

Pointers For Parents

Collecting Can Be Key To A Child's Development

(NAPSA)—Collecting is as much a part of childhood as teddy bears, well-worn denims and toothless grins. Whether it was coins, dolls, sports cards or something else, nearly everyone can remember collecting *something* as a kid.

Why are children so enthusiastic about collecting? According to Dr. Carol Seefeldt of the Institute for Child Studies at the University of Maryland, collecting is part of a child's learning process.

"Starting at age 7 or 8, children can categorize things in multiple dimensions, and collecting gives them the chance to practice newly acquired mathematical skills," said Seefeldt, co-author of the book, *Developmental Continuity Across Preschool and Primary Years*. "They now have the math skills to think of more or less, and are able to figure out how many more of an item they need to have a complete set—or compete with their friends."

Collecting also allows young children to develop feelings of control over their world, which is valuable to their cognitive development, according to Seefeldt. "It gives them the power to scheme and dream about building their collection," she said.

Starting a simple collection

So is there a "best" thing for children to collect? According to Seefeldt, making sure that collecting is interesting and within the child's reach is most important.

To Gary Doss, curator of the Burlingame Museum of PEZ Memorabilia in Burlingame, CA, PEZ dispensers are a terrific collectible because they're relatively inexpensive and small, simplifying storage.

"There have been a lot of collectables that have come out in recent years, but PEZ dispensers are still unique and have a lot of appeal to kids of all ages," said Doss, whose museum contains all but two of the PEZ characters ever manufactured. "You get a toy, a cartoon character and candy all in one collectable item."

Doss believes that the limited-edition mini PEZ dispensers currently being distributed in General Mills cereals (Trix, Lucky Charms, Cocoa Puffs and Honey Nut Cheerios) will be popular with collectors and give children an easy way to get into PEZ collecting. "All you have to do is acquire the four different cereals and you'll have your first complete set of PEZ dispensers."

[Note: The boxes are only available through July, and early cus-



New PEZ dispensers, based on popular cereal cartoon characters, are expected to be a big hit with novice and experienced collectors.

tomers response suggests they may sell out quickly.]

Of the 300 unique PEZ dispensers ever created, Doss estimates that approximately 100 are available to collectors for \$1 or less. "You can go to a collecting show or a garage sale and usually find a basket of PEZ dispensers for a quarter or so each."

Dispensers with a unique feature are especially collectable. For instance, the General Mills dispensers are about 40 percent smaller than the average PEZ dispenser and are the first PEZ products to feature cereal cartoon characters. Because of these factors, serious collectors paid top dollar to get their hands on some of the first-released General Mills dispensers at this summer's National PEZ Convention and in eBay online auctions.

Those who collect PEZ dispensers as an investment have been rewarded, according to Doss. "PEZ have held their own," he said. "In the 10 years I've been collecting, I've never had a PEZ dispenser go down in value."

The Burlingame Museum gets more than 10,000 visitors a year and its Web site, at www.burlingamepezmuseum.com, has attracted more than one million visits. As the museum's curator, Doss particularly enjoys the broad public interest in PEZ collecting.

"There is no 'typical' PEZ collector," he said. "We get visitors from young children to those who are 90 years old, from all ethnic backgrounds and from all over the world. Everyone likes PEZ and I think that's neat."