



Environments

Why Is Play So Important?

Play is the leading vehicle for learning in young children; learning happens naturally through play. For children, play and work involve the same actions: interacting with people, manipulating objects, and making discoveries that help make sense of the world. Play is the work of children.

Play enhances language development. Children express themselves through play, and they communicate in many ways during play. Play brings together adults with children, or children with each other, in stimulating activities – a perfect environment for vocalizations or conversation to develop. Play helps children have fun with language!

Play is an ideal way for children to express feelings. Sociodramatic play helps children act out relationships and work through negative feelings, overcoming trauma and stress. Play is critical to the socialization process, helping children develop rules and understand the purpose of rules. Through play, children learn to make choices and decisions and to solve problems. Physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development are imperative for school success, and play is a crucial part of this growth. A play-based curriculum involves active, hands-on, exploratory learning with materials, toys, and props that are safe, varied, interesting, and both developmentally and individually appropriate.

A child's social play begins with the first smile from an adult. This adult response is critical, involving facial expressions and body language as well as words and sounds. Later language play includes adult-infant games of vocalization and response. Infants and toddlers play with language long before talking. The adult serves as the play leader for young children, and through this play children develop secure attachments with adults. Adults promote play and language development by participating with children in play and by serving as models. Adults “set the stage” for play and provide a supporting role as they encourage and validate children's play.

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