Eyes on

Child’s play
Learning that comes naturally

PARENTS

Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE CLUSTER ON EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT
What do we know?

- **Play is:**
  - a form of learning
  - simple, creative, spontaneous, flexible with no specific goals
  - started and led by your child
  - an activity that should be part of all children’s life.

- Most very young children spend around 20% of their time and energy in play.

- There are three main categories of play: social, cognitive and physical.

- Social play is typically a child’s first form of play. As your child grows older, s/he will play in different ways:
  - First, s/he plays by himself/herself (solitary play). This is common at age 2, but continues throughout the preschool years.
  - Then, s/he plays near children, but doesn’t interact with them (parallel play). This is common at ages 2 to 3.
  - Later on, s/he plays with other children and learns to cooperate and negotiate (group play). Much of this is pretend or socio-dramatic play (e.g., play fighting). This is common at age 3 and older.

- When your child takes part in dramatic play (e.g., playing house, trains, school), s/he uses imagination, storytelling and problem-solving skills. These skills will help him/her to learn to read, write and communicate verbally.

- Cognitive play uses language and thinking skills and may also include pretend play. In this type of play, your child may use objects creatively. For example, s/he may use a banana for a phone, a stick for a magic wand, or an empty box for a time machine. This kind of play also includes construction play (puzzles, building blocks, etc.).

- Physical play, including outdoor play, is important for your child’s motor development (strength, endurance, skill), physical health, and ability to concentrate in school.

- Play allows your child to develop social skills (problem solving, cooperation) and to express possible stresses and problems.
### Paying attention to...

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<th>What can be done?</th>
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<td>Take your child on outings to stimulate his imagination.</td>
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<td>Initiate simple activities like bedtime story books, pretend play and rhyming games.</td>
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<td>Select age appropriate toys.</td>
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<td>Supervise your child’s play and provide help if needed. For example, lend him/her a hand if his/her block tower keeps tumbling over.</td>
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<td>Encourage your child to start and lead activities.</td>
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<td>Organize your child’s play space so that s/he connects words and pictures during pretend play (e.g., if playing “restaurant,” give him menus, bills, name-tags, etc.).</td>
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<td>Give your child basic art supplies, including paper, crayons, paint, glue, plastic letters, play dough and jigsaw puzzles to play with.</td>
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<td>Supervise and intervene if your child’s play turns aggressive.</td>
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<td>Provide clear guidelines to ensure your child plays safely and appropriately with others.</td>
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- interacting with your child during play to foster imagination, creativity and language-related skills.

- creating a secure play environment adapted to your child’s physical and intellectual needs.

- the importance of free play for your child. Stimulating activities do not always mean structured ones.

- play fighting and use of war toys. This form of pretend play is common, and within limits can be beneficial to your child’s development.

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Information

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For a more in-depth understanding of child’s play, consult our synthesis and experts’ articles on this topic in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at www.child-encyclopedia.com.

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Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development
Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development

Université de Montréal
3050, Édouard-Montpetit Blvd., GRIP
P.O. Box 6128, succursale Centre-ville
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3J7
Telephone: 514.343.6111, extension 2541
Fax: 514.343.6962
E-mail: cedje-ceeecd@umontreal.ca
Websites: www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca and www.skc-ecd.ca