**EXTENSION UPDATE**

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**The Importance of Play**

Play is absolutely essential for children. Play provides many opportunities for children to learn and grow – physically, mentally, and socially. What a child learns while playing is the basis for what they will learn later in school.

Play allows children to explore, experiment with new ideas, and try out what they have learned. Unstructured playtime stimulates creativity in children.

During play, a child can practice communication skills while solving problems. Neuroscience research shows that very young children learn best via two-way communication. Talking to your child is critical for their language development. Passive video presentations on smartphones or iPads do not lead to language learning in infants and young toddlers.

Children learn thinking skills by trying new things in play time. Solving problems helps children with their thinking skills and makes them feel good about themselves.

Being able to talk about what they see and how they feel increases children’s self-image, as well as their language skills.

Children learn to socialize by playing with others. The benefits are practically immeasurable in terms of learning to cooperate, forming friendships, and sharing with other children. These skills are important when they go to school.

Physical skills are important too. Running, climbing, riding tricycles, and playing with balls are some activities that help children develop their large muscles.

Drawing, cutting paper, using play dough, and stringing beads are types of play that help with small muscle development.

Becoming self-confident by doing things themselves and learning self-control helps children develop socially. Play gives children opportunities to be creative and freely take risks.

If play is a child’s work, then toys are the child’s tools. Children need toys to develop and learn. As a parent, grandparent, or child care provider you can enhance the quality of their education by providing a variety of toys to increase the types of play.

Carefully selected toys can increase a child’s creativity. Children like toys that let them use their imaginations.

A simple cuddly doll that can be dressed and fed will be played with longer than a doll that walks, talks, and sings. A windup toy looks great until the child figures out what is going on, then it becomes boring to just wind it up and watch it move.

Educational media games on computers, smartphones, or iPads can begin after age two, when media may play a role in bridging the learning achievement gap.

Finally, we often think about child’s play only in relation to their playing with other children. Too many times the opportunity of an adult to play games with a child is overlooked.

Take the time to play with your child! You will get to know your child better, plus your child can get to know you.

Play is important for children. Children learn by playing.

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