



## WHY IS PLAY IMPORTANT?

Play is one of the most important needs your child has. It is one of the ways children learn and it also helps children to manage their feelings and to cope with upsetting things that happen in their lives. Play helps build relationships and play is relaxation and fun.

### Play and learning

*Children develop intellectually through play* eg Hitting a mobile and making it move – learning about cause and effect; Posting boxes – learning about space and size; Puzzles – learning about shapes, sizes, number; Sorting toys – learning about number and grouping; Making up their own games – creativity.

*Children develop motor (physical) skills* eg Picking up small things; Pushing and pulling toys; Riding on toys; Using crayons or paint; Throwing and catching; Climbing toys; Hitting balls;

Computer games; Writing.

*Children develop socially and emotionally*

From the time toddlers start to play near others, they are learning about relationships. As they get older, play teaches about taking turns and sharing. Play helps children to negotiate when two children want the same toy or want to make rules for games. Children learn about being a leader and being a follower. They learn about how to ask to join in a game.

*Children develop language* eg Stories and books; Songs; Nursery rhymes; Games with friends and adults; Talking and listening.

### Play, relationships and feelings

Play teaches children about relationships and it is one of the important ways that young children, can develop good language skills, and can express and work through their

feelings.

- Play is the language of very young children. Their play can show you how they are feeling eg aggressive play can reflect frustration or distress.
- By playing out situations that have been stressful, through dolls or puppets, mud, paint and water, children can express their feelings. They will often repeat their play until they feel better.
- Doll and puppet play can also help children to deal with expected events eg starting school, going to hospital. The puppets or dolls can play through what is going to happen and help the child be more prepared.
- Dressing up or pretending to be someone powerful (teacher, policeman) can increase feelings of esteem and confidence.
- Playing games of skill helps children to learn to control their impulses and wait for success
- School age children learn about

making rules to get on well with others.

- The beginnings of friendships are often built around playing with others.

## HOW TO PLAY WITH CHILDREN

Here are some of the best ways to play with children.

- Follow the child's lead but make sure the game is safe, don't allow it to get out of control.
- Some children enjoy rough play and find it hard to stop. Encourage children to calm down by lying still and breathing calmly.
- Let the child make the rules.
- Listen but don't tell what to do.
- Talk about what the child is doing and encourage eg "It looks like the spaceman wants to rule the world. What are the people going to do?"
- Allow plenty of time.
- Allow for experimenting and

mistakes.

- Don't compete with your children; this can discourage them from wanting to play with you.
- Appreciate and encourage your child's effort eg display their works of art.

Learning to play works best when children chose how they play.

Sometimes parents worry that boys have fun dressing up in girl's clothes – children need to mimic and try out the roles of girls and boys, mums and dads. This is a very normal stage of their development.

## PLAY IDEAS FOR PARENTS

The most important play for young children is play with parents and there should be some time for this every day! Here are some suggestions.

- Talking, singing, cuddling, rocking or reading to your baby.
- Read stories and nursery rhymes – a

story at bedtime can be a very special time.

- Hide and seek – make sure you are easy to find if the child is very young.
- Games involving physical contact eg bouncing on knee.
- Enjoy a walk – explore the environment, listen, look, touch and talk about it.
- Gardening (especially digging, watering, playing in puddles).
- Helping prepare a meal or helping with the housework.
- Doing outside jobs together eg washing the car.
- Going on outings such as a picnic or to a playground.
- Pretend play – let the child decide who will play which role and make the rules.
- Kicking and throwing balls.
- Singing and dancing together.
- Dressing up – provide old clothes, shoes and hats.
- Playing puzzles or card games eg snap. Young children need to win

more than they lose and you need to let them change the rules sometimes.

- Watch a favourite TV show or video together (a good time for a cuddle and very restful).
- Fun play at bed time or bath time.

Remember: “rough” games such as throwing a child – can cause harm. **Play gently with very young children**