



When children play, they're learning with their bodies by touching, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and moving. Every day, there's something new to discover. Play also helps them to build social skills, language skills and more!

Play is important!

When your child plays, they:

- learn about their world and the people in it;
- develop their thinking, including problem-solving and organization;
- develop a strong body;
- learn self-control;
- are encouraged to understand, listen and speak;
- feel close to others and make friends;
- use their imagination and creativity; and
- have fun!

Pretend Play

When children pretend to be an animal, a teacher, a store clerk or a parent, this is called pretend or imaginative play.

Pretend play helps children use their imagination, problem-solve, improve their language skills, remember past events and understand other people. Everyday activities like cooking, shopping and bathing can be brought into pretend play. Your child can help to create their own pretend play using things found around the house or outdoors.

Some Examples of Children Learning through Play

Youni is 11 months old. His mother is singing one of her favourite songs from back home. Youni wiggles his legs in rhythm to the song and coos in different pitches. His mother picks him up and they sing/coo and dance together. Youni is learning to recognize different pitches. He can control his body movement according to a rhythm. He feels close to his mother as they play.

Asia is 18 months old. She is playing with different sized plastic bowls. She puts a ball inside the biggest bowl and watches it spin as she moves the bowl. She pours the ball into the smaller bowl and watches how it spins differently. Next, she balances the bowls on top of each other to make a tower. When they fall, she is excited to hear the noise they make. She is learning to coordinate her body and to predict and experiment. She feels powerful when she's able to make a big noise.

Roberto is three years old. He is lining up toy cars that are a similar size and sorting them according to their purpose (e.g., race cars, trucks, police and ambulance). His brother hands him a bigger car. Roberto changes the line up into a train formation, putting the largest car at the front. His brother shows him how to put the front wheels of the second car over the first car to make a "train." Roberto is learning about different categories, adapting his play, problem solving and learning new words to describe his actions. He is also learning to accept and use ideas from others.

In order to play, children need:

TO FEEL SAFE, SECURE AND LOVED

Play with your child. Get down on the floor so your child can see your face. Talk with them about what they are doing. (e.g., "Plunk! You put the ball in.")

LOTS OF TIME AND SPACE

Limit distractions. Turn off the TV and put down your cell phone. If you have a baby, be aware that they need time on their stomachs to reach for toys and to move their body freely. Keep the play area free of clutter.

THINGS TO PLAY WITH

Notice what your child likes to play with and add a few things to make their play richer. Put out just a few toys at a time to avoid overwhelming children and save a few toys to bring out at times when children are having difficulty waiting (e.g., in the doctor's office, or while you make dinner).

Inexpensive Play Ideas for Home

- Bang on pots and pans. Stack bowls or boxes. Create sorting games with different household items.
- Put out a bowl of water and things to pour with. Add sponges, soap and objects to wash.
- Use a spoon to touch different items and listen to the sounds they make.
- Play dress-up with your clothes or with an older brother's or sister's clothes.
- Prepare food together. (e.g., Mix a pre-cut fruit or vegetable salad, bake cookies, etc.)
- Clean together using a damp cloth and a dry towel.
- Hide objects and give clues. (e.g., "Hot" means close. "Cold" means you're far away.)
- Use cushions and blankets to make forts. Add stuffed toys or dolls.
- Do some pretend play: shopping, visiting, going on a trip, emergency/fire.
- Draw, or make books or cards.
- Turn a cardboard box into a train, a house or a garage to park toy cars.
- Sing songs with actions and dance.

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