

# How To Encourage Children To Learn Through Play

## Tips for Parents - How To Encourage Children To Learn Through Play



Note: This e-book is optimized for viewing on a computer screen, but it is organized so you can also print it out and assemble it as a book. Since the text is optimized for screen viewing, the type is larger than that in usual printed books.

## Disclaimer

This report has been written to provide information to help you Encourage Children To Learn Through Play. Every effort has been made to make this report as complete and accurate as possible. However, there may be mistakes in typography or content. Also, this report contains information only up to the publishing date. Therefore, this report should be used as a guide – not as the ultimate source of Encourage Children To Learn Through Play.

The purpose of this report is to educate. The author and publisher does not warrant that the information contained in this report is fully complete and shall not be responsible for any errors or omissions. The author and publisher shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by this report.

If you do not wish to be bound by the above, please return this report.

### Distribution Rights For This Report

You have the right to pass this report to other people with the provision that no changes are made and that no charge is made. In other words this report is free of charge to all.

Thank you,

Paul Duxbury

**MATERIAL CONNECTION DISCLOSURE:** You should assume that the author and publisher have an affiliate relationship and/or another material connection to the providers of goods and services mentioned in this report and may be compensated when you purchase from a provider. You should always perform due diligence before buying goods or services from anyone via the Internet or offline.

**Copyright © 2010 pkmcrr.** All rights are reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced or transmitted in any form without the written permission of the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

# Tips for Parents - How To Encourage Children To Learn Through Play

## Introduction

It can be tempting to think that the more scheduled activities you involve your children in the better and healthier and happier they will be. And for some children, participating in a lot of structured, "non-playing" activities is something they thrive on. Nonetheless, playing is important for all children and vital for others. And play is not necessarily unstructured.

There are various types of play and a variety of benefits that can be derived from it. There is play therapy that helps children who have experienced trauma or have other special needs; there is simply free play, which encourages children to develop an imagination and other important skills. Through play, a child can communicate and work through deep issues for which it can be impossible to find words.

## The Basics of Play - Encouraging Your Kids

Children learn by mimicking, and if you model playing by participating with your child, he or she will get some ideas about what play is and how it works.

How you will encourage your child to play will depend on her age and personality. Babies and infants, for example, learn through sensory perception and experience. Play involves both of these elements. For children of all ages, one of the best ways to encourage play is to participate.

Turning toddlers or infants "loose" and expecting them to play on their own is not necessarily beneficial - very young children do not have the cognitive ability to play together with others, and they are too young even to know how to play. While children need to be shown what play is and how to do it, resist the temptation to instruct or dominate, which can be very challenging for parents.

Here are some tips to keep the play session with your five-and-under child fun and low-key, providing instruction without being overbearing.

-Let the child lead

Allow your child to choose the toys (some toddlers do well when presented with a choice of a few toys), and participate with him however he wants to play with that toy. For example, it may be tempting to point out that your child's [block tower](#) is about to fall, but that may be his intention. He may like to see it fall, and is building it accordingly.

Then you could take that idea and develop it, showing him fun and creative ways to knock the tower down. Suggest he crash a toy car into it, for example, or roll a ball toward it. This can be a great hand-eye coordination exercise and helps with motor skills. As you can see, following your child's lead can lead to all sorts of fun and learning!

-Use informational speech

Young children often do not have words for what they are thinking or doing. (This is one reason why play is so therapeutic!) Using up-beat, informational speech can help a child form words to connect to her actions. As you watch your child at play, note what she is doing, or the toys she is using.

This encourages a child to take note of her environment, and it provides affirmation from the parent. As you "interpret" your child's play, use words she can understand, and don't talk continually. You might say, "Look at how you are using blocks to make a building! Is it a house? Who lives in your house? I see it's a tall house. I bet the people inside think it's fun to have a tall house." Your child will pick up on your sentence structure and speech patterns. Your words can "plant seeds" that will grow into full sentences later.

-Don't rush

Remember, you're not after a specific goal that you must reach that day. Take your time, and if your child doesn't want to play that day or the way you'd like her to, don't sweat it. Remember, you are planting seeds, not pruning a full-grown tree!

