

Eyes on



Child's play

Learning that comes naturally



PARENTS



Centre of Excellence
for Early Childhood
Development

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE
CLUSTER ON EARLY

child development



“Play is an activity that should be part of all children’s life.”

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...

- ... 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.

What can be done?

- Take your child on outings to stimulate his imagination.
- Initiate simple activities like bedtime story books, pretend play and rhyming games.
- Select age appropriate toys.
- 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.
- Encourage your child to start and lead activities.
- 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.).
- Give your child basic art supplies, including paper, crayons, paint, glue, plastic letters, play dough and jigsaw puzzles to play with.
- Supervise and intervene if your child's play turns aggressive.
- Provide clear guidelines to ensure your child plays safely and appropriately with others.





Information

This information sheet is a publication of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD) and the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development (SKC-ECD). These organizations identify and summarize the best scientific work on early childhood development. They disseminate this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

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-ceed@umontreal.ca

Websites: www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca and www.skc-ecd.ca



Coordinator:
Valérie Bell

Collaborators:
Nina Howe
Mélanie Joly
Peter K. Smith
Isabelle Vinet (GPEQ)

Copy editor:
Lana Crossman

Graphic design:
DesJardins Conception Graphique Inc.

