

The Importance of Play

by Patricia M. Mikelson
President, Highlights-Jigsaw



*Play is as vital as love,
food, care and hope.*

Child development experts agree that play is very important in the learning and emotional development of all children. play is multi-faceted:

• Play is how children experience fun and joy.
• Through play children develop their personalities and a positive sense of self, realize their potential and experience success.

• Play unlocks children's creativity and,

imagination, and develops reading, thinking and problem solving skills as well as motor skills.

• Through play, children process and manage emotions, and understand and interpret the world around them.

• Play helps children learn relationship and social skills, and develop values and ethics.

Play is a "brain food" to help brains develop in ways critical to school success. It provides

the foundation for learning including language, reading, thinking and reasoning skills. In addition, parent-child play provides important opportunities for parent-child bonding.

The most authentic play experiences are child-initiated, freely chosen, and child powered. Such play is pleasurable and fun, active and mind absorbing.

Dr. Edgar Klugman, Professor Emeritus at Wheelock College, Boston, one of the foremost experts in play, identifies the different categories of play as follows:

Functional Play: The child enjoys repetitive play with objects and gains motor and practice skills. Good examples are dumping, filling, stacking, water play, and outdoors play. Functional play characterizes infants and toddlers and at age 3 constitutes 50%

of a child's play. Although functional play decreases as a child grows older, it remains important. Functional play can be either solitary or parallel (another child is involved in a similar activity at the same time.) Children experience enjoyment, develop motor skills, and achieve mastery through functional play.



Constructive Play:

The child creates or makes something and solves problems. Examples are building with blocks, playing with arts, crafts and puppets and doing puzzles. Approximately 50% of all activity for 4, 5 and 6 year olds is constructive play, and this type of play continues to be important through the primary grades. Children can play constructively alone as well as with others. This type of play develops thinking and reasoning skills, problem solving, and creativity.

Pretend Play:

Through pretend play, children transform themselves, others, and objects from real into make-believe. Pretend play can be both a solitary and a group activity. It reaches its highest level at pre-school and kindergarten age and becomes less important as a child grows older. Pretend play helps children process emotions and events in their lives, practice social skills, learn values, develop language skills, and create a rich imagination.

Games with Rules Play:

This play involves pre-set rules such as board games, ball games, chanting, and skipping games. This type of play becomes dominant as children reach school age. Through this type of play children learn and practice cooperation, mutual understanding, and logical thinking.

