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The Importance of Pretend Play

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Young children learn by imagining and doing.
During this workshop we will discuss how
important pretend play is and fun ways to
incorporate it into your daily life.



What is pretend play?



Children make sense of their world through pretend play.

Some define imaginative or pretend play as “the acting out of stories which involve multiple perspectives and the playful manipulation of ideas and emotions.”

Basically, it’s your child making sense of this world. This may involve role play such as acting out different tasks and plots.



Why is pretend play important to your child's development?



Children learn through their play.

Children learn and develop:

- cognitive skills – like math and problem solving in a pretend grocery store
- physical abilities – like balancing blocks and running on the playground
- new vocabulary – like the words they need to play with toy dinosaurs
- social skills – like playing together in a pretend car wash
- literacy skills – like creating a menu for a pretend restaurant





Social Emotional Learning

Creative, open-ended play with both peers and parents is how children learn to socially bond, respect others, communicate, and balance personal emotions with the emotions of others.

Play increases the bond between a parent and child, creating a safe, stable, and nurturing relationship.

Source: <https://www.healthline.com/health/childrens-health/imaginative-play#benefits>

More benefits:

The cognitive, social, emotional, and language development that occurs builds a strong foundation for stress management and social-emotional resilience. Pretend play can:

- lower anxiety
- improve academic skills
- decrease disruptive behaviors
- increase understanding of literature
- increase emotional competence
- practice and acquire negotiation and sharing skills
- express and explore feelings
- exercise logical reasoning skills
- improve concentration and focus

Source: <https://www.healthline.com/health/childrens-health/imaginative-play#benefits>



Pretend Play at Home:

There's no need to spend money on new toys for pretend play. A cardboard box can turn into a boat, a race car, a dollhouse, or a tunnel portal to another world — everything and anything you or your child can think of.



Prop boxes to encourage pretend play:

- Large plastic crates, cardboard blocks, or a large, empty box for creating a "home"
- Old clothes, shoes, backpacks, hats
- Old telephones, phone books, magazines
- Cooking utensils, dishes, plastic food containers, table napkins, silk flowers
- Stuffed animals and dolls of all sizes
- Fabric pieces, blankets, or old sheets for making costumes or a fort
- Theme-appropriate materials such as postcards, used plane tickets, foreign coins, and photos for a pretend vacation trip
- Writing materials for taking phone messages, leaving notes, and making shopping lists



Source: <https://www.scholastic.com/parents/kids-activities-and-printables/activities-for-kids/arts-and-craft-ideas/importance-pretend-play.html>

More ideas from NAEYC:

- **Blocks.** Store proportional wooden blocks or colorful pattern blocks in plastic tubs, along with clipboards, paper, and crayons. Children can create buildings and roads, then make signs to go with them. .
- **Dramatic play.** Fill a box with clothes such as dresses, shirts, and suit jackets. Add accessories like hats, scarves, neckties, bags, and jewelry to make children's pretend play more exciting and elaborate. You could create separate prop boxes for different play themes—for example, a small briefcase, notebooks, paper, and pens for a prop box related to office play. Let the children's interests and imaginations guide their selection of clothes and props.
- **Writing center.** Fill a basket with paper, markers, notebooks, pens, pencils, envelopes, a ruler, stationery, and note cards. Your child can set up the writing center wherever she wants to write.
- **Water play.** The bathtub and the kitchen sink are logical locations. But a small basin on the floor can also work (place the basin on a towel with a plastic trash bag spread beneath it to catch spills). Fill a plastic container with props such as sponges, basters, colanders, strainers, pitchers, tongs, and so on.
- **Cooking.** Store a child-size apron, a collection of favorite recipes, and unbreakable bowls and utensils in a kitchen drawer or bottom cupboard. Invite your children to join in while you prepare meals and snacks. Get them in the habit of washing their hands before and after handling foods.



Check out this article for pretend play ideas from birth- 7 years!

<https://www.healthline.com/health/childrens-health/imaginative-play#takeaway>



NAEYC'S elements to meaningful play that create those rich memories we treasure:



- 1. Children make their own decisions.**
When children choose how to play for themselves, they experience freedom in making those choices. They also begin to see connections between choice and the consequences or results of that choice. The type of toys or materials parents offer can help their children make more meaningful decisions. Open-ended materials can be used in many ways so children can decide for themselves how to use them.
- 2. Children are intrinsically motivated.**
The impulse to play comes from a natural desire to understand the world. This play impulse is as strong as your child's desire for food or sleep.¹ It is this intrinsic motivation that allows a child to regulate her own feelings and desires in order to keep playing. Because children eventually find it more important to be part of play with their friends than to satisfy their own wants and needs at that moment, children learn self-control. And self-control has been shown to lead to success in later years, especially in today's information age, where distractions are part of daily life.
- 3. Children become immersed in the moment.**
In true play, children are so fully engaged that they lose awareness of their surroundings, time, and space. In this risk-free atmosphere where reality is suspended, children have the security and safety they need to experiment, try new ideas, and investigate the laws of nature.
- 4. Play is spontaneous, not scripted.**
Often, play is totally unplanned. Other times, play is planned but a child impulsively makes a change. One child changes his mind, or perhaps a toy does not cooperate. This sense of the unknown provides children with opportunities to develop flexibility in their thinking and decision making, which is a vital life skill.

Pretend play should be fun!

5. Play is enjoyable.

Play always has an emotional response attached to it. Without this emotional connection, the experience is simply an activity; it is not PLAY. Enjoyment is the direct result of engaging in play. It is FUN!



Questions?

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