



Why is Play Important?

Playing isn't just fun, it's also the best way for young children to learn. Through play, children can practice all the skills they'll need as they grow up. It is also crucial for developing children's communication skills; they can practice making new sounds, try out new vocabulary, develop social skills and exercise their imagination through

What areas of development can play promote?

Play helps children to learn about the world around them, and through this they can develop important life skills such as;

- Listening and attention
- Sharing and turn taking
- Planning and problem solving
- Imagination and creativity
- Developing understanding and use of language
- Fine and gross motor skills

How can I make play beneficial for my child?

Play should be child led to ensure they are engaged and interested. Try to avoid asking the child lots of questions whilst they are playing, and instead simply comment on what they are doing e.g. "teddy's having a drink". You can also help expand their language, e.g. if they say "car" you can respond with "red car". Try finding 'special' time for play each day, and turn off distractions such as the TV and your phone. It's important to get down to your child's level, so playing on the floor is usually the best way to do this.

What sort of play activities are best?

Following your child's lead is always best, as this will engage them most. However, the following ideas are also beneficial in developing a range of communication skills;

- 'People' games involving no toys - Peek-a-boo / Row, row, row your boat etc
- Toys - stacking cups, building blocks and inset puzzles/jigsaws.
- Role play - setting up real life situations such as kitchen play / shopping
- Daily activities - involving your child in everyday routines such as washing up / cooking / cleaning.

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Stages of Play Development

There are different stages of play development, and it is important to identify which stage your child is at. This is so that you can adapt activities, and when appropriate, increase them to the next stage to encourage their development.

Unoccupied Play (Birth - 3 months)	At this stage baby is just making a lot of movements with their arms, legs, hands, feet, etc. They are learning about and discovering how their body moves.
Solitary Play (Birth - 2 years)	This is the stage when a child plays alone. They are not interested in playing with others quite yet.
Parallel Play (2 + years)	When a child plays alongside or near others but does not play with them this stage is referred to as parallel play.
Associate Play (3 - 4 years)	When a child starts to interact with others during play, but there is not a large amount of interaction at this stage. A child might be doing an activity related to the kids around him, but might not actually be interacting with another child.
Co-operative Play (4 + years)	When a child plays together with others and has interest in both the activity and other children involved in playing they are participating in cooperative play.

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