

# **Learning Through Play**

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Play and learning can happen anytime you are with a child. All children learn through play and any activity can be adapted to meet a child's unique needs. When playing children need adults to follow their lead, respect their play, join in, and help them to learn new ways to play. No matter the activity, children need lots of time to explore and play both indoors and out. Children have a strong desire to learn and develop new skills and spend up to 20 % of their time and energy playing.

Play is the "work" and main daily life role of all children; it is where they begin to learn. Play is natural, enjoyable, and flexible, involving a lot of child choice and imitation. It is an essential part of all children's healthy growth and learning at any age. As play is probably the most comfortable activity for children it should come as no surprise that this is where children can express themselves the best, better than they could with words. Play has also shown to improve children's attention, planning skills, and attitudes. By playing children can learn the skills needed to support their role as friend, playgroup member, and student.

Through play children are given the chance to learn about their physical, social and emotional abilities and skills, as well as explore and learn about themselves and their surroundings. Physically, play is an appropriate place for children to expend energy and as a major stress reliever; it fosters fine and gross motor skills such as climbing, jumping, balance and coordination, body awareness, and also develops brain areas used in controlling behavior and thinking.

Play also allows the development of social and emotional skills by encouraging children to initiate language, take turns, become involved in activities and develop relationships. Play provides children with the experience they need to learn important social skills such as empathy, controlling emotions and learning how to share. These types of play skills will help to encourage peer play, friendships, language, sharing, turn taking, and helping to solve problems.

Finally, play affords a sense of wonder and discovery in children. It allows them to learn about the world through exploration, which prepares them for life's duties, and achieve challenging goals. Play allows children to invent, create, discover, discuss, and improve their skills, which helps them to develop their personality. By being involved in play children can let their imaginations go making them feel comfortable and in control of expressing their feelings both positive and negative.