

Play wisdom

CHILDREN learn new skills through Play. I use play extensively to help children develop speech and language skills, social skills, enhance language and problem solve.

Play is an essential, universal human function helping us learn to "handle" the world and our social roles within it.

Playfulness opens up thought and generates flexibility to new ideas, new ways of doing things and new ways of looking at things. Play also promotes creativity, problem solving and distinctive thinking.

Society must provide the best environment and structure to assist children's growth.

For a preschooler, play is the most powerful tool for learning, allowing for exploration and experimentation with objects and roles observed in his environment. Like most skills, play develops over time and as play becomes more sophisticated, so too will language and social skills develop.

Play provides excellent opportunities to help children develop listening and language skills. Understanding the benefits of play helps parents enhance their child's play development thereby assisting the learning of language and social skills.

Don't confuse "play" with "entertaining your child". Sometimes when adults join children in play, the activity that follows is not, in fact, play. You may have experienced settling down to "play" with a child only to have the child get up and wander away minutes later.

There are several DO'S and DON'T'S to keep in mind when playing with a child to make the interaction fun and beneficial to the child.



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The DO'S

1. DO provide support for the child's activities, such as providing materials necessary to the child's play. Malaysians spend lavishly on toys but when deciding on what toy to buy, think about the skills you would like your child to develop. Certain toys will develop certain skills i.e. bicycles encourage co-ordination, puzzles improve observation and thinking, while cooking utensils develop social skills as you enjoy a pretend meal together.
2. DO stay at eye level with your child.
3. DO make it possible for the child to have different types of experiences
4. DO talk about what the child is interested in and/or doing. By describing their play you can add words thus helping their vocabulary grow.
5. DO respond to the child's requests and directions — follow the child's game
6. DO use comments that will help the child in his problem solving i.e. "What do you want to do next?", or, "Do you think we should make the front or back first?"
7. DO provide feedback about the child's play,

including reinforcing self-initiated activity.

The DON'T'S

1. DON'T try to change or add onto the child's activity i.e. "I have a better idea", is negative intervention.
2. DON'T bring your skills into the child's activity. Don't forget, you have 20-30 years headstart at the skills involved in play. Attitudes of "If it's worth doing at all, it's worth doing right", turns play into work.
3. DON'T ignore the child's need to practice skills involved in his play at a basic level before being ready to move on to more complex activities. Notice the small differences between yesterday's play and today's play that indicate that some new concept has been learnt. If you ask, "Why don't you make something new?", you may push your child to move on before he is ready
4. DON'T expect finished products. Play is a process and the learning that takes place is a result of experimenting with different ways of doing things. Play rarely produces a product. A statement like "You never finish anything you start" is inappropriate to play situations.
5. DON'T control all the materials or direct all of the play. When adults say, "Let me show you how to do it", the child becomes a passive observer and will most likely wander off.

Play has many levels:

Type	Emerging Age	Description	Encouraging development
Exploratory Play	Birth - 18 months	Shaking rattles, banging and turning over toys	Encourage your child to hear, see, touch, move, taste and smell objects and foods, within the environment.
Functional Play	18 - 24 months	Using objects the way they are meant to be used i.e. toy phone, feeding a doll etc	Demonstrate how to use objects and encourage imitation.
Creative Symbolic Play	2-3 years old	Begins to use symbols in play i.e. pretending a box is a car	Provide props from around the house for play i.e. old sheets to make a "house"
Pretend Play	3-4 years old	Having imaginary friends or pretending to be someone else	Reading and allowing your child to develop a theme in play encourages this stage
Sequenced Pretend Play	4 - above	Acting out sequences observed in their environment or something viewed on television i.e. playing doctor, teacher, being Spiderman etc	Encourage by reinforcing the sequence, or order, of events with your child by talking about it.

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