

Understanding the Importance of Play

Children do not generally have to be asked or made to play. It comes naturally to them and it is an activity that can be maintained without giving them any rewards, because to them play is a reward in itself. Playing helps children to learn and develop skills that they will need for successful living, and is a source of physical and mental activity that helps to regulate their levels of stress and improves sleep. The type of play changes as children mature, but it is beneficial throughout childhood, well into adolescence.



Cognitive Development

Children explore their environment through play. They learn about shapes, colours, textures and many other features of the external environment. They also learn about their own emotions, and can develop the ability to concentrate and focus. Through play, children also learn to be persistent and solve problems, both on their own and through team work.

Social-emotional Development

Imaginative play, especially with others, can help children to learn how to work well with others, i.e. teamwork, develop empathy, a sense of fairness and the ability to negotiate with others in order to achieve a desired end. Children can develop self-confidence through play. Playing with others can also reduce impulsivity and teach children how to control their emotions through learning to wait their turn. They learn real-time how their actions and displays of emotions impact those around them, and their capacity to make decisions and accept consequences can be improved. Learning how to treat others as well as how they want to be treated is developed through cooperative play.



Physical Development

Play that involves physical activity supports the development of balance, gross motor coordination and the development of strong bones and muscles. Activities that involve running, jumping, skipping, dancing, throwing or catching a ball are just a few examples of play that can improve a child's physical development. Regular physical activity in early childhood can be a good habit that a child takes forward into adulthood, reducing the risk of being overweight or obese.



Creative Thinking

The use of creativity and imagination in play, whether in role play or other kinds of imaginative play, helps children to expand their ability to create and find solutions, and to evaluate the outcomes of situations that have not been experienced in the real world. They learn to experiment with ideas and analyse relationships between themselves, others, and the world around them.