### -Skip the TV

If other family members wish to watch TV, take your play into another room where you can focus on the play activities. Hopefully, you can get other family members involved in some TV-free time. The television is distracting and beckons little ones to enter the media world rather than entering their own inner world.

### -Make the time

You may need to cut back on some activities you have scheduled outside the home in order to make time for play. It's nice if it can be spontaneous to an extent, but in today's world even play needs to be prioritized and scheduled. That way, you know you'll get to it. Your child doesn't need to know it's scheduled, after all. Like the television viewing issue, this may take cooperation from older members of the household.

### -Make the toys

Children enjoy making things, whether it's inventing simple machines or artistic crafts. Children take pride in their work and enjoy playing with their own creations. Helping your child make a fun toy can go a long way toward encouraging play. Here are some suggestions for homemade toys.

- Empty boxes make wonderful stacking blocks. Your child can paint, color, or wrap them in wrapping paper. You can also make empty boxes into musical instruments (think tissue boxes made into guitars with rubber bands), or use markers and construction paper to make boxes into cars and buses.

If the box is big, then your child can "ride" in the homemade vehicle or take her stuffed animals and dolls and for a ride. Very large boxes can be made into houses or hideouts. Smaller boxes can be used as building blocks to build "towns" or other dwellings. And empty boxes are light, so being stacked and knocked down again will be less likely to hurt like wooden blocks.

- Kitchen items make great toys for the younger age groups. Beans, cornmeal, flour, water, funnels, slotted spoons, spots, etc. can be explorative toys. You might consider putting a tarp down first so that your little one can play freely and make an educational mess!

- Playing dress-up can be a great way for children to express themselves and communicate non-verbally. Keep a box of dress-up clothes that your children can play in without fear of tearing, staining, and so forth. Remember, participation from the parent is essential for young ones - dress yourself up, too!

- Make play-dough or salt dough and let your child choose the colors.

### **What Do Young Children Learn Through Play?**

Now that we have gotten some of the basics underway, you might be wondering just what your child is learning from your playtime efforts. During the first five years of life, all kinds of important concepts can be introduced through play. Here are some examples of the skills your child can begin to learn through play.

- Motor skills

Working with puzzles, blocks, and other manipulative toys develops motor skills. It is important, however, that children be given toys that are appropriate for their age group. It will only produce frustration if a child of two, for example, is given an intricate puzzle meant for older kids.

- Math

A lot of play involves sorting and grouping. Some children enjoy sorting their toy collections according to color (all the red cars in a line, all the round blocks in a circle, etc.). Then finding out how many are in each group introduces the concept of grouping, which is helpful in learning multiplication. There are all sorts of sorting, grouping and counting games that children enjoy, and is an excellent way for parents to get involved (don't be pushy about the math concepts, though - remember, this is play!).

### - Problem solving

Play presents many "problems" that need to be solved. Children playing with blocks need to figure out how to stack blocks into the shapes they want as they try to solve the problem of structures toppling prematurely. Puzzles themselves present a problem that is resolved with each fitting piece.

Games often present a conundrum - how do I get my game piece from here to there on the board? Construction toys such as [Lego Blocks for Toddlers](#) or [Tinker Toys](#) present the child with the "problem" of creating something tangible from the image in his or her mind. Nearly all play presents problems that the child solves.

### - Emotional control

Play provides an outlet for creative expression, constructive communication, and other means of self-expression. A child who feels "heard" will be less likely to erupt into tantrums or other outbursts of emotion. Often, tantrums result from emotional frustration - the child just can't get his point across due to language barriers or inadvertently clueless parents. Play - with an attentive adult in attendance - can go a long way in helping a child communicate, relieving some frustration and emotional tension.

### - Reading/Language development

[Alphabet and Number Blocks](#) introduce young children to the concept of letters and numbers, even if it is just recognition of the shapes. Children learn better when they are presented with something familiar to them; later in life, when it comes time to read, children who have been exposed to letter and number shapes may pick up these skills more quickly.

