



National Lekotek Center - a division of Anixter Center
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AblePlay™ Toy Rating System: www.ableplay.org



National Lekotek Center Fact Sheet

The Lekotek Mission

Lekotek uses interactive play experiences, and the learning that results, to promote the inclusion of children with special needs into family and community life.

A Lekotek Overview

Lekotek provides direct services, support and information to children with special needs and their families in resource and play centers that can be found worldwide. The National Lekotek Center is a non-profit 501(C)3 organization based in Chicago, Illinois, and is the administrative and training center for a nationwide network of 35 Lekotek centers housing family play facilities, toy lending libraries and computer play resources. Ten of these sites, often referred to as Compuplay, house extensive family computer resources.

Clinical evidence affirms that early intervention using strategic play techniques profoundly affects a child's learning capacity. Play is how a child learns, and hidden in play are the keys to positive development. Lekotek provides each of our families with the guidance and tools to help their child with special needs develop through play. With the focus on the child's abilities - and not disabilities - Lekotek helps strengthen and support the entire family.

Lekotek Beginnings

Lekotek is loosely translated as "play library." In the late 1970s two American special education professionals learned of the Lekotek concept at an educational conference. They were so inspired by the idea that they traveled to Sweden to receive training in Lekotek methods. Under their guidance, the first American Lekotek opened its doors in Evanston, Illinois in 1980. Since that time Lekotek has developed into a national network serving thousands of children with disabilities and their families. The phenomenal growth of Lekotek has resulted in part because its philosophy is practical and simple to understand. In December 2002 National Lekotek Center merged with Anixter Center, a leading Chicago non-profit provider of high-quality vocational, residential and educational options, substance abuse prevention and treatment, and health care.

Play Sessions

Lekotek's primary services are the play session and toy lending library for children birth to eight years old. Lekotek family play sessions are held monthly where Leaders, trained by the National Lekotek Center, focus on facilitating family interaction through play. Specially adapted and off-the-shelf toys are carefully selected for each child and his/her family members. The play session is designed to emphasize the creative use of toys and play materials, while promoting interactive play among all members of the family.

Although the value of play and toys in a child's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development is recognized, Lekotek is unique in that our primary concern is the child's enjoyment of the toys and the parents' enjoyment of the child. Since the toys are picked specially for each individual child, the child is able to experience success and the parents can share in that positive experience with their child.

Each month the family borrows a number of toys to be used in their home. Parents have seen the toys demonstrated and feel comfortable using them and expanding on the child's play. Parents are encouraged to bring siblings, grandparents and neighborhood children to Lekotek to promote maximum carryover between the play session and the child's home and community environment.

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Toy Lending Library

During play, a child is learning to learn. Toys that are wisely chosen to meet the developmental level of the child become the tools for growth. Play is how a child explores, manipulates and creatively absorbs information about the exterior world, while simultaneously expressing thoughts, feelings and frustrations about the interior world.

Nationally, Lekotek libraries contain over 50,000 toys that Lekotek Leaders have analyzed and catalogued. Not only are Lekotek Leaders knowledgeable about commercial and educational toys, they have designed and produced specialized toys as well. Lekotek is expert at the adaptation of commercial toys with special switches and motors to accommodate the needs of the children who have physical disabilities.

Computer Play and/or Compuplay

All Lekoteks and Compuplay programs use computers and adapted equipment allowing children and their families to learn and develop through play. Computer technology allows children with special needs to have more control over their environment. It empowers them, helps build their self-esteem and paves the way to future independence. Hundreds of interactive software programs which cross varying developmental levels is available for preview and home use.

Lekotek's Continuum of Services

Lekotek welcomes children with a range of disabilities such as Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, sight or hearing loss, mental retardation, or chronic medical conditions including cancer, HIV/AIDS, or epilepsy. Some families have children coming to Lekotek who do not have a diagnosed disability but are at risk of developmental delay because of poverty or other conditions in the child's environment.

Lekotek continues to meet the diverse needs of families by continually creating innovative direct service models. In addition to play sessions and toy library services, Lekotek reaches out to families through: inclusive play groups, home visits, toy making workshops, and family literacy programs.

Lekotek Toy Resource Helpline

For many children with disabilities, birthdays and holidays bring pajamas and socks rather than exciting toys. Family members, even parents, may be uncertain which toys the child will be successful using and, as a result, not choose to purchase a toy at all. To help facilitate satisfying play experiences, the Lekotek Toy Resource Helpline has been created. This toll-free service provides parents of children with disabilities, their friends, family and the professionals who work with them individualized assistance in selecting appropriate toys and play materials.

Individuals can call the toll-free Lekotek Toy Resource Helpline 800-366-PLAY (TTY: 773-276-8633) Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm (Central Time) to talk to trained Lekotek Leaders who are experts on toys, play materials, and creative play ideas for children with disabilities.

AblePlay Rating System

www.ableplay.org

AblePlay™ is a toy rating system and website that provides comprehensive information on toys for children with special needs so parents, special educators, therapists and others can make the best choices for the children in their lives with disabilities. AblePlay™ breaks down information into disability categories-physical, sensory communicative and cognitive - in order to help parents and professionals get more customized information.

For more information on Lekotek, call 773-528-5766. Outside Illinois, call 800-366-PLAY.