



Why Is Play Important?

Children of all ages love to play. Whether your child is five months or five years old, play is the best tool for fostering learning. As your child plays he or she is building a foundation for academic skills: learning to get along with others and developing pride in her accomplishments.

At different ages, children's play styles and interests grow and change. As a parent, there are many ways to facilitate that growth. If you have an infant or toddler, laughing, singing and cooing to your little one offers early social play and language experiences. Also, exploring a variety of toys or household objects like pots and large wooden spoons will stimulate eye-hand coordination, motor skills, and intellectual growth. If your child is two or older, your involvement enriches her play and communicates that play is important.

Here are just a few things your child learns while playing both at home and at school.

Building With Blocks

When building with blocks your child is solving problems in creative and imaginative ways. Whether building the tallest tower in the world or a miniature network of cities, she is learning about weight, balance, space and dimension. She is also developing valuable language and social skills as she communicates ideas and cooperates with friends.

At Home - Find room to play and provide shelves so blocks can be stored safely. Listen to your child describe what she is building and help find appropriate props to enhance the play, such as paper and crayons to make signs and scenery and dress-up clothes to complement what your child is building.

Dramatic Play

"Let's play house!" is a familiar sound at home and in any preschool setting. Through dramatic play your child expands her imagination, creates her own worlds, and safely acts out fears and life experiences. Your child may decide to give a party or act out waking up from a nap because of a thunderstorm. Whatever the situation, she is experimenting with new roles.

At Home - If you have the space, set up a small corner in your child's bedroom and store play props in easy-to-reach boxes. Provide dress-up clothes, dolls, household props such as silverware and dishes, a play telephone, etc. Ask questions to stimulate play such as: "Are you having any guests over for lunch today? How is your baby feeling this afternoon?" Your enjoyment of make-believe enhances your child's dramatic play.

Enjoying Books

At preschool, the library corner is a place where children can go to relax, think, get lost in a book, or share a story. Through books, children learn that language is useful and powerful. They can find new information, deal with important feelings and changes in their lives, and let their imaginations run free.

At Home - Visit the library together and pick out some favorites. Your child might enjoy time to browse by herself. Then later at home you can share a story or two. If possible provide low shelves for storage and a comfortable pillow to lean on.



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Sand and Water Play

As your child uses sand to measure and fill plastic bottles or places a toy boat and a marble in water to see if they float, she is learning basic concepts related to science and math. Sand, water, or the two mixed together offer children play that engages their senses and challenges them to think.

At home - Enjoy water play with your child using the sink or the bathtub. Just make sure you keep a large towel around the area! Or, try filling a homemade sandbox with rice or dried beans. Gather some of the props mentioned and you're all set to explore.

Art

Whether it's dropping a glob of red paint into a glob of yellow paint or sculpting playdough into just the right shape, your child is experiencing the pleasure and satisfaction of creating something entirely personal. With art, your child feels free to experiment and discover.

Because preschoolers aren't always able to translate what they feel into words, art takes on even more importance. Art experiences enable your child to express her thoughts and expand her creative powers through color, shapes, textures and design.

At Home - Encourage your child by providing materials such as playdough, plastic utensils and cookie cutters, paints, paint brushes, a smock, fat pencils and crayons, markers, safety scissors, scraps of paper and material, and paste. Choose an easily accessible storage place and decide on an easy cleanup method. Pick a place to display your child's artwork.

Play gives your child a chance to try out new ideas, see himself as successful, and develop a positive attitude toward participating in new experiences. Learning takes root in early childhood, through play! Play with your child and enjoy this special time together!

From *Scholastic Pre-K Today*

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