



Play: Needed for Healthy Development

The Why:

- **Helps the child make sense of their world and practice new behaviors** (e.g. playing teacher; making friends; handling conflict; compromising)
- **Strengthens the caregiver-child bond**
 - o When caregivers play with their children, a hormone called oxytocin is released. Oxytocin is associated with trust and relationship building. Oxytocin is a buffer against the effects of stress serving to decrease blood pressure, anxiety, and fear
- **Builds your child's self-esteem**
- **Provides opportunities for caregivers to provide social and emotional coaching related to managing frustration, sharing, and practicing decision-making**
- **Improves motor skills**
- **Improves communication and social skills**
- **Promotes creativity**

The How:

- **Set aside 5 to 10 minutes each day for play**
- **Allow for child-directed play**
 - o Let the child choose the activity and be the leader of the play with you staying one step behind
- **Observe, listen, and support**
 - o The focus should be on being present, having fun with your child, and showing that you're interested in what they're saying and playing. This isn't a time to correct behavior or to teach academics. Only correct if a behavior is unsafe and/or the child is asking for help
- **Stay on the same topic as your child**
- **Praise for creativity, trying one's best, and sharing**

Possible Activities:

- **Building blocks**
- **Play-doh**
- **Drawing/coloring**
- **Make-believe play with dolls or action figures**
- **Puzzle**



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- **Bubble play**
- **Outdoor activities** (e.g. jump rope; hula hoop; ball)

Take Home Points:

- Play is needed for healthy brain development and bonding.
- Play is how children communicate and learn about their world.
- When you allow for child-directed play, you give the child the opportunity to be in control and to practice emotion and behavior regulation.
- Play can help to decrease disruptive behavior. By strengthening the bond and increasing the enthusiasm shared between the caregiver and the child, the child is more likely to be relaxed with the caregiver and to follow directions.
- Positive discipline is more effective when there's a solid foundation of trust, respect, and enjoyment all of which can be fostered through play.