

The Power of Play

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It may seem obvious, but a child's exploration of their world, aka play, is a critical component of learning and is vital for successful, lifelong learners and problem-solvers. Parents are an essential part of the equation and a child's first playmate, so don't hesitate to get on the floor and jump in!

But first, why is play so important?

- Play helps to develop cognitive, social, and literacy skills, as well as vocabulary, and both fine and gross motor skills. It is the best and most natural form of schooling.
- Play and learning are intertwined. Children learn about their world through play. It seems so simple, but actually is a very complex interaction between knowledge and learning. It is symbolic and dramatic, but also functional and exploratory.
- It is healthy! Not only does it fend off obesity and strengthens both fine and gross motor skills, but research also shows that it relieves stress by providing a child with an outlet for anxiety.
- Play gets children outside. I vividly remember playing in Buffalo Creek with my friends, catching crayfish and making them new homes, no thought of TV or anything else that would bring me inside. We built forts, grocery stores, restaurants, went on treasure hunts, built ramps to try to jump the creek on our sleds, played school, hospital, acted out favorite shows or characters. Unfortunately, we are now in an age when playing outside has to be intentional, not just instinctual.
- Play gives children a safe space to pretend, explore, interact, and learn about the world!

Some parents are natural playmates, but others may feel uncomfortable or unsure about how to play with their child. If that is the case, follow your child's lead. They will gladly show or tell you what to do. Help your child to build complex train tracks, race tracks, and castles. Cheer them on, or help them figure out how to make a really tall tower. Encourage pretend play that has your child bringing you all sorts of creative, imaginary foods from their kitchen. Applaud the successful completion of a new puzzle, even if you have to guide them along the way. And when the time comes, find a preschool that welcomes those same things.

Families today are busier than ever with work, school, and extracurricular activities. Just don't forget the value of unplanned time together to explore the world.



