



The Role of Play in Early Childhood

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When it comes to academic skills, children are born with completely blank slates. All kids have huge potential, but how much they learn in the future is greatly impacted by early experiences. One critical factor that influences early development is play.

The role of play in cognitive, social, and academic development cannot be overstated. As parents, we must understand the role of play in our children's early lives, and provide the very best opportunities for play to our children. Read on to see just how play factors into your child's development, and to discover ways to integrate meaningful play into their lives.



Play is Vital to Overall Growth

What better way can a child stimulate their imagination and creativity if not for play? A child is born with no life experiences, but is able to learn about the world around them through exploration and play. Through play, a child will begin to develop their thinking

and problem solving skills, while exploring the objects and the environment they are exposed to.

Through their self-led discovery, children are able to learn more about the world around them while also developing important skills cognitive skills to help them form a foundation for life. Moreover, when children are cognitively ready to play with playmates such as siblings or classmates, children also develop crucial social skills which will help form the basis for their personality and the ways in which they relate to others.

Types of Play

From toddlerhood to the preschool years, there are many meaningful types of play that little ones engage in during their early development. Some of these include:

- Symbolic play. Starting from about 12 months, toddlers will begin to pretend to use everyday objects, like phones or hair brushes, to practice the roles of life.
- Solitary play. Children will start life playing on their own, and as they get older will still enjoy alone play time for certain activities.
- Cooperative play. Older toddlers will begin to play not just near others, but will play with other children, including each other, in their games.
- Pretend/Fantasy play. Around age 4, preschoolers will cultivate their imagination to create pretend situations and scenarios to act out and play elaborate games with themselves or others.
- Role play. Branching out from pretend play, preschoolers will take turns practice the roles of life through their pretend play to play games like “house” or “doctor”.
- Competitive play. Preschoolers will also eventually begin to compete against each other in games like races, or competitive board or card games.
- Physical play. Any play that involves exercise, like tag, races, or hide and seek, qualifies as physical play, which is helpful in building motor and social skills.



Key Aspects of Meaningful Early Learning Games

There are many ways that you can incorporate meaningful play into your child's day. To help your child get the most out of their play, be sure to do the following:

- Allow for ample choice - kids enjoy something more if they picked it.
- Focus on learning through discovery - children have a natural curiosity and seek to explore their surroundings.
- Don't micromanage their play time - spontaneous play is best.
- Vary their options - have a variety of toys available, from dolls to apps.
- Build in opportunities for your child to experience all the different types of play above.
- Make sure your child is free from distractions as is possible - the best play is uninterrupted play.

Lastly, [early learning games](#) should be enjoyable for your child. If your child is not enjoying their time spent playing, then they are not playing at all. We all learn best when we enjoy what we are doing, and kids are no different. Research has long supported the notion that kids learn the most through play.

By giving your child the opportunity to explore and discover with a variety of activities and many different types of play, your child will learn and grow in many ways. Play is vitally important to the early development of every child, and by following the above tips, you can be sure that your child is receiving the best foundation for learning about the world around them while also having fun and just being a kid.

