

Child Play

Play is how children occupy free time and learn. It helps facilitate growth and development, good health, social/cognitive skills and helps children learn how to follow rules, problem solve, and regulate emotions. Child-guided play is a form of play where children can explore under the guidance of adults. Adults follow the lead of the child which allows the child some autonomy to explore. Encouraging play can enhance overall well-being!

Types of Play:

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| ❖ Unoccupied Play | ➔ Dramatic/Fantasy Play |
| ❖ Independent Play | ➔ Competitive Play |
| ❖ Onlooker Play | ➔ Physical Play |
| ❖ Parallel Play | ➔ Constructive Play |
| ❖ Associative Play | ➔ Symbolic Play |
| ❖ Cooperative Play | |
| ❖ Guided Play | |

Here are some tips you can follow to maximize learning through guided play:

1. Recognize learning opportunities. Whenever your child is engaged in an activity, notice how it can also be a lesson (i.e. if playing catch-count how many times the ball is thrown).
2. Ask a lot of questions. Why and What questions allow children to think about cause/effect and test hypotheses. Thinking critically is a great way to stay engaged.
3. Compare and contrast. Point out similarities and differences to your child (i.e. at snack time point out a red and green apple, noting they are both apples but have different colors)
4. Demonstrate discovery! Giving a child new information is a great thing, but allowing them to discover things on their own allows more independent exploration.
5. Showing enthusiasm for the interest of your child can encourage them to explore these subjects further. Help them find more information on the subject, provide reading materials, videos, etc.
6. Encouraging questions and answering them is a great way for you to maximize learning during play. Connect new information with things your child already knows.
7. Celebrate your child's achievements, no matter how small. This positive reinforcement will help continued learning, continued exploring, and overall confidence.

Developing Play Skills (by age group)

- **Infancy/Early Childhood**

- Colorful mobiles, rattles, vocal play (talking/singing)
- Mirror play, balls, stacking toys, peek-a-boo, books, music, and water play
- Hide-and-Seek, climbing, pull toys, chasing
- Toddlers: shape toys, scribbling with crayons, books and toys with sound, and imitation play (i.e. hammers, telephones, etc.)
- Preschool: Dress up, puppets, toy cars/trains, puzzles, finger paint, and riding toys

- **Elementary Level**

- Sports
- Board games
- Crafts
- Structured and less-structured experiences (sports, performing arts, instrument)
- Active play before homework can help decompress and prepare child for learning

- **Middle School**

- Encourage child to join school/community-based club and activities
- Participate in leisurely activities with your child → biking, hiking, game nights
- Ask questions about your child's preferences (movies, music, books) to indicate your interest and spark conversation
- Try your best to model a balanced lifestyle of work and play

- **High School**

- Encourage limited screen time (TV, Social Media, Phone, iPad, Video Games) and increased physical activity. This helps deter obesity and depression, and promotes positive thinking, better sleep, and good health.
- Find a good fit between your child's interests and the demands of the leisure activity. For example: some children enjoy more active subjects like swimming or track, while others prefer drama or debate team

**Offer healthy, balanced meals for all ages!