Rubber stamps in the shapes of numbers and letters are helpful, too, as is clay. In fact, making letter and number shapes out of clay or play-dough is especially helpful and is even employed by some school curricula. Using clay allows a child to interact with the formation of the shape.

### - Social skills

A great deal of play involves interacting with others. Children at play may have to take turns or wait (going down the slide, waiting to go up to bat, etc.).

Play also involves sharing with others; if a child does not allow other children to share a ball or other toy, he or she is not going to have any playmates. Play introduces the joy of sharing - that is, it's more fun to share than to hoard. This is a vital life skill and concept, with the potential to foster a sense of compassion and community later in life.

#### - Shape recognition

As noted above, play helps children recognize shapes, and familiarity is a helpful factor in later learning. It is not just letter and number shapes in question; children who play learn that square blocks stack better; long, thin blocks tend to topple when stacked end-to-end but are more stable when stacked horizontally.

They learn that round objects roll, triangular objects do not stack, and so forth. As children play, they learn what shapes work for what game. Puzzles help in this regard, too - children learn to associate negative and positive shapes in space.

#### - Creativity

When children enter the world of play, they enter their own world. This should be a safe place where adults participate but do not dominate. In such an environment, children's minds begin to open up as they seek creative solutions to problems and creative expressions of feelings, thoughts, and inventive ideas.

#### - Other cognitive skills

Playing with clay, sand, dirt, rocks, beans, water, etc. encourages understanding of different textures and how different types of matter behave under certain conditions (wet, dry, etc.). It is also a way to encourage focus and persistence. This is an incomplete list; a truly thorough discussion of the benefits of play can and has filled volumes. The point in presenting this list is to show the potential benefits of play and to encourage parents to explore play among their own children.

## Older Kids

Thus far, most of the information presented has been in regard to children under five years of age. What about older children who need much more than empty boxes and a handful of beans?

Older children have different play requirements, and by gradeschool age they begin to enjoy more organized play such as sports or **board games**. While free play is still an excellent activity, children of this age will gravitate toward games with rules and structure.

You may notice children of gradeschool age making up their own rules and strategies for play. How can parents participate with their children who are of gradeschool age?

- Family game night

Board games can help teach teamwork and communication. They can also increase family members' understanding of each other and teach children how to win or lose gracefully. It's a safe environment that can be full of "teachable moments." Some board games are geared toward learning facts; others hone drawing skills; still others are simpler.

If you have various ages in your family, some games are quite flexible and can accommodate a lot of kids' levels. You can also let each child pick his favorite game each week so everyone gets a chance to play a game on his level. And don't forget card games - these can teach strategy and, like board games, healthy competition.

You can incorporate interactive games into your family game night too. Try charades, musical chairs, duck-duck-goose, or other games that involve physical movement and the participation of everyone. If weather permits and you have the space, try a game of lawn darts, badminton, croquet or horseshoes.

- Backyard sports

This can be anything from football to croquet to badminton, as noted above. Physical activity enhances learning across the spectrum, working off excess energy and improving circulation to the brain and whole body.

Copyright pkmc 2010

Page | 9

Discover the [Best Selling Baby Toys](#)

Throwing, catching, and hitting a ball develop hand-eye coordination. Parents can model good team behavior by losing and winning gracefully, thus teaching children important social skills.

- Organized sports

Of course, getting your child into organized sports outside the home has benefits, too. Organized sports have all the benefits of backyard sports with stricter schedules, rules, competition, and teamwork. Parents can encourage their child in the sport of her choice by attending games and practices, asking interested questions about the sport, and being willing to hear that a child simply doesn't like that particular sport (after giving it a fair chance).

What Toys Work Best For What Ages?

Children will respond best to age-appropriate toys and activities. Of course, as the parent, you know your child's level - she may be 3 and have strong social skills but weak motor skills; he may be 5 and reading fluently but somewhat awkward socially. So choose toys that fit your child above choosing toys that a chart or list says are appropriate for his age. Try to stay away from trends and choose toys that fit your child. Even preparing to play helps you get to know your child!

