Why Play Is Important
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There are restrictions in growing up
The child is too small. The child can’t reach that yet, he/she can’t do that yet.
The child is too young. The child can’t light the match or pour the milk.
There are time restrictions.
Christmas is not for a long time.
There are distance restrictions. The travel in the car is too long. The zoo is far away.
There are restrictions on the property of things and matter. Things get lost and they break.
Events have restrictions. You plan for a birthday party and you get sick. The child is running and playing and then the child falls and hurts himself.
There are skills to be learned. Skills are inherent in growing up and they take time to learn. Also included in this are social/emotional skills to be learned and children are told not to be mad, or to hate, or to be jealous, etc.
A child needs to feel adequate.

In play the child can:
♥ Be the boss
♥ Be powerful
♥ Be safe
♥ Be in control
♥ Have less fear
♥ Have their own rules
♥ Live with himself/herself
♥ Learn to live with the order of the world

Learning Through Play
by Lisa Feeney

Have you ever wondered what your child is learning while he or she plays? Through quality play activities, your child gathers valuable information and develops important skills that support later academic success. Here are some insights into the play your child engages in at home or in a group setting and guidelines for participation.

Pretend Play: As your child acts out real-life or imaginary experiences, he or she is trying to make sense or feel in control of his or her world. Whether reliving stressful experiences and developing new ways to deal with them, or imitating an everyday event to try out a new role, during pretend play your child experiments with sharing and solving problems. Listen and observe. Chances are your child will use some new words and even begin to experiment with pre-reading as he or she “reads” a picture book to a doll or “writes” a shopping list.

Arts: Scribbling with crayons; tearing or cutting paper; painting; rolling, pounding, or cutting play clay– unstructured art experiences help your child learn how the mind and hands can work together to create. Through art, he or she gains control of hand muscles, which is a must for pre-writing, and learns about shape, texture, form, and color–all pre-math and science skills.

Words and Books: As your child is exposed to words–written and spoken–he or she develops a love and respect for reading that continues to grow over a lifetime. When your child uses language to talk about feelings, share thoughts, and relay fears, he or she begins to feel the power of speech. When your child sings, listens to poetry, is read to, and is given time to browse, he or she experiences the joys of the written word. Learning that books and words are fun and important is an essential first step in beginning to read.

Music and Movement: Music and informal creative movement provides your child with wonderful physical outlets. Familiar songs and soothing music can ease tension. Singing helps develop language as your child learns new words and experiments with new speech patterns. Exposure to a variety of rhythms and beats broadens awareness and appreciation of many cultures. Informal movement activities invites exercise as they deepen understanding of body parts and how they move.

Table Toys: Toys such as Lego and Bristle Blocks, puzzles, matching cards, nesting and stacking boxes, pegs and peg boards, and beads to string introduce your child to the world of math. Toys like these offer your child opportunities to classify, sequence, sort, match by size and shape, and other important pre-math experiences!

Block Play: Gain a better understanding of what your child learns when he or she plays with blocks. Sit down on the floor, build for your own enjoyment, and notice the skills you use. Do you need to make decisions about size and shape? Plan how your structure will progress? Share or cooperate if others are nearby? Do you balance, count, or weigh? Solve problems? Feel proud when you’ve completed a structure? When your child is playing with blocks, he or she is developing similar skills.

Now that you know more about what is going on “behind the scenes,” join in as a play partner. Share non-judgmental comments by describing only what you see. “Wow, David, you’re really running fast with the scarf. You must be in a hurry,” “Sasha, you’re painting big blue lines. Tell me about them.” “Amos, I see you’re feeding the doll a bottle. How does she feel?” Your child’s reactions will clue you in to some of his or her feelings and thoughts. Your interest and open ended questions will help continue and broaden play. Just remember–as you pose questions, avoid those that ask for yes or no answers. Strive to help your child respond with descriptions and his or her own observations, and you will both enjoy the experiences more fully.

Freedom to Choose

Play should never be inflicted on a child. Children should have the freedom to choose what to play with from among the suggestions you make and the play things you make available.

They should also have the freedom to play alone or with others, to play sitting down or standing up, to do something slow or fast, or to choose not to do an activity at all.

It is all right not to want to play all of the time. However, if a child seems not to want to play much of the time, then you should check for symptoms of physical or emotional illness.

Pressure by Parents or Guardians to Teach Academics

Pressure from parents and guardians to teach toddlers and preschoolers academics, especially reading and math, usually stems from a lack of understanding about how many concepts children do learn through play activities.

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