



# The Power of Play

Play is part of a happy and healthy childhood and helps your child to stay physically and mentally healthy. In these times of crisis play is especially important. Through play your children will begin to make sense of what is happening and let out their feelings. Children may like to spend time playing alone, but will also benefit from you being nearby or involved with their play.

There are so many benefits and so many skills that can be developed with a playful approach.

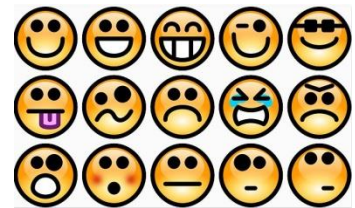
## The Benefits

. Play with attentive adults can:

- -build **warm and loving relationships** with family members.  
(This is great for the mental health of adults too!)
- -develop a sense of **self-worth** and **build self-esteem** and **resilience**.
- -make sense of the world around them.
- -develop **vocabulary** so that they can communicate their thoughts, wishes and feelings (**reducing frustration**).
- -encourage and strengthen social skills (**sharing, turn-taking, helping, waiting** etc.)
  - -build skills such as perseverance and patience.
  - -develop **knowledge** and understanding: colours, shapes, numbers, positions, distance, names of things etc.



- -help children recognise and **regulate their emotions** and be **sensitive** to the feelings of others.
- -**allow children some control**, in a world where they have very little.
- -be encouraged to use their **imagination** and **explore their creativity**.
- -be encouraged to take risks, test out ideas and solve problems.
- -have lots of **feel-good fun**! Children whose parents join them in lots of imaginative make-believe play tend to **show less difficult behaviours**.



**Try to play with your child for a short time each day. Even just 10 minutes of child-led play with an attentive adult can be really beneficial when done daily.**

# How to play

- **Follow your child's lead:** With our best intentions, adults can sometimes stifle children's play. We have our own ideas about how things 'should' be and we can easily take over and prevent children from using their own ideas, creativity and imagination. A desire to 'teach' children through play means that adults can find themselves giving a string of commands or asking lots of questions.



Imagine yourself, fully engrossed in an activity and then someone comes along and starts asking you lots of questions about what you are doing or telling you how you should be doing it. What effect would this have on you? How would it make you feel?

Instead, try quietly sitting back and observing your children play. If they invite you to join in copy their actions and do what they tell you to do. This approach will help your child to become more involved and interested in their play and encourage them to be more creative and independent.

- **Play at your child's own pace:**

Young children like to repeat the same activity over and over again. This can be very boring for adults but is how children build their confidence by practising an activity again and again. If you push your child into moving onto another activity too soon you may leave them feeling incapable because they have not had the opportunity to master the skill. If an activity is too difficult for them they may become frustrated and give up.



- **Listen to your child:**

Have you ever had a great idea for play with your child but find that they are reluctant to join in? This may be because the activity is too complex for them and they are not developmentally ready. If you notice your child losing interest in an activity, move onto something they do want to do. You can try introducing the activity at a later time. Or perhaps, your game will be transformed into something different- your monopoly game might become a play shop, a bank or a little village! Follow your child's lead as much as possible and be sensitive to what they are 'telling' you with their behaviour and actions.

- **Show you appreciate their play and ideas:** try to focus your attention on your child and what they are doing. Sit back and watch them, praising their **efforts** enthusiastically. Your praise should be for what they are trying to achieve, the process of their play and creativity and not just reserved for the end result. Without this praise of their effort, children will give up before they have managed to get there. Show interest and support and develop their play by simply describing commenting on what they are doing instead of asking lots of questions. To help your child's knowledge of numbers you can say 'oh, I see you've got 1...2...3...4 bricks in your tower!' rather than 'how many brick are in your tower?' or introduce vocabulary by commenting 'ah, a rabbit and its babies, what cute little kittens!' instead of asking 'what are baby rabbits called?'



- **Avoid competition and power struggles:** try not to get involved in competitions with your child. If you are drawing portraits side-by-side, try not to produce a masterpiece worthy of an art gallery while your child is working hard just to get a vague resemblance. This will make you child feel inadequate and they may give up or have a tantrum. The aim of play is to build your child's feelings of competence and independence... These play sessions are one of the few instances where your child can exercise some control and power with adult. In your play session, do not worry unduly, about teaching children to play by the rules or learn to be a good loser. Children are only just beginning to understand rules at the ages of seven or eight. If they come up with rules that allow them to win, that's ok! You are teaching them to follow rules by your own acceptance and there are plenty of other opportunities for them to learn this skill
- **'Coach' your child as they play:** Your child will absorb new words from your comments and descriptions of what they are doing. You can also help them to develop lots of other skills in the same way. For example:

# COACH

1. **Staying on task:** whenever you notice that your child has been focused on a task (even for a short time), persevering with a difficulty be sure to praise this. This will help them to stay on task for longer and longer periods. You might say:

“You are so patient and just keep trying all the different ways to make that work” or “you are staying calm and trying again”.