That said, here is a brief list that is meant to help give you a rough guide in choosing toys for your child.

- Birth to 12 months (when babies learn through sensory perception and experience): teethingers; rattles; cloth books; soft blocks; mobiles and unbreakable mirrors and take a look at [Toys for Babies](#)

- 1 to 3 years (toys that coincide with movement, the beginnings of imaginative play, and experience): push toys; board books; stacking blocks; play dough or clay; finger paints; riding toys; shape-sorting toys; peg boards; and wooden peg puzzles [Toys For Up To 3 Year Olds](#)

- 3 to 6 years (children this age are getting more into imaginative, interactive play): dress-up clothes; finger paints; large beads and sturdy yarn or string; lace-up boards; puppets; simple puzzles; large Legos; picture books; blocks.

### [Toys for Up to 6 Year Olds](#)

- 6-9 years (a time for more peer-related play and the seeking of new experiences): roller skates (with helmet and pads!); skateboard (also with helmet and pads!); tricycle; baseball bat and ball; football; more advanced board games; "wordier" books with fewer illustrations; memory board games; and building/construction toys (smaller Legos, log building sets, etc.)

### [Toys for Up to 9 Year Olds](#)

- 9-12 years (when children are seeking independence, enjoying their private play world and also playing with peers): books; card games; chess and checkers; "science" kits with experiments and assemblage of motors, circuits, etc.; jigsaw puzzles with 100 pieces or more, model airplane, car, dollhouse, etc. kits

### [Toys for Up to 12 year Olds](#)

## **Who Benefits?**

While it's been noted that children benefit from play, parents do, too.

- Stress relief

It can be a stress reliever for parents just to get down on the floor and get to know their small child, attend their older child's baseball game, watch track practice, or enjoy a game of checkers.

- Understanding the child

Parents really get to know their child as they participate on the child's level without dominating or controlling the play. This offers parents the opportunity to see things from their child's point of view. This can benefit the entire family

- parents who know and understand their child are the parents who can communicate best with him or her. In short, play builds a foundation of common ground between parents and children.

## - Tools

As parents participate in playing with their child, they are learning effective parenting tools. Because play time is getting-to-know-you time, parents are developing effective communication tools that will prove invaluable as the child grows. They are also learning coping tools, so they have something to offer their child in times of stress or difficulty.

## **Play Therapy**

Children naturally communicate and learn through play. Professional play therapists harness this natural tendency and make use of it to provide therapeutic help for children. Sometimes, play can be used to aid diagnosis in children who exhibit abnormal behavior.

As the therapist "interprets" the child's play, the therapist can then help the child's parents understand what the child is "saying" through his or her play. What sorts of disorders and emotional issues are diagnosed and helped through play therapy?

- Autism
- Aggression
- Sleep disturbances
- Worries and fears
- ADD/ADHD
- Depression
- Anger

For the above to qualify as problematic and in need of play therapy, these problems (or the symptoms of them) need to have been persistent for several months with no resolution, and to be interfering with the normal social development of the child. Other problems that can be helped by play therapy are:

- Abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, mental)

- Trauma (such as the loss of loved ones, physical injury, illness, etc.)
- Learning disorders

Play therapy strictly addresses only psychological issues and is thereby distinguished from physical therapy.

Because play therapy is fun and captures a child's attention, the child does not feel the pressure of being "treated for a disorder." The child simply looks forward to a fun time with his therapist, and the benefits unfold as a natural outgrowth of the therapy. In fact, play therapy is so engaging and enjoyable that children can get upset about the therapy ending. Therefore, therapists use specific, gentle methods to bring the sessions to a gradual close.

### **Helping Autism Through Play**

Autism deserves a special discussion on the topic of play. As the benefits of play have been noted above, it bears mentioning that for many children on the autism spectrum, play does not necessarily come naturally.

For these special children to obtain the crucial life skills and overall enrichment that is derived from play, play therapists teach these children how to play. It is interesting to note that playing is recognized by professionals as so vitally important to children's development that they are willing to teach the skill to kids who don't exhibit it naturally. That in itself is a powerful testament to the powerful, positive effects of play.