

GET YOUR PLAY ON!



Play is an essential part of every childhood. It's the way children explore, create and discover. Through play children learn about themselves and the world around them.

WHY IS PLAY IMPORTANT?

Play is the way children learn. Play stimulates a child's senses and encourages brain development. Through play, children develop language and communication skills and learn how to co-operate and solve problems.

THE VALUE OF PLAY

Playing with parents and caregivers helps build vital connections and strengthens relationships. Playful children are happier, more co-operative and more attentive.

Children with access to a range of well-selected toys will be inspired, challenged and stimulated. Children play longer when a wide variety of toys are available. Toys don't need to be expensive. More importantly, toys should be age appropriate, and suitable to your child's interests and level of development.

LEARNING NEW SKILLS

Play helps children learn about what they can and can't yet do. In the simple act of reaching for a toy, a baby is working on hand/eye coordination, strength, balance and agility. An activity mat to lie on and a rattle or soft blocks or balls will help babies to build these skills.

For toddlers and older children, toys can encourage sharing, cooperation and communication. Blocks and models foster spatial skills, whilst puzzles and dominoes are great for logical skills. Balls and push/pull toys

encourage physical play, while books and word games help with verbal language. Dolls, action figures, costumes and puppets all inspire imaginary play.

AGES AND STAGES OF PLAY

Children differ enormously in their rate of growth and development. When choosing toys and activities, consider your child's interests, abilities and limitations.

Here are some play ideas for different stages of development.

INFANTS

A baby's first toy can teach them about texture, colour, size and shape. A baby can respond to bright colours and gentle sounds,

and as they begin to develop hand eye coordination and strength, they can reach, grasp and explore the shape and feel of objects.

You are the most interesting plaything to your baby. Your baby will enjoy hearing your voice, seeing your face, and being around you. A parent or other adult must be always around to supervise and support babies during play.

Play ideas

- Activity mat.
- Mobile or toy frame to place above an activity mat.
- Toys that squeak or rattle.
- A wobbly or bouncy toy that responds to being pushed or tapped.

TODDLERS

Toddlers are busy! They need a variety of activities to keep them interested and engaged. Toddlers will enjoy toys that move, make noise, or can be pushed or pulled. Set up a play space that your toddler can visit and revisit throughout the day.

Play ideas

- A game of peek-a-boo.
- Reading with a parent or other familiar adult.
- Pushing their doll or soft toy around in a little pram.
- Toy hammer and wooden pegs.
- Small cars and construction vehicles.
- Animal figurines.
- A walk in the pram, a trip to the park, or a visit to the library or zoo.

3-5 YEARS

Pre-school aged children are full of energy. They will enjoy active play and will begin to play with their peers. As their patience and concentration skills develop, they will be able to play games with rules such as memory or dominoes.

Play ideas

- Puppets and soft toys.
- Dress-ups and props.
- Household sets like a cubby, small tool bench or play kitchen.
- Craft including pencils, paint, materials to cut and paste with.
- A visit to the park for running and jumping, throwing, catching and kicking balls, climbing and exploring.

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6-10 YEARS

Older children still enjoy and benefit from play. They learn social skills when engaging in play with their peers. They can experiment with different roles through dress-ups or playing with fashion dolls and action figures. They can exercise creativity through art and craft.

Around this age children may start to join more formal activities such as swimming lessons, tennis lessons, or team sports such as football. Ask your child what interests them. Work with your child to make time for them to play every day.

PLAY IS IMPORTANT FOR PHYSICAL SKILLS

- agility
- balance
- physical co-ordination / dexterity strength
- attention span
- hand / eye co-ordination

SOCIAL SKILLS

- communication
- sharing
- co-operation

COGNITIVE SKILLS

- creativity
- intelligence
- logical thinking
- memory
- problem solving
- imagination
- language
- maths
- planning
- reading

PERSONAL SKILLS

- adjustment
- happiness
- social development
- emotional development
- popularity

THE VALUE OF PLAY

A WORD ABOUT SAFETY

When choosing toys for your child, make sure they are safe and appropriate for your child.

- Follow age guidelines and other instructions on the toy and its packaging.
- Check for broken or loose parts that could injure or choke a child.
- Keep mobiles out of baby's reach.
- Supervise children, especially babies and young children at all times when they are playing.

SUMMARY

- Play helps children explore the world around them.
- Toys help inspire play. Choose toys that are fun for your child to play with.
- Play with your child as often as you can. Play has benefits for adults as well as children.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Australian Toy Association

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Also visit www.austoy.com.au

The ATA acknowledges the work of the National Toy Council (UK) in the development of these materials.

The full set of *Value of Play* leaflets are available for download at www.valueofplay.com.au



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THE VALUE OF play



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