

# Children and Play

## Play: The Work of Childhood

Play is a natural and necessary activity for children of all ages. It helps them to grow, learn, and develop in all areas of their lives. Play fosters physical and mental health, and is also very important for social and intellectual development.

When children play, they learn more about themselves, other people, and the world around them. They become more creative thinkers, and are better able to cope with challenge and change. Studies show that children's time is well spent in play. This is why many educators and researchers refer to play as the work of childhood.

## How Children Play

All children play. Yet depending on their age, personality, abilities, and experiences, children play in a variety of ways. Adults can encourage children to try many different kinds of play activities, while also respecting their individual needs, skills, interests, and choices. While every child's play is unique, play typically includes the following stages:

**Solitary Play** - playing alone. Children may be very content and involved in looking at a book or doing a puzzle by themselves.

**Parallel Play** - playing beside others. Children may sit on the floor or at a table, near a friend as they play.

**Cooperative Play** - playing with others. Children may enjoy group play as they dig together in the sandbox or build with blocks.

**Complex Play** - playing with others, as in cooperative play, but usually including more imaginary themes, longer time, and more detailed agreements and rules. Children may adopt roles from a favorite story or theme, such as community helpers or space exploration, and continue this play over days or weeks.

## Play Activities & Learning

Children enjoy and learn from play - indoors and outdoors, at home, in child care settings, and in community programs. Here are some examples of what children learn from various play activities:

### **Activities:**

water, sand, and outdoor play

### **Learning:**

science and math concepts; appreciation of the natural world

dress-up and dramatic play

social skills; creative, imaginative and emotional self-expression

**Activities:**

**Learning:**

art, music, literature, and dance

art appreciation; creative expression; physical coordination

puzzles, blocks, and computers

science and math concepts; eye-hand coordination; spatial awareness; problem-solving

games and sports

physical, analytical, and cooperative abilities

## Creating Play Materials

Simple play materials can challenge children to use their creativity and imagination. Such materials will often interest them longer than expensive, commercially-made toys. Using basic art supplies like paper, scissors, glue, and crayons, children can make an endless variety of props and resources for their own play activities.

Children can have hours of enjoyment from inexpensive materials that they use in imaginative ways. Cardboard that is decorated, cut, and glued can be made into a crown. Paper that is folded and shaped can become a bird, a boat, or a star. Blocks made from different-sized cardboard boxes can be used to create a house, a farm, or a space ship.

When adults provide encouragement, children can enjoy both making and using their own creations in play.

## Supporting Children's Play

Families and others caring for children can support their well-being, creativity, and learning by providing plenty of opportunities for play. At all ages and stages, children will benefit from:

Playing by themselves, and following their own interests and timing for play

Playing with others, with adult encouragement and guidance to help make social play successful

Trying out new activities and experimenting with lots of different materials

Adults' direct involvement in play can also be very beneficial for children. Asking open-ended questions, for example, helps sustain, extend, and deepen children's play:

'I wonder what would happen if..?'

‘What can you tell me about this drawing?’

‘Can we think of other ways we could use these materials?’

When adults support and encourage play, children get the message that play is important as well as fun!

## More Play Resources

Community services such as Family Places, Neighbourhood Houses, and Community Centres offer play activities for children, often at little or no cost.

Families whose first language is not English can contact local cultural, multicultural, or immigrant-serving agencies to find out more about community programs for children or contact the **Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA)** [www.amssa.org](http://www.amssa.org) .

## The Importance of Play

Play provides opportunities for children to:

- Develop positive self-esteem
- Express feelings and ideas
- Relieve tension or frustration
- Try out imaginary roles and activities
- Be spontaneous and creative
- Explore interests, likes and dislikes
- Take risks, practice problem-solving, and learn from making mistakes
- Discover and refine specific skills, abilities, and talents
- Cooperate with others
- Gain awareness of and appreciation for human diversity
- Learn about the physical and natural world
- Have fun!