

Importance Of Play In A Child's Life

(By Meera Narain, Principal, Kinder Valley International School)

Play is the business of childhood and playing allows your child to experiment with the world around him and the emotional world inside him. It has been rightly said that "Play is as necessary and important for the child as the food he eats". Play is a developmental process that involves many aspects of growth. As children play and mature, they grow physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally. Whether a child is five months or five years old, play is the best tool for rapid learning. While it may look like a mere child's play to adults, there's a lot of work going on behind the scenes like problem solving, skill building etc. Given below are some of the things your child will experience and learn, along with ideas on how you can help boost the benefits of his play:

Play Builds Imagination

Pretending or imaginative play is one of the cornerstones of a young child's world. Almost anything can spur your child's imagination, including everyday objects. Using these objects, he learns that one thing can stand for other things. Using his new ability to pretend, he can transform a block of wood into say an airplane or even a few pots and pans into a drum set.

In your child's make-believe world the roles he assumes in play everyday transforms him completely. For example he will move from a Superhero to Daddy to a police officer with ease and simplicity. By experimenting with these different and diverse roles and identities he is able to explore and learn a variety of scenarios and outcomes.

To encourage imaginative play you should keep a box of everyday items that your child can use during pretend play. Child versions of adult objects such as play telephones and plastic dishes help facilitate role playing. You can also have coloring books and crayons etc. for him to color his make-believe world and the things it represents. This helps to stretch the child's imagination with unlimited possibilities.

Play Promotes Social Skills

As Toddlers, children play together (known as Parallel Play) without obvious communication. During the Pre-School years, they start to interact and communicate with each other by creating complex story lines together. In the process they learn to negotiate, cooperate and share. When children disagree about who gets the car/toy or who becomes a police officer, they are actually developing important social skills.

To boost social play schedule his play time or set up a play group for your child and his friends. Attending a Pre-school also makes him learn social skills quickly as there are always children of his age around him.

Play Advances Physical Development

Different types of physical play help develop different skills in a child. Skipping takes balance, climbing a Jungle Gym builds strength and other outdoor activities involve coordination. Large motor skills such as running, throwing and jumping etc. develop faster but fine motor skills are also not far behind. A 3 year old carefully stacking blocks into tower or stringing the beads is not only learning about gravity and balance but also developing hand-eye coordination.

A non-physical benefit of physical play is that it helps kids work through stress and crankiness. Without adequate play time your child may become grumpy or tense.

To promote physical play at home you have to set a good example for your child to follow. Start by engaging in physical activities yourself rather than sedentary ones such as watching TV or casual napping. Indoors, you may start with hide and seek or even play some dance worthy music. Outdoors, build a castle in the sand box, carry out touch and go races or kick a ball back and forth.

Play Helps Kids Work Through Emotions

Children express their feelings through an assortment of ways, instead of words. They express them through physical play, storytelling, art and other activities. Experiences that are hurtful or hard to understand for them are reviewed through play.

During play your child will be exposed to behavior he doesn't understand or needs guidance with. For example, if the child has been pushed or has something snatched away from him, he may just not understand what happened and probably just start crying. Don't reprimand your child if the next day, he aggressively pushes another child as he may be trying to work out what he had experienced the day before.

It is here that the parental role comes into play. You should respond by mimicking the right type of response and try to make your child to laugh which helps to ease tension. Allow your child to lead during play. Let him determine what, when and how to do it within permissible limits of safety and time. This not only helps him to try out his judgment but also allows him to show you what he is delighted in. Join in your child's play but only if invited to do so. As he lets you into his world of make-believe give him complete control as this is his world. Playing with your child and showering attention during play builds his self esteem. By pretending along with him while playing, you are showing him that you accept his world, its fun and really important to you.

Children of different age groups love to play differently. But they do love to play. At different ages their play styles and interests grow and change as is evident from the following:

Infants To 18 Months

These children will benefit more if you spend time playing with them. Rattles, kid telephones, pots to bang, water toys, soft blocks, plastic containers etc. are some of the age appropriate toys. These play objects facilitate their hand eye coordination and enhance their social and intellectual development. This age group prefers to play alone with no regard to others, laughing during play and enjoying looking at self in the mirror.

18 Months To 3 Years

This age group likes parallel play and normally does not interact during play time. Balls, Books with cloth pages, toy phones, wagons, beads to string, unit blocks and play corners are some toys and activities which interest them. Encourage them by allowing them to do safe household chores and by being part of their fantasy world and pretend themes.

3 Years To 4 Years



They start engaging in associated play and are always interested in interacting and playing with other children. Role play and dramatization is essential although sharing is still a dilemma for them. All types of blocks, balance beams, slides, ladder structures, play dough, sand pits etc. are all time favorites with them.

I think that it is amply clear that for the overall development of your child play occupies a very important role. You should encourage your child to experiment with creative materials, let him fantasize and engage in different physical activities. This undoubtedly will keep your child in a happy mood and always in good spirits. Make a difference in your child's life and start from today.