

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](http://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](mailto:cedje-ceed@umontreal.ca)

Websites: [www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca](http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca) and [www.skc-ecd.ca](http://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.

