

The importance of play

Parent's Guide

“All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate”

Playing isn't just fun, it's also the best way for young children to learn. By playing, children can practise all the skills they'll need as they grow up. To grow and develop, children need time and attention from someone who's happy to play with them.

Why play is important

Play is one of the most important needs your child has.

- It is one of the ways children learn about and practise living in their world and their culture.
- It also helps children to manage their feelings and to cope with upsetting things that happen in their lives.
- Play helps build relationships.
- And play is relaxation and fun!

Play and learning

Here are some of the ways children learn through play.

Learning - intellectual development e.g. Sorting toys - learning about number and grouping Puzzles - learning about shapes, sizes, number Posting boxes - learning about space and size Hitting a mobile and making it move - learning about cause and effect Card games and board games Making up games	Developing motor (physical) skills e.g. Pushing and pulling toys Riding on toys Picking up small things Throwing and catching Climbing toys Using crayons or paint brushes Writing Computer games Hitting balls
Social/emotional development e.g. Playing alongside others and watching them Playing with others	Developing language e.g. Stories and books Songs Nursery rhymes

Playing mothers and fathers Copying adults and practising adult tasks and roles Water, paint and mud - expresses feelings Music - relaxes and expresses feelings Pretend play - dressing up Games with rules (eg hopscotch, card games, ball games)	Games with friends and adults Talking to each other Listening to children's programs on TV or iPad, etc Learning to talk is important and should be fun. The best thing parents can do is talk with babies and young children often.
--	---

Pre-schoolers

- Pre-schoolers are beginning to learn to share and take turns and to get much pleasure out of playing with other children. They still need supervision, however.
- They like imaginative play, stories with plays on words, and pretend play with each other.
- They also like activities which enable them to become expert at moving (running, climbing, riding pedal toys).

Play and feelings

Play is one of the important ways that young children, who do not have good language skills, can express and work through their feelings.

- Play is the language of very young children. Play can show you how your child is feeling, eg. if your young child is very aggressive in play towards your baby, you can know that he is telling you that he is upset and angry that the baby seems to be taking his place in your care and love.
- By playing out situations that have been stressful, children can learn to cope with their feelings. If you provide dolls or puppets, mud, paint and water, children can express their feelings through these.
- Children who are very distressed and angry may like to play messy games with mud and water.
- With dolls and puppets children can go over the things that upset them until they feel better about them.
- Doll and puppet play can also help children to deal with expected events, eg starting school, going to hospital. The puppets or dolls can play through what is going to happen and help the child be more prepared.
- Games where children can dress up or play as someone powerful (like superman) can help them to cope with feeling powerless and unimportant.
- As children get older playing games of skill helps them to learn to control their impulses and to be patient. For example children cannot do well at computer games or ball games if they become impatient and do not use all their skills.

Play and relationships

- From the time when toddlers start to play near others they are learning about relationships.
- As they get older play teaches children about taking turns, waiting for a turn and sharing.
- Play helps children learn to negotiate where two children want the same toy, or both want to make the rules for the games.
- Children learn about being a leader and being a follower in play.
- They learn about how to ask to join in a game with others.
- School age children learn about making rules to get on well with others and for their groups.
- The beginnings of friendships are often built around playing together with others.

