



The Importance and Benefits of Play

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Think back to when you were a child. What types of play do you recall engaging in? Did you ever pretend to be a teacher? Nurse? Doctor? Mom? Dad? If you have children, younger siblings, nieces, or nephews what types of play do they participate in?

Play is a self-motivated activity where individuals explore and learn. Some have even said that play is children's work. There are several types of play which include:

1. Unoccupied— child is not engaged at all
2. Onlooker—child watches others play but doesn't interact
3. Solitary—child plays alone independently of others
4. Parallel— children playing parallel to each other, may even share toys but with limited interaction
5. Associative—child plays with others with little or no organization. Many times, each child has a different goal
6. Cooperative—two or more kids playing where a specific goal is evident (i.e. kickball, board games)



The benefits of play are as numerous as they are varied. Some of them include.

Social Development

- Increases social interaction and peer affiliation
- Promotes positive self-esteem
- Learn roles associated with each gender

Cognitive Development

- Learn from trial and error, helps problem-solving and decision-making
- Learn adult roles and occupations
- Use imagination and creativity by pretending to be something or someone else

Physical Development

- Helps develop gross motor skills (large muscles)
- Increases fine motor skills (small muscles)
- Releases tension, anxiety and stress
- Learn how the body works

Factors That Encourage Play

- Safe physical environment
- Lots of space
- Allowing children to be creative curious, and play freely

Factors That Can Hinder Play

- Unsafe physical environment
- Too much structure
- Constant interruptions by adults



This *Child Development* Fact Sheet is part of a series prepared by the Cooperative Extension Program at Tennessee State University.

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