

## Engage Your Child

“We don’t stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing.” -George Bernard Shaw

Most of us have probably heard that quote before. As adults, we can forget how important playtime is to kids. We live in a time of rushing and busyness, rushing to get from place to place and rushing our kids to grow up. Sometimes we forget to let our child just be a kid.

Playtime is so important in the development of children. What they are doing may seem silly or simple to us, but it could be teaching your child valuable life lessons.

Let’s be honest. Our lives are busy. People are on the go all the time and everyone is in a hurry. We all have something to do. Little kids just want to play and have fun. This is often overlooked in our rush to get things done.

Playtime can also give parents an opportunity to fully engage with their child and see the world through her eyes. Kids don’t have to necessarily be taught how to play, but parents and teachers are important in helping kids advance through play. So, what are some ways to boost learning through play? Help increase your child’s verbal skills by asking questions about what they are doing. Say things like “Tell me about what you are building.” Challenge their imagination by asking for details as they pretend. If your son is pretending to be a pirate, ask them what kind of treasure they would look for and what their pirate ship is like. It’s also a great time to help them feel independent. Provide materials for them, but allow them to control their actions. This helps them to feel like a big kid.

There is a quote by the author Roald Dahl that says “A little nonsense now and then is cherished by the wisest men.” That is a great reminder that we need to let our kids be silly and play and just have fun. It may seem simple to us, but it is so meaningful to our children.

Source: [ministrytoparents.com](http://ministrytoparents.com)

# Importance of Play



## Why Is Playtime So Important?

We know that playtime has a direct result on social and emotional development and cognitive growth. The time before the age of three-years-old has been referred to as a “critical period” in brain development. Knowing that, as parents it is up to us to provide the most well-rounded opportunities for our child to grow and learn. Playtime is one of the first opportunities a child has to discover the world. Time for free play has been reduced for some children due to more busy lifestyles, changes in family structures, and an increased number of activities. As parents, we must help to find a balance between structured activities and free play.

You may have a newborn or small infant and think that your child isn’t quite up to playing just yet. At this young age it is up to parents to initiate play and show babies how toys work. You are the one who shakes the toy that makes noise or makes faces and smiles at your baby. This is play for them. This is how they begin to understand how things happen. As a child grows, her play changes. Around the age of two and older, you may be drawn into what she wants to do. The older a child is, the more she will direct the play.

Skill Development - Infants learn hand-eye coordination by reaching for and playing with toys. As children grow, games and puzzles increase problem-solving skills. Has your child ever been so engrossed in what he is doing that he doesn’t hear you call his name? That playtime is helping with concentration, focusing on a task, expanding attention span and memory. Any type of physical play will assist in maturing large-motor skills and physical development.

Social Skills - At first, adults are a child’s primary playmate. As children get older, they will enjoy interacting with other children, whether it is playing alongside or just observing. This is a way they learn to get along with others and that others have wants and feelings as well. This is where they will learn about sharing, kindness and being part of a group. Social play can strengthen language skills and help children understand social rules.

Imagination and creativity - Playtime helps to cultivate and express a child’s imagination and creativity. When children are pretending to be a princess or a cowboy they are working through their own ideas and emotions. Coloring, painting, any type of creating falls into this category. Creativity has been shown to help brain development.

Make sure that your children have access to “true toys” like blocks or dolls. Another example could be dress-up clothes, play kitchen/ household items, and action figures. These toys aren’t electronic and stimulate creativity rather than those that require a more passive participation. Don’t forget to include books at all ages. Just because a child cannot read yet doesn’t mean we shouldn’t instill a love of books and the pictures/stories inside them.

Who knew that playtime was so important? Let’s not be in such a hurry for our children to grow up. Allow them to play and make an investment in the person they will become!

## Free Play vs Structured Play

There are two basic types of playtime: Unstructured, free play and Structured play. Free play is playtime that just happens, depending on what takes your child’s interest at the time. It isn’t planned and it is often coordinated by the child. It lets your child use her imagination and move at her own pace. An adult may or may not be a part of it. Structured play is organized. It occurs at a fixed time and in a set place. This is usually led by an adult or some sort of instructor. Examples of this are dance classes, story time at the library or even swim lessons. Sometimes we push, even our little ones, to be involved in many structured activities like dance or sports. Organized activities are not bad. Many have very valuable benefits, as does free playtime. There must be a balance between the two and each child’s needs must be taken into account.

These days, there is more pressure on kids than ever before. The Kindergarten and Pre-school of today looks totally different than it did twenty years ago. Education is so important, but there must be a balance. Think back for a moment to when you were a kid. What was your favorite toy? I adored my baby dolls, and I remember my brother could make anything out of a simple stick. Be honest; was there anything better than a fort made of blankets or a really huge box? Despite the growing market of expensive toys, children actually need very little to maximize their playtime. Items that may seem simple, or that aren’t even actually toys, can be just as much fun and increase the use of a child’s imagination.