



# Advice for the Home Team Toolbox

## by Dr. Debi Warner

*Dear Dr. Debi,*

*It seems the presents just take over Christmas. I want to do something better with the family, but then again, I would like to head to the workshop to play with the new tools I am pretty sure I am getting... ?*

*Signed, Santa Plays Hooky*

Dear Sleigh Bells and Away,

Don't we all love to get and give presents? Yet Christmas can have all sorts of feelings, pulling in many directions. Thankfully the day is not very scheduled, so you likely can do a bit of each wish on your Santa's list. What sort of mood do you want to linger on that day? What will you want to remember about a special family time that frames itself with meaning? And of course how do you want to relax and enjoy the blessings of sharing gifts and time together?

Many folks tend to wander off after everyone has opened their presents, but it doesn't have to be that way. You may be chomping at the bit to try your new router, but if you stick around, there is much to enjoy.

Likely there are gifts that need assembly. Your handy skills can come to play to help put together the latest fad in child amusements. How you do this can be a lesson and encouragement for your Home Team, especially the young ones. You can help them figure it out and make logic of the task, trying to place odd pieces together to make the toy look like the box. Sometimes this is easy, but indeed, we have all seen it go to ruin. But you can teach your young ones how to use a resource like instructions.

Did I imply that you might actually read the instructions? I would not venture to insult you that way, but they can be a handy reference in making sense of the mind of the person on the other side of the world who threw the pieces into the box. Yes, who reads instruction sheets? It could be a new trek altogether to actually break out your glasses and read those directions. Many times they can be flawed, but you can show your team how to reason out the overall strategy of the toy assembly to compare with the written instructions. Those skills of understanding will help the young ones develop their construction mind.

Having an image and strategy in mind to compare with the pieces in the box, the written instructions provided, and the picture from the box will give them a great ground-

work for later building projects. They will learn to hold a model in their mind of the steps needed for the assembly. A mental design that holds the pieces and their parts that connect. Their mind will turn the pieces around until the connecting details slide into place and the mind snaps it together. What a great way to develop such a mental skill – than to enjoy it on your own Christmas toys?

The assembly process, with oddly written instructions will also bring more great tasks to their little brains. Comparing their mental map of assembly, their observations for the pieces at hand, along with the directions, will also help them learn evaluation skills to contrast their internal understanding with the authoritative literature that comes with the toy. They will learn academic skills too, thinking critically of the information given to them, against what they are coming to know and understand about the task, and their understanding of the written materials. Sometimes reading badly written sentences can test their reading skills more than a smooth story. Letting them try to decipher the Japanese written, printed in Korea, translated by East Indian, all-American directions can bring them more polish in their reading skills.

Looking at diagrams and learning how to treat them like road maps will be a great skill to develop. The brain is busy comparing what it knows, what it sees in the parts, and what the diagram portrays. It is multipart thinking and very good for the developing mind.

How do you nurture this little architect while they struggle and yearn to play with the Handy Manny's Repair Shop that is in pieces and does not yet look like the picture on the box? Your confidence that they will learn and enjoy the process of putting it together will help them along. Get a cup of Jo and convey the attitude that the putting together part is fun too. Be there with them and help them see the picture and move their mind through the steps of assembly and understanding. Your comfort and reassurance, your helping them with pace and even taking over where the going gets tough will help them get the idea that putting things together is a part of the fun too.

You can help with the pace and slow things down when they are frustrated, giving a perspective on projects that they will internalize for themselves. Actually, the time to spend helping them enjoy the process will be a presence they remember long after their presents are outgrown. Happy Home Team!

*Dr. Debi*

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*Dr. Debi Warner is the Founder of Renovation Psychology® radio host, and author of the book, Putting the Home Team to Work, available now online at RenovationPsychology.com. Dr. Debi provides advice for greater domestic harmony to folks who are renovating their home – for True Home Improvement. This column is offered for enjoyment and enhancement and is not intended to replace your personal medical care. Photo by Bob Jenks, St. Johnsbury, Vt.*

*Dr. Debi has a consultation practice, from her studio in Littleton, NH, with house calls all over the East coast.*

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