

Good -ginnings

Early Child Development · Parenting Education · Learning and School Readiness Tips

the Buzz...

Your child is a **natural learner**. She was born hungry for interesting sights, sounds, and interactions with caring others. Remember when her eyes widened at the sight of a colorful rattle or at the sound of your sudden laughter? Remember when she tried to grab your nose?

As your child grew out of babyhood, she was curious and interested in doing **new things**. Remember when she climbed to reach that tempting object? Remember when she tried to do everything you did?

When you encourage your child's interests, you support the development of her **curiosity** and **enthusiasm** for learning. These are important qualities shared by good learners of all ages.

For preschool-age children, **learning** happens best through playing. In this issue of *Good Beginnings*, we talk about ways to support your child's natural learning instincts through play. By creating interesting play opportunities for your child, you may even spark your own desire to learn.

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Let's Pretend!

Let's pretend we're fishing! Let's play school—I'll be the teacher and you can be the kids.

Young children between the ages of 2 and 6 years like to **pretend**. Make believe gives them a chance to be and do what they are powerless to be and do in real life. Is make-believe or pretend play a waste of time? Absolutely not!

Pretend play is a great way to stimulate the **imagination**. It encourages your child to connect what he sees and hears to himself in new and original ways. He may do this by playing dress-up, by telling a tall tale, or by imitating other real life situations such as school.

Pretend play lets children practice important **social** and **intellectual skills**, such as using language. It can help a child work out how to act in situations that make him nervous, scared, or angry. Pretend play lets a child feel in **control** of his own world and helps him gain **confidence**.



Pretend Play Tips

Keep on hand inexpensive items that could stir the imagination:

- Set aside a sack of old clothes, shoes, or hats for playing dress-up.
- Save unused household objects, such as worn-out cooking pans, plastic containers, and utensils.
- Collect empty boxes of different sizes.

Give your child the time and permission to play make believe. Show interest in your child's play—for example, "Tell me more about your pet dinosaur." If invited to play by your child, keep your participation small and follow your child's lead. **Avoid** correcting your child during pretend play. (Of course there's no such thing as a flying purple cow that talks! That's why it's called **pretend play**.) Make a suggestion—for example, "Let's play grocery store. Do you want to be the shopper or the check-out clerk?"





Wise Words

A wise person once said, "Play is a child's work." Play is not only fun. It involves activities directly related to the **development** of the mind, the body, the emotions, and the skills needed to get along with others. The types of play young children enjoy and learn from will **change** as they grow. The play that interests a baby is different from the play enjoyed by a toddler or a 4-year-old. When you make sure your child has interesting "work" to do at each stage of growth, her desire and ability to learn increase.

stories, outings, and special events. These will inspire and encourage symbolic and pretend play.

Social Play and Sharing

Young children play with others differently at different ages. Crawlers and toddlers are often content to play alone or in the presence of other children, but they are not good at sharing their toys with others.

At ages 3 and 4, children enjoy playing with children their own ages. They are better able now to learn to share and cooperate with others. While parents and other adults are important in this learning, children learn good social behaviors best from **each other**.

Why? When children share because an adult asks them to, they often do so to avoid punishment or win approval. This does not teach them why they would want to share or cooperate. But with others of similar age, children may choose on their own to cooperate because they are motivated by the needs of the other child, by friendship, or because they need to solve a problem.

This is one reason why social playing and having friends are so important to young children. Make sure your child has the chance to play with others his own age and learn these important social skills.

Baby Play

Mobiles or child-safe objects hanging just above the baby's crib are tempting play toys for an infant. As your baby becomes aware of these things, he will begin to swat or kick at them. When he makes contact, he will try to do it again. This kind of play is fun for a baby because it shows him that his movements can make **interesting** things happen.

Later on, your baby will start to enjoy interacting with people in activities such as patty-cake and peek-a-boo. Games like these are entertaining because they play on a baby's growing sense of the order and permanence of things around him.

Activities that let babies safely **explore** their surroundings are very good for their development. As they learn to control their bodies, babies enjoy toys and activities that respond to and encourage their

movements. Pressing buttons that make a bell ring or a friendly face pop up is fun and interesting.

Remember that toys and other play materials for very young children must be durable, easy to care for, and without small pieces that could be put in their mouths.

Symbolic Play

Have you ever seen a child pretend that a block is a truck or use a paper plate as a steering wheel? When children use an object to represent something else, they are in the stage of **symbolic play**. Symbolic play is a sign that your child is starting to develop language, imagination, and thinking skills.

These skills depend on your child's having plenty of **exposure** to a variety of ideas and experiences. So plan times for

He or She? We take turns referring to children as he or she. When we use he or she, we mean to include all children.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work in agriculture and home economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, and other related acts, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) offers educational programs, materials, and equal opportunity employment to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability. UPS, 10M11, Revised March 2002, HE-808



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