

## ■ Learning Through Play

# Why Is Play Important?

**H**ave you ever wondered what your child is learning while he or she plays? Through quality play activities, your child gathers valuable information and develops important skills that support later academic success. Here are some insights into the play your child engages in — at home or in a group setting — and guidelines for participation.



## ■ Pretend Play

As your child acts out real-life or imaginary experiences, he or she is trying to make sense or feel in control of his or her world. Whether reliving stressful experiences and developing new ways to deal with them or imitating an everyday event to try out a new role, during pretend play your child experiments with sharing and solving problems. Listen and observe. Chances are your child will use some new words and even begin to experiment with prereading as he or she “reads” a picture book to a doll or “writes” a shopping list.

## ■ Art

Scribbling with crayons; tearing or cutting paper; painting; rolling, pounding, or cutting play clay — all these unstructured art experiences help your child learn how the mind and hands can work together to create. Through art, he or she gains control of hand muscles, which is a must for prewriting, and learns about shape, texture, form, and color — all important premath and science skills.

## ■ Words and Books

As your child is exposed to words — written and spoken — he or she develops love and respect for reading that continue to grow over a lifetime. When your child uses language to talk about feelings, share thoughts, and relay fears, he or she begins to feel the power of speech. When your child sings, listens to poetry, is read to, and is given time to browse, he or she experiences the joys of the written word. Learning that books and words are fun and important is an essential first step in beginning to read.

## ■ Music and Movement

Music and informal creative movement provide your child with wonderful physical outlets. Familiar songs and soothing music can ease tension. Singing helps develop language as your child learns new words and experiments with new speech patterns. Exposure to a variety of rhythms and beats broadens awareness and appreciation of many cultures. Movement activities offer your child exercise as

well as a chance to increase understanding of body parts and how they move.

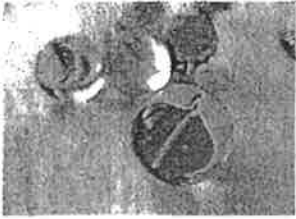
## ■ Table Toys

Toys such as Legos and bristle blocks, puzzles, matching cards, nesting and stacking boxes, pegs and pegboards, and beads to string introduce your child to the world of math. These toys encourage your child to classify, sequence, sort, match by size and shape, and experiment with other premath skills.

## ■ Block Play

Gain a better understanding of what your child learns through block play by building for your own enjoyment. Then think about the skills you used. Did you make decisions about size and shape? Plan how your structure would progress? Did you balance, count, or weigh? Solve problems? When your child is playing with blocks, he or she is developing these same skills and others, too.

Now that you know more about what is going on “behind the scenes,” join in as a play partner. Share nonjudgmental comments by describing what you see. “Wow, you’re really running fast with that scarf. You must be in a hurry.” “You’re painting big blue lines. Tell me about them.” “I see you’re feeding the doll a bottle. How does she feel?” Your child’s reactions will clue you in to his or her feelings and thoughts. Your interest and questions will help continue and broaden the play. Just remember, as you pose questions, to avoid those that ask for yes or no answers. Instead, encourage your child to respond with descriptions and observations. You will both have more fun!



# Play and Preschool Fitness

by Jency Scarola - Fit and Healthy Schools

## Most play involves movement. But exercise? Can exercise be play?

Many of today's young children spend a lot of time in front of a screen: handheld devices, TVs, computers, movies in the car, and so on. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) takes a strong position on screen time: "The AAP strongly discourages television viewing for children ages two years old or younger, and encourages interactive play. For older children, the Academy advises no more than one to two hours per day of educational, nonviolent programs, supervised by parents or other responsible adult."

An antidote to screen time, carefully planned active play, provides chances for preschoolers to acquire and fine-tune a variety of basic motor skills. It does not have to be structured and should not focus on any one skill. It should be fun, functional and safe! Exercises or any movement activity should move from one to the next so children do not lose interest. Use your imagination. These bundles of energy are surely using theirs!

Remember, both teachers and parents are role models. No fair sitting or standing as the children move. If you're having fun, the kids will too!

Here are some examples of play to do with your kids.

1. Hopscotch - Get out some sidewalk chalk and practice your skills with the children - like you did when you were their age!
2. Jump Rope- Inexpensive and effective piece of exercise equipment. A classic! Younger children can jump over a wiggling rope along the ground, or a still rope held slightly higher.
3. An inflatable ball -To roll, kick, throw, and catch with the children.
4. Dance Fever/Musical Chairs - Put on your favorite CD and dance like no one's watching! Or play the old favorite Musical Chairs; when the music stops, find a seat - but don't count anyone OUT!! Share a seat!
5. Chores - Light cleaning, carrying in play equipment, picking up toys, stacking chairs, setting the table.

6. Bubble Chase - You or your little ones blow bubbles and chase them outside.
7. Simon Says & Hokey Pokey - More classics, make exercise fun and challenging for mind and body.
8. Nature Walks - Walk whenever and wherever you can. Collect rocks, leaves, stones all the while getting a good walk with lots of stooping and grasping!
9. Treasure Hunt - Hide objects inside or outside and watch the kids run, squat, lunge, reach, and jump to find the "hidden" treasure!
10. Preschool Boot camp:
  - a. Wall push-ups - Lean against a wall with arms outstretched in front of you. Perform a push up with your arms and keep your legs behind you and stationary. Perform 10 repetitions.
  - b. Leap Frog - Have your child squat down and jump up and then back to start position. Perform 10 repetitions.
  - c. Balance beam - Provide a straight line for a child to walk on at floor level and have them walk foot over foot to keep balance. Complete the walk back and forth.
  - d. Cobra - Adapted from traditional yoga, place hands flat on the floor close to the body and beside your rib cage. Lift your chest off the floor and hold pose for 10 seconds.
  - e. Jumping jacks - Perform 15 repetitions.
  - f. Crab walk - You're on all fours, you're facing upwards. Builds strength and endurance. "Walk" across room four times back and forth.
  - g. Bear crawls - Find yourself some space. Now get down on all fours and walk around like a bear for 2 minutes.

Repeat the circuit!

Be a role model of fitness. Play actively with your children! We only have one body and one life.





# PLAY POWER



**Play** is essential to healthy development.

**Play** is fun and relaxing.



**Play** teaches children to use their problem-solving skills.



**Play** leaves children with a sense of accomplishment.



**Play** fosters a child's normal curiosity.

**Play** is an acceptable way of acting out aggressive and angry feelings.

**Play** gives a child an opportunity to interact with other children and adults.

**Play** is universal in teaching children to become adults. As they role-play a mom or dad, teacher or doctor, they are clarifying for themselves the grown-up world.

