

# Play II

It is through play that communication, thought, social interaction, development of self-esteem and personal growth, health, physical and creative ability are developed.

## What is play?

- Play is a time when a child is free to try things out for herself, in her own way and at her own pace.
- Play is a time of pleasure and enjoyment.
- Play tends to be initiated by the child herself; she chooses what to play and how to play. She may not involve another person.

## Why is play important?

- Play is important because it lays the foundations for the child's future learning in all areas. She can practice old skills and develop new ones.
- Play is important because it builds up the child's understanding of people and things around him, which is the basis of communication.
- Play allows the child to experiment and to learn without the risk of failure.

## How does play develop?

- Play begins with the interaction of the mother/father with her/his baby.
- Later on the child will interact with other people and with objects around her.
- There are different types of play:
  - Exploratory
  - Moving
  - Manipulating
  - Socialising
  - Pretending
  - Problem solving.

Each type of play progresses through certain stages as the child develops.

## Do children need help to play?

- To learn to play all children need the stimulation of their parents, brothers and sisters and other people.
- Children who have a disability also need stimulation but may need special help and attention.
- The parents of a child with a disability need to encourage their child to be active in play situation and they need to help him to learn.

## **What is exploratory play?**

- Exploratory play is the trying out and finding out of new things.

## **Why is exploring important?**

- Exploring is fundamental to a child's development.
- It enables a child to make new discoveries and to learn more about the world he lives in.
- It stimulates a child to want to learn more about the world around him.
- It helps a child to develop his skills and learn new ones.

## **How can we encourage a child to explore?**

- Show the child that his world is interesting by filling it with different objects and events so that he is stimulated to explore it.
- Follow your child's lead: notice what he is interested in and show that you are interested in it too.
- By your interest in things, and by your actions, you can show a child how to explore.

## **What is moving play?**

- Moving play is the use of all parts of the body in playful, physical activities.

## **Why is moving important?**

- Moving is fundamental to a child's development.
- It enables a child to be active in her exploration of her world.
- It provides opportunities for a child to learn about her body and to gain control over it.

## **How can we encourage a child to move?**

- By setting up situations, a child can be stimulated to move. For example, by placing objects slightly out of reach.
- Playing energetic and physical games with a child will help her to see that movement is fun.

## **What is manipulating play?**

- Manipulating play is the ability to coordinate both hand and eye in a skilful and controlled way (hand/eye coordination).

## **Why is manipulating play important?**

- Manipulating play is an important skill for a child's development.
- It enables a child to have control over toys and objects, so that he can play independently of an adult.
- The ability to manipulate means that as a child grows older, he will be able to do more things for himself, for example, fastening buttons, using cutlery, writing or drawing. This is important if a person is to gain self-respect and independence.
- It is by manipulating objects that a child learns all about them: their size weight, shape, etc.

## **How can we encourage a child to manipulate?**

- When a child is interested in an object, share his interest, and show him how to manipulate it.
- By taking the child's hands you can physically help him to manipulate objects.
- Give the child toys and objects that will stimulate him to reach out and to manipulate.

## **What is socialising play?**

- Socialising is interaction between two or more people. It involves give and take, and is a two-way process.

## **Why is socialising important?**

- Socialising is essential for the development of communication.
- It encourages children to learn from other people by watching and copying their actions.
- It provides natural opportunities for a child to practise and develop her communication skills.
- The experience of taking turns and interacting with people is essential for the development of relationships in later life.

## **How can we encourage a child to socialise?**

- Watch carefully for any attempts a child might make to interact with you, and be sure to respond to them.
- Help the child to learn to play with other children and to be confident in playing with them.
- Create opportunities for the child to meet and play with other people, both adults and children.

## **What is pretending play?**

- Pretending play is when a child uses his imagination to make objects into symbols of the things they represent, for example, a card box becomes a motor car; a tin and stick become a pot and spoon.
- Pretending play is one of the most important types of play for developing communication skills.

## **Why is pretending play important?**

- Pretending play is essential for the development of thought and language, where words are used as symbols of the objects they represent.
- The development of imagination broadens a child's experience beyond himself and encourages him to be creative.
- It helps a child to make sense of the situations he sees around him and prepares him for situations in later life.

## **How can we encourage a child to pretend?**

- Encourage the child to watch while household chores are being carried out, for example, while the mother is cooking, sweeping, washing dishes, etc. Talk to the child about what is happening.
- Sit with the child and show him how to pretend play, so that he is motivated to try to do it himself. Talk to him about what he is doing.
- Help the child in his attempts at pretend play and show him how he can develop it further.

## **What is problem-solving play?**

- Problem-solving play is when a child has to think carefully to puzzle out how to do something.

## **Why is problem-solving important?**

- Problem-solving develops thinking skills that help a child to work things out for herself.
- The challenge of having to work something out for herself develops a child's confidence and curiosity.
- The skills needed for problem-solving become essential in later life, when an adult is faced with situations in which she must make well thought-out decisions for herself.

## **How can we encourage a child to problem-solve?**

- Draw the child's attention to the objects and events around her, so that she becomes curious and wants to find out more about them.
- Follow the child's lead; notice what she is interested in and show her how to find out more about it.
- Give the child activities to do in which she can succeed, so that she is encouraged to keep trying.
- Give the child time to try things out on her own and to solve her own problems, without adult intervention.

## **When preparing to play with a child think about the following questions:**

- Which activities are you going to do and why?
- Do you have all the toys/equipment that you will need?
- Is there a quiet, relaxed setting, free of distractions in which you can be with the child?
- Can you avoid being disturbed for the length of time that you are playing with the child?

## **The Do's of playing with a child**

- Choose activities that are appropriate to the child's level of development.
- Be flexible in your approach. When something interests the child, follow his lead. You cannot force him to be interested in what you choose.
- Praise and encourage the child when she tries. Play is not a test for a child to pass or fail. It is important to praise any attempts she makes.
- Try to remain calm and undistracted throughout your time with the child.
- Encourage the child to take part in a variety of play activities. Do not concentrate on one type of play only.
- Before playing with a child, make sure she is alert and sitting comfortably in a position in which she is free to use her hands.
- Show by your face and your voice that you are enjoying playing with the child. Respond positively to any attempts he makes to play.

- Play for short periods of time. When the child starts to lose interest, move onto another activity.
- A child's play will develop if you take small steps and if you repeat activities with the child often.
- When introducing a new play activity, model the activity for the child first. When you think she understands what to do, let her try it for herself.
- Playing alone is also important for a child. Give him a chance to experiment and to discover things for himself.

## **Important points to remember about play**

- Play is an essential part of any child's development. It is through play that a child develops skills that are essential for all areas of development.
- All types of play are of equal importance.
- All types of play are interrelated and dependent on each other.
- We need to make sure that a child has experience of all the different types of play.
- Most play activities involve several different components.
- By knowing the stages of development of play we can find out the level at which a child is functioning and help her to develop her skills from there.
- The development of play takes time and a child cannot be rushed on to a later stage of development until the earlier stages are well established.
- The development of a child's play is dependent on how skilful the adult is at playing with the child.

Further reading:

World Health Organisation (1997). *Let's communicate: a handbook for people working with children with communication difficulties*. World Health Organisation.