



THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Play is essential to healthy development. Play helps children develop their creativity and imagination. It helps them learn to problem solve and develop their thinking skills. It helps them deal with their fears as they develop winning strategies – *“I was afraid, but now I’m a superhero!”* It allows children to learn to share, to take turns, and to interact with others. Active physical play keeps young bodies fit and healthy.

Playing with your child can strengthen your relationship and can benefit you too! First, it is fun. You can do all of the things that you wish you could do on your own but that you might need the “cover” of being with a child to pull off! It also will allow you to understand your child in a different way than when you see her trying to fit into adult led activities. Let your child lead the way and direct the action. You’ll discover what she cares about and how she views the world. You’ll learn both what she thinks is funny and what she fears. When you play in her world you will create memories of your time together that she will cherish for a lifetime.



● THE ESSENTIALS OF PLAY FOR CHILDREN

- > **Keep it simple.** Simple activities are enjoyable for young children.
 - Despite what the advertisements suggest, the best toys are the simple (inexpensive!) ones.
 - > Children who play with a ball, color in coloring books, play with a doll or stuffed animal, or build cities out of blocks have to fully use their creativity and imagination.
 - Fancier toys do not require as much thought because the action is built right into the toy.
 - > They might be more attractive on the shelf, but children may become bored with them more easily.
- > **Hop on in.** Join in with your child’s activity.
It is a good way to bond during an activity of your child’s choosing.
- > **Use real world examples.** Imitating adult activities can be beneficial to your child.
 - To mimic the real world through play, you can encourage your child to play house, have a tea party, or design a village.
- > **Go with what works.** Repeat activities that you know your child loves.
 - This activity might become the comfort zone needed if your child becomes stressed.
- > **Go with the flow.** Allow your child to use her imagination and create games.
 - It is okay to bend the rules during play for younger children. Depending on their age, they may or may not be able to follow rules.
 - > It is important that your child feel comfortable playing without being corrected.
- > **Move a little.** Encourage and participate in active play with your child.
 - Go outdoors, hike through nature, kick around a ball, or dance to music indoors.
 - Turn off the TV!

- > **Play dates.** Arrange play dates for your child with other children her age.
 - Your child will participate in cooperative play and learn important skills like sharing.
 - You will get some much needed adult time with other parents.



- > **Just the two of us.** Create a special time with your child that is only for the two of you.
 - This time should become routine and not be sacrificed for any reason.
 - Even if your child has misbehaved, this special, positive time is critical.
 - Your child might even behave better after she has gotten attention from you.
 - This can be an especially rich experience for your child when both parents participate.
- > **Family Time.** Spending time playing with the entire family is a great way to form a strong family bond.
 - Designate a “turn-off” time where the phones and TV are off and the door goes unanswered. Now all attention is on the family. Dinner is great for this, but so is game night!
 - > Play board games.
 - > Play car games while on a family trip.
- > **Your own time.** You need some downtime too!
 - Children get bored easily when they “have nothing to do.”
 - > This may be particularly true for children who become used to being shuttled from activity to activity.
 - Children should learn how to fill their own time with nature, reading, quiet play, and creative activities.
 - Encourage your child to play independently.
 - > Your child will develop problem-solving skills and learn how to entertain herself – a lifelong skill!

Play is not a waste of time. It is the job of childhood. It is especially important for military children with a deployed parent. Added responsibilities and stressors are common for military children who may need to help more around the house or care for younger siblings. That makes it even more important that we save some time for them to enjoy childhood and play.

Thank YOU

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