

Play, who know?



While we watch our children, nieces, nephews, and grandchildren play we many often feel it is just a time waster. A way to get a few errands done while your child is busy. But what is really happening during play? How can it contribute to your child's development of important skills required for participation in school and social settings? Most importantly how can it contribute to your relationship with you child? And lastly how is our fast pace technology driven society effecting the quality of play and what does that mean?

Play is the foundation for all early skill acquisition. From cognitive functions (thinking), gross motor skills (large movement), fine motor skills (utilizing your hands), emotional regulation, creativity, and social participation. Through play children are able to explore the world and build skills without even knowing. They can discover new interests, face fears and learn resilience to conquer future challenges. By climbing, jumping, crawling, and running children are building strength, and coordination. While manipulating legos, beads, blocks, and tiles children we witness the emergence of coordination in the small muscles of their fingers, utilize their visual perceptual skills, problem solving, emotional regulation, and constructional praxis. While engaging in symbolic and pretend play children began to develop the skills required for social participation, social emotional skills, creativity, and executive functioning skills. Watching a child play can give us insight into how they perceive the world. Play is directly linked to healthy brain development.



Looking back on your childhood what are your best memories of you parents, Aunts, Uncles, and Grandparents. They are most likely filled with play, fun, laughter, and smiles. Research shows that play develops deep relationships between children and loved ones. Deep meaningful relationships in the early years of life form a concrete base line for up health relationships in adulthood.

Television, game consuls, tablets, smartphones, and computers all lead to a new form of play. One that may feel impossible to avoid. This play is sedentary and often not led by the child. Children utilizing excessive screen time will not have the opportunity to explore and understand the world. They are not playing in reality but rather a virtual setting. They are not mastering jumping, climbing, or crawling. They are utilizing limited fine motor skills. Talking through a microphone or on a video call is not the same as truly interacting with peers which may lead to challenges with social interaction. This may cause delays in all skill areas.

As teachers and caretakers how do we promote play? Do not be afraid to be silly, outlandish, and most importantly have fun. Let your child take the lead as much as possible. Keep in mind there is no correct way to play!

Below is a list of suggestions to aid in the facilitation of play:



- Themed obstacle courses
- Dress up
- Take an airplane trip to different country
- Utilize pretend play to explore different careers and adult roles
- Explore a verity of different mediums (playdoh, slime. Blocks, legos, food, etc.)

Resources to learn more about play:

- The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds by Kenneth R. Ginsburg, ; and the Committee on Communications and ; and the Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health
Pediatrics January 2007, 119 (1) 182-191; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2006-2697>
- The Power of Play: Learning What Comes Naturally By David Elkind Ph.D

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