

The Daily Parent

A NEWSLETTER FOR WORKING PARENTS

ISSUE NO. 50

CHILD'S PLAY: It's Not Just for Fun

Play is natural for young ones. Children from all around the world and from all cultures engage in play and always have. The earliest toys were made from rocks, sticks, and clay. Toys have been discovered from the Indus valley civilization (3000-1500 BC). Indus children played with small carts, whistles shaped like birds, and toy monkeys that could slide down a string.



Parents know that play is good for children. When at play, children are busy **and** enjoy themselves. Seeing your child smile and have fun brings joy and satisfaction to you as well. What you may not always know or focus on is *how* play is really helping your child develop.

Play is essential to a child's healthy growth and development. It is the basis for the skills your child will develop and use later in life. Play is how children learn: they learn about and understand the world around them and how they fit into it.

Young Children Learn by Doing

Children learn by moving, touching, tasting, seeing, smelling, and hearing. Infants don't necessarily "play" in terms of the way we think of play until they

are able to walk and move freely. But, they do learn by interacting with parents and others. Infants learn language by listening to it and having it spoken to them. When caregivers talk with and respond to them, infants begin to understand how they can get what they want. Almost everything infants do gives them feedback. If they cry, they will be fed or their diaper will be changed. If they throw an object on the floor, someone will pick it up. If they shake a rattle, they will hear a sound. Infants learn that they do have "power". They can make things happen.

As toddlers are able to crawl and walk, they begin to explore their environment and start to "play". Preschoolers' play becomes a way of imitating real-life experiences and practicing social skills as they begin to play with other children. From school-age and onwards, play takes on the form of more formal games (games with rules and competitive games) and can become an important way of to meet and make friends.

Types of Play

There are many different ways to look at play. You can look at how children play at **various ages**, the **different forms of play**, or **what is being learned** in various play activities. You can also look at play developmentally and how it impacts children in terms of their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.

Children's brains are quickly developing during the early years. There is a large amount of cognitive growth taking place from birth to age 5. Play is an important part of this development.



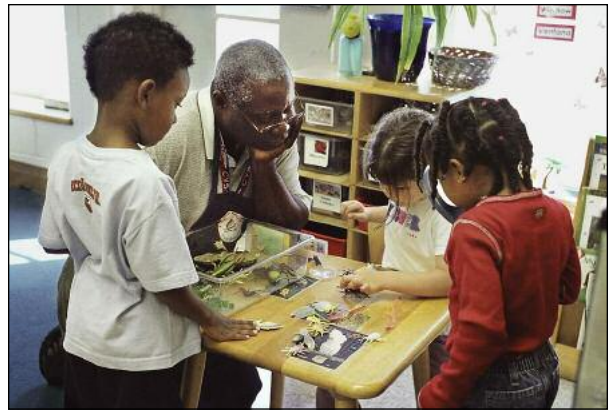
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Parents and Providers Supporting Play

Now that you know that *playing* is how children build a foundation for life, allow them to learn and explore. Make sure children have a variety of materials. Materials and toys do not need to be expensive. Have books, crayons, pens, pencils, paper, blocks or other building toys, music, and the opportunity to play outdoors and with other children. Physical activity and play: running, jumping, riding bikes, skating, tag, are all play activities that are fun for children and help them develop.



What are Children Learning as They Play?

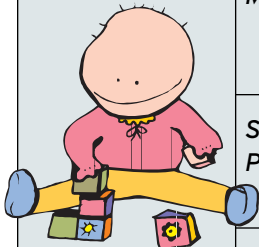
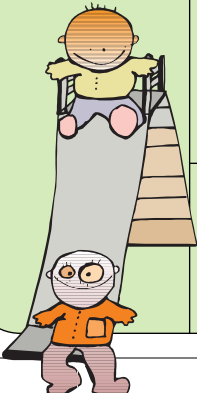
Every kind of play is a learning opportunity for children. Here are some typical play activities and what children learn through them:

Age Group	Type of Activity	What’s Being Learned
Infants 	<i>Play and Interaction with Others</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peek a boo and other interactive games: Children learn “object permanence” – that objects do not mysteriously disappear into thin air just because they cannot be seen • Back and forth interaction: Children, adults making sounds, imitating baby, singing, talking back and forth, is amusing for babies They learn language and the give and take of being social
	<i>Play with Objects (rattles, mouthing toys, toys that make noise)</i>	Children learn that their actions get a response – shaking, squeezing, tapping objects can produce sound or make objects move (cause and effect)
Toddlers 	<i>Finger-play and singing games</i>	Children learn rhythm, counting, and eye-hand coordination.
	<i>(“Itsy Bitsy Spider”; “Five Fat Sausages”)</i>	These types of games also teach cultural norms and childhood songs and games many young children usually know by the time they are in preschool or kindergarten

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What are Children Learning as They Play?

Age Group	Type of Activity	What’s Being Learned
	<i>Blocks</i>	Block play teaches many math concepts and skills such as: counting, length, height, patterns, symmetry.
	<i>Manipulative Toys</i>	Materials such as Play-Doh, threading beads, and stacking and nesting toys help children with their fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination.
	<i>Sand and Water Play</i>	While being fun and soothing to the touch, sand and water play teaches math skills such as measurement and helps children practice pouring skills.
	<i>Puzzles</i>	Puzzles help children with abstract thinking skills and visualizing space and how shapes fit together.
	<i>Dramatic Play</i>	Older children love to pretend they are heroes, parents, or other adults doing “grown-up” things. Dramatic play helps children with their language skills , and can be a creative outlet . Children can practice life skills like grocery shopping or having a party. It’s a good way for children to learn to cooperate with others as well.
	<i>Group games</i>	School age children engage in more group play, which is usually more structured and may have rules. These are team games such as soccer, baseball, or less organized games such as hide-and-seek, tag, kick ball. Children this age also like board games with rules. These games allow children to develop independence , yet learn cooperation with others and to be part of a group.
	<i>Dramatic Play</i>	School-age children also engage in dramatic play or fantasy play. Still pretending and acting out real life or “fantasy” play, dramatic or pretend play gives children a chance to be creative and interact with other children.

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For More Information

- **Play and Learn,** www.naccrra.org/naccrra/. Web page has learning/play activities for with your child by age in seven different categories. Each activity suggestion tells you what materials you need, with step by step instructions, along with how this activity supports your child’s development.
- **Is This the Right Place for My Child?: 38 Research-Based Indicators of High-Quality Child Care,** www.naccrra.org/pubs/. This user friendly booklet contains a checklist of 38 questions that parents can ask to evaluate the quality of child care programs and explains why each question is important and how it relates to the quality of care. It includes a section on making sure your child care program is safe and healthy for your child.



- **Talaris Research Institute,** www.talaris.org. Talaris provides research summaries and information on a variety of topics on children’s development. One focus of their web-site is called “Parenting Counts: A Focus on Early Learning.” This multi-media program uses a series of television spots, printed material and workshops to make the research on best parenting practices part of every day parenting decisions.

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