



How Play Helps Children's Development



During this difficult time, it is important to remember that playing is a natural and enjoyable way for children to **learn, stay well and be happy**. Freely chosen play helps children and young people's healthy development. To have **good physical and mental health** and to **learn life skills**, they need various play opportunities from an early age right up until they're teenagers. And remember... you're never too old to play.

Why play is important

Play improves the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and young people. Through play, children learn about the world and themselves. They also learn skills they need for study, work and relationships such as:

Confidence, self-esteem, resilience, interaction, social skills, independence, curiosity, coping with challenging situations.

Developing physical health through play such as running, skipping and riding a bicycle helps children develop:

good physical fitness, agility, stamina, co-ordination, balance

Playing can help children develop their social skills with others. By listening, paying attention and sharing play experiences, this helps a child:

explore their feelings, develop self-discipline, learn how to express themselves, work out emotional aspects of life



Playful Parenting

Through play, parents/carers can connect fully with their children and have fun. A parent or carer can support and take part in their child's play activities but they shouldn't always direct what happens. It's important they give their children time, freedom and choice to play. If an adult makes all the decisions about how, what and when their child plays, the child won't enjoy their play experiences.

Play and Digital Technology

To make sure children have time for unstructured, freely chosen play every day, parents should limit screen time. The younger the child, the less time they should be using digital devices.

Keep certain times and areas in the home technology-free zones such as:

Meal times, when outdoors, in bedrooms and at least 30 minutes before bedtime.

Don't use digital devices to distract your children or keep them quiet. Talk to your children, play games or look at a book together. Join in your children's screen time and talk about their online activity.

Show your children a good example by limiting your own screen time.



Suggestions of activities and the areas of development you will be supporting

Games/activities	Areas of development
Uno, Snakes and ladders, frustration, monopoly, Jenga, other board games	Recognising numbers, turn taking, following rules, developing concentration, counting, managing money,
Chess, draughts, connect four, battleships.	Develops problem solving abilities, improves children's cognition, improves critical thinking skills, develops concentration and patience.
What's the time Mr Wolf, Go fish, Where's Wally books, spot the difference, Snap, puzzles	Develops thought processing and listening skills, develops working memory, language skills.
Sand and water play. Gardening	Develops fine and gross motor skills, hand eye coordination, supports and develops sensory needs, calms and soothes, develops imagination. Supports the development of understanding the world around them, looking at insects, different plants that are growing in the garden. Research on the computer about the habitats and growing conditions for plants.

Catch, bat and ball, football, skipping, hop scotch, building obstacle courses	Hand eye co-ordination, attention span, gross and fine motor skills, problem solving.
Building dens in the house.	Develops imagination, (finding materials to use: sheets, pegs, cushions), develops problem solving skills, working with others, develops creativity.
Teddy bears (dinosaurs) picnic (get them to plan, write invites, make the sandwiches)	Develops imagination, supports literacy, develops life skills. Enables them to think about others and develop empathy.
Scavenger hunt (Place clues/objects around the house and garden)	Develops literacy, problem solving skills, improves critical thinking skills.
Cooking	Develops literacy skills (reading recipes), It also allows children the opportunity to use the knowledge they have and apply it by counting, measuring, following a sequence, following directions, and cause and effect. Develops confidence and self-worth, Language Development: Cooking offers the opportunity to develop language by linking it to all other areas, including Maths and Science. This is done by encouraging children to talk about what they are doing, counting, and watching materials change colour and texture.
Dress up (using hats, gloves, dresses, glasses), put on stage shows.	Develops imagination and creativity, develops language skills, self-esteem and confidence, supports emotional development and by playing different characters it enables the children to develop an understanding of others.
Lego, knex, magnetic blocks, stickle bricks, meccano,	Develops creative thinking and problem solving and develops fine motor skills.
Singing and karaoke,	Children singing causes the brain to perform multiple tasks at once, this helps to develop memory. Children singing encourages deep breathing, getting more oxygen to the brain. Children singing teaches opposites, from fast and slow to loud and quiet. A child will learn to be able to differentiate between opposite tasks. Develops concentration. It can help to develop a child's imagination and creativity.