

Young Children Need to Play!



It has been said that play is children's work. Children work hard at their play because they can make it up themselves. The best part about children's play is that it helps children learn a great deal while they have fun. Here are some things to keep in mind about play.

 **“Play” can be any spontaneous activity that is fun.**

If children organize a ball game, a dramatic play, or a game of hide-and-seek, they are meeting their needs for spontaneous play. When parents enroll their children in little leagues or sign them up for dance lessons, children have a different kind of fun. Children benefit most from a balance of adult-initiated activities and activities that they initiate themselves.

 **Play can be an effective and enjoyable way for children to develop skills:**

- **Language skills** when they play name games, sing songs, and recite jump rope rhymes.
- **Thinking skills** when they construct a block tower, follow directions to a game, and figure out pieces to a puzzle.
- **Small muscle skills** when they string beads, make clay figures, and cut with scissors.
- **Large muscle skills** when they play ball, roller skate, and run relay races.
- **Creative skills** when they make up stories, put on a puppet show, and play with dress-up clothes.
- **Social skills** when they team up to play ball games, discuss rules for a card game, and decide who will play what part in a role-play.

 **It is important to remove barriers to children's opportunities to play, such as:**

Too many structured activities. When children's lives are overscheduled with activities, sports, and lessons, they do not have time to themselves and time for unstructured play.

Too much screen time. When children watch too much television, their play often mimics what they see on TV (or on the video or computer screen). TV watching, video games, and playing mobile apps also rob children of valuable time to play.

 **If a child says, “I’m bored,” she may need more unstructured time for play.**

Parents often hear children complain about boredom when activities are not scheduled for them. Children need “down time” and time to be alone. These are the occasions when children's imagination and creativity take hold. These are the times when children experience the full benefits of play.

 **For related Web resources, see “Young Children Need to Play!” at <https://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/>**

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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