The Importance of Play to Healthy Development

Infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-aged children all benefit in numerous ways from play. Spending play time with family, with peers, and alone sets the stage for the lifetime enjoyment of and participation in physical activity, an important component of overall good health. From face-to-face play during the infant stage to parties with imaginary friends to team sports, play is a critical part of development.

Play is important for the cognitive development of counting, verbal expression, listening, creativity, and learning group rules. Physically, play helps with development of balance, coordination, and gross and fine motor skills. Emotionally and socially, play is important for learning to take turns, compromise, develop trust, become self-disciplined, develop skills in conflict resolution, and develop friendships.

So that children with differing levels of development can be successful, caregivers should plan activities that focus more on movement, fun, and participation rather than winning.


The Many Benefits of Play

While the many benefits of play are well documented, it is also apparent that those benefits do not extend to those in poverty due to socioeconomic obstacles for playing outside. Mothers who live in public housing or in poverty who have five-year-olds often cite neighborhood fear as a reason for not letting their child play outside.

In a Head Start setting, play was found to support English-language learners’ oral development. In older third-graders, daily recess of 15+ minutes improved classroom behavior.

Regular physical activity has been linked to a reduction in the prevalence of childhood obesity. However, neither adults nor children meet established guidelines for physical activity levels.


Childhood Play Research Highlights

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Career and Technical Education

Chapter 130
Subchapter J.
Human Services

§130.247
Child Development

Knowledge and skills:
(1) E
(3) A
(4) A, B
(5) A, B, C
(6) A, E, G, I

§130.243
Child Guidance

Knowledge and skills:
(1) A, B, C
(2) C
(3) B
(4) A, B, D
(6) C, F

http://www.cte.sfasu.edu
Play is a cherished part of childhood that offers children important developmental benefits and parents the opportunity to fully engage with their children.


Suggested Activities for Students to Learn about Childhood Play

- Volunteer to help with children’s games and recreation at a local center.
- Choose a familiar game and then adapt it for a child with a special need.
- Brainstorm ideas for using physical activity as part of science or math lessons.
- Investigate recommended physical activities for children who have acute or chronic illnesses or who are hospitalized.
- Organize a toy drive, and then classify the toys for appropriate ages.
- Use materials at home to develop safe toys for children of varying ages.
- Investigate the state requirements for amount of physical activity at licensed day care centers.
- Refer to the Consumer Product Safety Commission website for current recalls of unsafe children’s toys.
- Perform a time-sampling observation of popular children’s electronic games and/or television programs to determine the extent of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development provided.
- Distinguish practice, solitary, onlooker, symbolic, parallel, associative, cooperative, dramatic, rough-and-tumble, socioeconomic, and mastery play, and provide examples of each.
- Become an objective observer of children in play settings. Look for both similarities and differences in group and individual play situations.
- Plan a family outing that includes physical activity for each member of the family.
- Interview children of different ages to determine their favorite physical activities.
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Careers Related to Child Development and Guidance

The numerous careers available are dependent on level of education obtained and work experience. Examples include:

- Assistant/Associate Teacher or Aide in early childhood programs
- In-home care provider (nanny)
- Assistant/Associate Teacher or Aide working with children with special needs
- Early Intervention Assistant
- Licensed Family Child Care Provider
- Teacher in early childhood programs
- Para-educator
- Child Recreation Specialist
- Program Director
- Child Development Specialist
- Family Life Specialist
- Parent Education Teacher
- Elementary Education Teacher
- Special Education Teacher
- Behavior Specialist
- School Psychologist
- College/University Professor

Above-average growth is expected in jobs related to care of children due to increasing numbers of children, increasing numbers of employed parents, and continued demand of quality programs.

FCS Career Connection www.aafcs.org/Resources/Career.asp
U.S. Department of Labor www.bls.gov

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