

Monthly Message:

the importance of dramatic play

All children are born learning. From the minute they enter the world, their brains are making connections and soaking up experiences that will later shape their success. To a child, playing *is* learning. As a child, did you nurse a stuffed animal back to health or turn an empty paper towel roll into a dragon-slaying sword? Behind these seemingly fun activities, learning was taking place. Dramatic play is what we often refer to as pretend play or make-believe. It allows children to play a role or re-enact familiar activities or stories. It is unstructured and child-driven unlike entertainment-driven play like video games.



When kids play, they develop important skills. Children learn social and self-regulation skills such as sharing, negotiating turns, empathy and sticking to the “script” when they role-play. Dramatic play is physical and children have a chance to strengthen motor skills by using both small and large muscles to complete tasks like pouring water into teacups. This type of play can also be language rich. You may be surprised to hear the words your child knows when they imitate familiar people, like a teacher, that they usually don’t use in their typical role as a student.

Play helps set the foundation for learning math and reading. During a pretend game of “grocery store”, children may practice math concepts like sorting and classifying the fruits and vegetables or “writing” checks or receipts. Children also learn the different purposes of text from maps to menus at a restaurant.

Benefits of Dramatic Play



Setting the Stage for DRAMATIC PLAY

Although children seem to come hard wired for play, they need help learning how to play. The more caregivers know about their child's abilities at different stages, the more likely they are to have healthy expectations and curb frustration. Here are some play tips to keep in mind.

AGES 1-3

(Needs help learning how to play pretend)

Until around age 2, most infants engage in parallel play (playing next to but not with peers).

Provide kid-friendly versions of adult items like keys, phones or dress up clothes.

Model how to pretend play with props by acting out scenes like using a block as a phone.

Choose everyday activities to act out like pretending to brush a stuffed animal's teeth.

Pretend to be someone your child knows. "Let's pretend we are mommy driving the car."

Turn off the TV to reduce distractions.

Supervise their play with peers at first since they are learning how to share and take turns.



"Play is the work of the child."

-Maria Montessori (famous early childhood educator)

AGES 3-5

(Knows how to play pretend but needs ideas)

Provide abstract props like cardboard boxes or empty gift wrap rolls.

Let them lead the play. Play a secondary character and let them tell you your role.

Use a favorite story your child is familiar with as a basis of play. Ask questions like, "What do you think would happen if...?"

Turn off TV to reduce distractions.

Give plenty of uninterrupted time to play. It can take 1/2 hour to 1 hour to plan their play, choose roles, make props and then act it out.