How to play with children

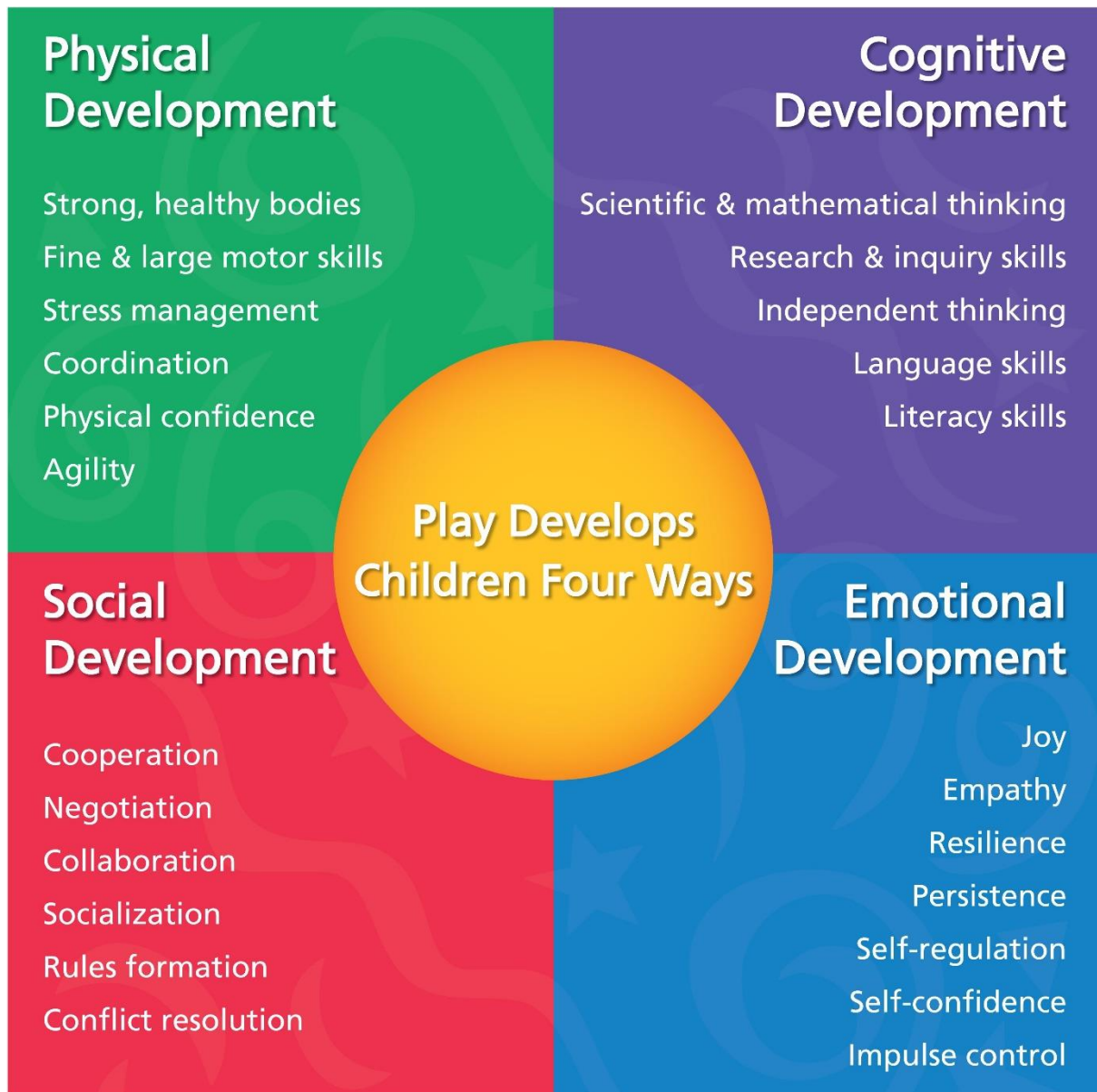
Here are some of the best ways to make play with children.

- Follow the child's lead but make sure the game is safe, don't allow it to get out of control.
- Play with the child but don't take over, let the child change the game.
- Listen but don't tell what to do.
- Talk about what the child is doing and encourage, eg. "It looks like the spaceman wants to rule the world. What are the people going to do?"
- Allow plenty of time.
- Allow for experimenting and mistakes.
- Don't compete with young children; this can discourage them from wanting to play with you.
- Appreciate and encourage your children's effort, eg. display their works of art.

Play must:

- Be fun and enjoyable
- Have no set goals
- Be spontaneous and voluntary
- Involve active engagement
- Involve an element of make-believe

However, some activities have more play potential than others, and are worth establishing in their own right. The adult provides the space, resources, and time-‘invitations to play’ and the children do the rest-they play.



The Strong 2013[®]

Some play ideas:

1. Sand

Sand play is a fantastic opportunity for the foundations of scientific learning, and developing self-confidence and physical development. Scooping, digging, pouring and sifting, teach children how things work, whilst also building their muscles and coordination. Done alongside a little pal, and it becomes about teamwork, sharing, and social skills.

2. Water Play

Similar to sand play, water play enables children to experiment in a safe environment with basic concepts such as volume. Additionally, water play is great for learning consequences of actions. Add in some hand-eye coordination and physical strength, and water play is a firm favourite.

3. Play Dough

Play dough has immense potential for learning. Not only does it strengthen fingers in preparation for a lifetime of writing, it teaches fine motor skills, creativity, and hand-eye coordination. Add some beads to the dough for a fine-motor exercise, or get the kids threading beads on to lengths of dried spaghetti held in the dough, for extra play-value.

4. Dress-Up and Role Play

Let the children loose with a bunch of dressing-up clothes and props such as toy doctor's kits, and let their imaginations run wild. Soon you'll discover the budding doctor, vet, nurse, astronaut, chef or thespian. Dressing-up helps children to begin to make sense of the adult world, roles, and interests, as well as boosting social interaction. Not least, dressing-up helps to reinforce the self-care aspects of self-dressing which is essential for primary school life.

5. Doll and Character Play

And we're not just talking about the girls! Providing characters in the form of mini-figures and dolls allows children to develop their social play. It encourages imagination and the expression (and labelling) of feelings.

6. Drawing and Painting

Letting children run wild with paints and drawing tools allows them to experience their world in a sensory way and develop self-expression, whilst also developing pre-writing skills. Furthermore, it's an invitation to learn about colours, mixing, and good-old tidying up!

