

The Importance of Play

Play is the work of children.

For the young child, play and work involve the same actions: interacting with people, manipulating objects, and making discoveries that help make sense of the world. Learning happens naturally through play. For school success, children must develop physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and creatively. Play is a crucial part of this development of the whole child.

Play is the way children learn to control their bodies and their movements.

By playing active and physical games, children learn to move competently – to run, to stop, to balance, to judge distance. Play with small toys like puzzles and blocks refines children's fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. These are the same skills that are needed for reading and writing.

Play is an important part of language development.

Children express themselves through play, and they communicate in many ways during play. Play brings together adults with children, or children with each other – a perfect environment for conversations to develop. Play helps children have fun with language!

Play is the way young children construct their own knowledge and learn to think creatively.

It is how they build the foundation for all future learning. Through manipulating and handling toys and creative materials, children learn about cause and effect. They also learn about relationships between objects and events. Through play children make observations that help them to understand quantity, to distinguish attributes, to make associations, to question, and to find answers.

Play is an ideal way for children to express feelings.

Sociodramatic play helps children act out relationships and work through negative feelings. Play is critical for social development, helping children develop rules and understand the purpose of rules. Through play, children learn to make choices and decisions and solve problems.

A child's social play begins with the first smile from an adult.

The adult serves as the play leader (guide) for the infant, and through this first interactive play infants develop secure attachments with adults. As young children grow, social play grows in scope and complexity. Toddlers begin to enjoy the companionship of other toddlers playing nearby. Preschool age children start to interact with each other to set up play games that involve rules and order.

Adults have a role in child's play too.

Adults can encourage children's play by "setting the stage" for play and by providing support as children play. It is their place to see that children have suitable spaces, appropriate materials, and lots of time to play. Adults who actively participate in play with children and serve as models promote language development and expand children's learning through play.