

# The Importance of Play to Healthy Development



## The Many Benefits of Play

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.

Berk, L.E. (2013). *Child development*. (9th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

McDevitt, T.M. & Ormrod, J.E. (2013). *Child development and education*. (5th ed.) Boston: Pearson.

## Childhood Play Research Highlights

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.

Barros, R.M., Silver, E.J., & Stein, R.E.K. (2009). *School recess and group classroom behavior*. *Pediatrics*, 123(2), 431-436.

Kimbrow, R.T. & Schachter, A. (2011). *Neighborhood poverty and maternal fears of children's play*. *Family Relations* 60(4), 461-475.

Milteer, R.M. & Ginsburg, K.R. (2012). *The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bond: Focus on children in poverty*. *Pediatrics*, 129(1), 204-213.

Piker, R. (2013). *Understanding influences of play on second language learning: A microethnographic view in one Head Start preschool classroom*. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 11(2), 184-200.

Yadrick, K. (2005). *Supporting healthy lifestyle choices*. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 97(2), 8-12.

## 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



## Suggested Activities for Students to Learn about Childhood Play



**By shortchanging children on play in favor of academics, we might actually be inhibiting their development.**

Summary of comments from Bartlett, T. (February 20, 2011). The case for play. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Interview adults in a variety of child care professions to determine their reasons for choosing the profession and what they enjoy about their daily responsibilities.
- Prepare a pamphlet of suggested physical activities that could be done while children are traveling.
- Write a reflection of memorable physical activities while growing up.
- Focus activities with FCCLA, TAFE, and 4-H projects.

## 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.

All Images Microsoft Office Clip Art (2013).  
<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/images/>  
 FCS Career Connection  
[www.aafcs.org/Resources/Career.asp](http://www.aafcs.org/Resources/Career.asp)  
 U.S. Department of Labor  
[www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)



*Play is a cherished part of childhood that offers children important developmental benefits and parents the opportunity to fully engage with their children.*

Ginsburg, K.R. (2007). *The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds*. *Pediatrics*, 119 (1),  
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/119/1/182.full>

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