7. Blocks, Jigsaws, and Shape Sorters

Playing with blocks, jigsaws, and shape sorters all lay the foundations of spatial thinking, logical reasoning, ordering, and recognising various shapes, sizes, and colours.

8. Music, Dancing, and Singing

Singing and music hugely help to develop language and form the basis of literacy skills, as well as basic mathematical concepts such as counting. Furthermore, they begin to develop rhythm, whilst also refining their listening skills. Dancing helps the child develop strength and coordination, and flexibility.

9. Imaginative Play

All play should be imaginative, but we're referring to the type of play that comes naturally to many children. Leave a small child with nothing but a random selection of objects and you'll soon find them lost in a world of make-believe. Giving a child time and space for imaginative play is essential. It develops their imagination, which is important for literacy skills and intellectual reasoning. Additionally, it increases their sense of self, and self-esteem, as well as making sense of the world around them, as well as ability to handle boredom.

10. Running, Jumping, Climbing, Swinging

Young children have a compulsion to move. Allowing them to do so, and providing safe and age-appropriate challenges, allows them to increase their confidence as well as develop their resilience through risk-taking. Of course, gross motor skills also receive a mighty boost.

11. Nature Play

Children's learning is fuelled with rocket-fuel when you take the play space out in to the great outdoors. Not only is it healthy, it teaches a respect for the environment, and the beginnings of biology. It also helps children to become more independent and inquisitive.

12. Sensory Play

In a nutshell, sensory play is any play activity which involves touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing. This can be provided with a plate of jelly, aqua beads, ice, rainbow rice, or even small world tubs. Sensory play stimulates exploration and the building blocks of science and investigation.

13. Basic Board Games

There are so many board games available for even the youngest players, and these should be embraced – not only for their fun factor, but for their learning potential. In addition to the themes of numbers, colours, shapes, and early phonics, these games are vital for teaching children turn-taking and sharing.

14. Cooking and Pretend-Cooking

Cooking, and pretend cooking, serving, and shops, are great play scenarios for kids. Cooking itself combines elements of sensory play, mathematical concepts, home safety, and following processes. Pretend cooking, serving, and toy shops also teach basic mathematical ideas as well as social interaction, and how to be thoughtful to others.

15. The Cardboard Box

Yes really! The humble cardboard box is one of the most incredible invitations to play. Will it be a house, a car, a home for their teddies? Provide them with scraps of fabric, cushions, pencils and paper plates and watch them explore their world, enter their imagination, and begin thinking like an engineer

Children need to **PLAY** to
BE ADAPTABLE **CONSTRUCT KNOWLEDGE**
PROBLEM LEARN CREATE
SOLVE PROCESS EMOTIONS
INTERNALISE EXPERIENCES
DISCOVER CHALLENGE
BE HEALTHY THEMSELVES
LAUGH & HAVE FUN
LEARN TO WORK IMAGINE
TOGETHER LEARN TO LEAD
EXPRESS EXPLORE SPEAK
IDEAS DEVELOP READ
MANAGE AN INQUIRING
STRESS MIND WRITE
Because **PLAY** **COUNT**
matters.

Just Playing

By Anita Wadley

When I'm building in the block room, please don't say I'm "just playing"
For you see, I'm learning as I play, about balance and shapes.
Who knows? I may be an architect someday.

When I am getting dressed up, setting the table, caring for the babies.
Don't get the idea I'm "just playing". For you see, I'm learning as I play.
I may be a mother or a father someday.

When you see me up to my elbows in paint or standing at an easel, or moulding
and shaping clay, please don't let me hear you say "He is just playing"
For you see, I'm learning as I play, I'm expressing myself and being creative.
I may be an artist or an inventor someday.

When you see me sitting in a chair "reading" to an imaginary audience.
Please do not laugh and think I'm "just playing".
For you see, I'm learning as I play.
I may be a teacher someday.

When you see me combing the bushes for bugs, or packing my pockets with choice
things I find, don't pass it off as "just playing". For you see, I'm learning as I play.
I may be a scientist someday.

When you see me engrossed in a puzzle or some "plaything" at school.
Please don't feel the time is wasted in "play". For you see, I'm learning as I play.
I'm learning to solve problems and to concentrate.
I may be in business someday.

When you see me cooking or tasting foods, please don't think that because I enjoy it, it is
"just playing". I'm learning to follow directions and see differences.
I may be a chef someday.

When you see me learning to skip, hop, run and move my body, please don't say I'm "just
playing". For you see, I'm learning as I play. I'm learning how my body works.
I may be a doctor, nurse or athlete someday.

When you ask me what I've done at school today, and I say, "I just played"
Please don't misunderstand me. For you see, I'm learning as I play.
I'm learning to enjoy and be successful in my work. I'm preparing for tomorrow.

Today, I am a child and my work is play.

