



Play in the Early Years

Why is Play so Important?

- Play gives infants and children the opportunity to use all five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch) in a safe and fun way, which develops their brains and bodies.
- It is the main way your child learns about their environment, surroundings and skills they will need for life.
- By interacting with you and listening to you when you play, your child is developing their brain's potential for learning and relationships. An infant's favourite toy is their parents face, looking at your face, copying your expressions and watching your responses to them.

Children's Play Types

- As your child develops their play progresses through solitary or alone, alongside another, interacting together, turn taking, to co-operative play.
- Watch your child's actions when they are playing, try to provide opportunities for these actions or close alternatives for their play. They can repeat play to practice the skills they need to develop or want to master.
- Recycled toys and everyday objects allow your child to express their interests in play e.g. using the inside of cardboard rolls, boxes, lids, clean containers, blankets, pots, spoons etc
- Your child may play in one or many patterns, e.g. building things, moving things, banging, musical play, or pulling objects apart. Look for your child's interests (then buy or borrow toys, investing time and money wisely!).



Learning Through Play

- Songs, talking and stories develop your child's social and language skills (tone of voice, volume, expression and meaning) e.g. with books. Children start to open the books, turn pages and connect meaning with pictures, and understand another person.
- Your child can develop their motor and thinking skills through something as simple as pulling things 'out' and putting things 'in' e.g. play with milk lids, scarves, paper or tissues with a tissue box.
- Your young child learns literacy and academic skills through play, even the house work, e.g. writing shopping lists, counting towels into the wash, pack away colour or number of toys.
- Through pretend play, your child will develop social and verbal skills, talking and interacting with people, imaginary characters and/or dolls.
- Songs about road rules or full names of family members keep children protected when away from home. Playing out stories (acting or with toys), clarifies your parental boundaries of what is acceptable and appropriate.



Idea's for Learning Through Play

- Constructive play or Arts and Crafts – Building with boxes or blocks using brushes (even with water) develops your child's fine motor co-ordination, maths skills, science concepts and knowledge of objects.
- Role Playing – This gives your child the chance to act out the real life scenarios the child experiences, developing social skills, language and their imaginations.
- Messy Play – This is a good outlet for emotion and provides your child with an opportunity to learn about different textures and materials (water, sand, etc) along with thinking skills (controlling and understanding the substance).
- Moving Around – Dance, running, jumping, climbing can be supported at an early age, developing awareness of your child's body in space, judge distances, and balance.
- Imaginative Play - Providing props, can give your child things they must use their imagination for play. A circle of stuffed toys can become animals in the jungle, on a farm or even guests at a tea party. Cardboard boxes of different sizes are great to use in encouraging your child to use their imagination.
- Rough and Tumble Play – This is play. It is necessary for children to explore, experience, practice and master self regulation of their emotions and themselves. Often relationship boundaries are felt, Dads often prefer rough play - not Grandma!



This handout was prepared using information from various sources. References are available on request.

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