

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

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CLINICAL REPORT

The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds

Play is so important to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right for every child. Those forces that prevent children in poverty and the working class from benefiting fully from play deserve full, even urgent, attention.



Play contributes to optimal child development for ALL children. We must advocate for the changes specific to the need of each child's social and environmental context that would enhance the opportunities for play.



The overriding premise is that play is essential to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth.

Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development.

It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them. Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while prac-

ticing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers. As they master the world, play helps children develop new competencies.

Undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills.

When play is allowed to be child driven, children practice decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest, and ultimately engage fully in the passions they wish to pursue.



When parents observe their children in play or join them in child-driven play, they are give a unique opportunity to see the world through their child's vantage point, as the child navigates a world perfectly created just to fit his or her needs.

The interactions that occur through play tell children that parents are fully paying attention to them and help to build enduring relationships.



Parents who have the opportunity to glimpse into their children's world learn to communicate more effectively

with their children and are given another setting to offer gentle, nurturing guidance. Less verbal children may be able to express their views, experiences, and even frustrations through play, allowing their parents an opportunity to gain a fuller understanding of their perspective.



Many parents seem to feel as though they are running on a treadmill to keep up, yet dare not slow their pace for fear their children will fall behind. Further, some worry they will not be acting as proper parents if they do not participate in this hurried lifestyle.



Trusted child advocates are ideally suited to help parents consider the appropriate balance between preparing for the future and living fully in the present through play, child-centered organized activities, and rich parent-child interaction.



Some play must remain child-driven, with parents either not present or as passive observers, because play builds some of the individual assets children need to develop and remain resilient.