension 3**

- Invite the toddler to participate in making the puzzle. Give the toddler a piece of sturdy paper (8 1/2 x 11 inch or 22 x 28 cm) and a crayon to draw on it with. After the child has created a drawing, laminate the drawing or cover it with transparent contact paper, then cut it horizontally, diagonally, or vertically into two or three pieces. Make sure to ask the toddler for permission before you cut the drawing. The pieces can be stored in a large envelope, a flat box, or a paper or cloth bag.

**Extension 4**

- Making puzzles can form part of a practical life activity. For example, you and the child, along with other children, can cut bread or cheese slices into pieces, then fit them back into their original shape. Other ideas: fruit cut in half; triangle crackers that fit together to make a rectangle or square shape; sandwiches cut in halves or triangles; square waffles broken into quarters.