

The Importance of Play

Play is a serious business - it is important in every single aspect of your child's development and education and is the way she will acquire the skills and knowledge she needs to prepare her for adult life.

Often the simplest way to enrich your children's play experience is by talking to them about their discoveries through play and sometimes, not always, playing with them. Playing with your children helps them to learn the skills they need to play with other children and is an important part of learning about relationships. Playing and games are also an important part of the way in which your children learn to talk and to understand what is being said to them. Early baby games, like 'round and round the garden' and "This little Piggy" are great fun for parents to play with their children. At the same time the child is learning about listening, anticipating and responding.

Small children do not have to be encouraged to play - this seems to come naturally especially once they are mobile - everything in their path becomes fair game as a play thing!! However, long before they are big enough to decide for themselves what they want to play, small children are observing, listening and absorbing information about the world. The fuel for their behaviour is curiosity - they want to find out what is going on and they will explore and discover in the best way that they are able, at each stage of their development.

Play comes in different forms and the way in which your child progresses, will change considerably as she grows. What different types of play will your child encounter as she grows?

◇ **Physical, energetic play** - this helps her to learn how to control her body and co-ordinate her actions eg: climbing up and down equipment, up trees or over rocks, hitting or kicking balls or balloons or "roly poly" down grassy slopes. Many more of these activities occur in a child's day.

◇ **Experimental Play** - In one way all play is an experiment for young children - finding out what can and cannot be done. But this play can lead to more discoveries eg: putting objects into containers, stacking different sized and shaped objects or sorting shapes. By watching what they are doing and talking to them you can help your child to find the right words to describe their discoveries.

◇ **Creative Play** - This play can cause great joy with very little effort. For example, household "junk" such as empty margarine tubs, scraps of cardboard or old magazines can be used for gluing or sticking. Under fives will need help but try not to take over as the creation will be amazing, whatever it looks like!

◇ **Fantasy Play** - Acting out situations with friends or toys, things that happen in their lives, helps your child to make sense of the world around them. This may involve a game of schools, mummies and daddies, or hospitals - the stuff that life is made of. Pretend games, for example - flying fairies, or underwater fish can also be flights of pure imagination.

◇ **Messy Play** - Time spent playing with playdough, sand or water can have a very calming effect on young children. It can also help them to explore the properties of many different materials and to discover, experiment with and sometimes create things.

◇ **Playing with friends** - this play teaches your child how to cooperate, how to develop social skills and also to learn a sense of fair play. It also teaches them to keep rules, make friends again after a disagreement and to develop a sense of humour.

Overall play may be difficult to describe or define but it is easy to recognise. Probably the best way to describe it is, as a childish activity which is at once fun, and although some may not realise it, a superb natural way of learning.

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**Declaration by the International Association
for the Child's Right To Play**

Play

along with the basic needs of nutrition, health, shelter, and education is vital to develop the potential of all children.

Play

is instinctive, voluntary and spontaneous. It is natural and exploratory.

Play

is communication and expression, combining thought and action; it gives satisfaction and a feeling of achievement.

Play

touches all aspects of life.

Play

helps children develop physically, mentally emotionally, and socially

Play

is a means of learning to live, not a mere passing of time.

from SA Play Inc