2. Managing feelings: comment when you notice your child feeling an emotion. This will help them to recognise, and eventually share their feelings and to, in time, be able to manage their feelings. It's helpful to match up an uncomfortable feeling to an appropriate coping strategy: “You look really frustrated that spilt your paint water but you are staying calm, cleaning it up and starting again.”
3. Getting on with siblings: when you are playing with your children together, use it as an opportunity to coach their social skills to encourage them to play together. You can say ‘you are being really patient while you wait for your brother to catch up, that's really kind’ or ‘that's really thoughtful of you to give some of your crayons to your sister’.

- **Encourage problem solving:** often as adults when we see our child struggling we are tempting to jump in and take over. Taking over or giving too much help encourages children to be too dependent on adults and reduces the opportunities for them to experience a sense of accomplishment. Try to get the balance of offering just enough support that they don't get overwhelmed and give up. Remember to praise and encourage your child for their efforts and perhaps offer some guidance e.g. ‘what about if I hold this part while you do that...?’ Young children often give parents mixed messages because they are struggling between being independent and wanting our help. Often though, it is enough that we let them know that we are there and we're confident in their ability to succeed.

- **Give attention to positive play:** Children, more than anything, want their parent's attention and they will work to get it in any way they can. If your child is not getting positive attention through praise, they will try to gain negative attention from you by behaving inappropriately. Often, when children are playing quietly we use it as an opportunity to get on with some household or personal tasks. However, by ignoring quiet play we are inadvertently giving the children the message that we don't value it. To encourage your children to play quietly and independently more often, make sure you acknowledge and praise them whenever they do. Also, if you give your child lots of



positive attention by playing with them for a regular period of time each day, they are less likely to misbehave and you may also find that you are able to take more time for yourself later.

Keep the 'attention rule' in mind for times when your child misbehaves during your playtime. Ignore any shouting, throwing toys or other inappropriate behaviour by turning away and diverting your attention elsewhere (perhaps talking to a child who IS behaving appropriately). The, as soon the destructive behaviour stops you can turn back. If the behaviour persists, you can end the play session, explaining why.

- **Encourage imaginative pretend play:** Pretend play is important but may be an area



that parents find difficult to join in with. Through pretend play children are engaging with and making sense of the world. It helps them to think in symbolic ways, as they are playing with representations of things rather than the objects themselves. Role play helps develop empathy and understanding of emotions as children playing a role get to experience the feelings of somebody

else. Often children will share uncomfortable feelings with their parent during pretend play. Try to put any feeling of embarrassment to one side and let yourselves be led by your child. You never know you might have fun!

## Ending Play

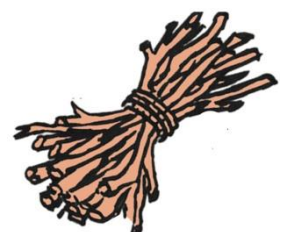


- Often children will have had such a nice time playing that they are reluctant to stop. You can probably remember a time that you have been fully engrossed in an enjoyable activity but were told abruptly to finish. How did that make you feel? It can be very helpful to prepare your child for the end of the playtime

by giving them a warning, perhaps 5 minutes before. Remember to ignore any pleading or protesting. If your child knows that you will play with them again soon, this will also help them accept the end of the playtime with you.

## A few ideas to inspire play

- Collect some items from nature to play with, either from your garden or on your daily walks. Please only collect small amounts



and don't damage trees or plants) Items such as twigs, sticks, pebbles, stones, shells and pinecones are great materials to encourage your children's imagination.



- Raid the recycling: items such as plastic bottles, boxes, tin foil, containers, and egg boxes may form the basis of a great junk model or be used in role play or as part of an art project.
- Flatten out a cereal box and draw pictures on the plain side. You could cut them into jigsaw puzzles.
- Set up pretend shops, cafes, banks or schools. This would be a good way of encouraging your child to work out their feelings about the lockdown.
- Pop bubble-wrap or stamp on boxes to work out feelings of frustration.
- Give your child a clean paintbrush and a bucket of water and get them to 'paint' the wall or garden furniture outside.



- Fill a bowl with warm soapy water and wash plastic toys or dolls.

I hope this guide has been useful. If you have any questions, you can contact school on 01773 832426.

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