

BUILDING HEALTHY FAMILIES



The Power of Play

Play is powerful for both child and parent.



Play is the arena where learning takes place. When a child's primary caregiver is involved in play, the benefits can last for a lifetime!

Mutually enjoyable play between parent and child strengthens their bond, releases healing hormones, and creates an intellectual memory bank that can be recalled to get through hard times and used to form healthy relationships with others.

In fact, according to the New York State Infant Mental Health Association, "primary relationships are essential ingredients in the formation of infant brain architecture." [nysaimh.org]



So, when you play with your baby, you are building your little one's brain. As you enjoy the play yourself, you bolster your own emotional health and cultivate your child's curiosity.



The curious child views the world as an exciting and wonderful place filled with things to explore and understand. This perception will fuel an interest in learning throughout life.

"Children want the same things we want."



To laugh, to be challenged, to be entertained, and delighted."

— Dr. Seuss

A parent's busy life and numerous responsibilities can get in the way of important interactive play during early childhood and potentially interfere with enjoyment of playing with their child.

The next page is filled with tips and ideas for prioritizing and enjoying play in a parent's busy world.



Dad's Corner

Letting your child lead play strengthens your bond and fosters critical developmental skills.

See the next page for Tips on Prioritizing Play

Tips for Prioritizing Play



Respond to your Child's Interest in Play by:

- Saying “yes” to your child’s requests to play: Each time you do, you deposit something in her intellectual memory bank that teaches her she is important and valued; it teaches her to express her needs when she is away from home or making friends.
- Following infant cues to drop everything and play: This teaches babies to learn trust. Your newborn baby is ready for play time when he is focused on your face, and his eyes are open and alert.
- Scheduling play time with toddlers or preschoolers *before* you start daily chores or head off to work.: Prioritizing play with predictability will teach your child about routines and increase their ability to wait. When his playtime needs are met, he will more willingly move to independent play as you do what you have to do.
- Including children in chores:

- Talk to infants and tell them what you are doing as they watch from a safe place.
- Provide opportunities for babies to use their senses: stroke a cheek with a washcloth as you fold laundry; hold an orange under your little one’s nose as you prep dinner; make up a song while running water to wash dishes.
- Let toddlers and preschoolers help with folding laundry, filling the dishwasher, or setting the table
- Teach them to match socks, count out spoons, fill the dog’s dish
- Build organizational skills by letting them help put away groceries and find household items you need

- Designing a “busy box” for young children and filling it with safe items they can use independently while you care for another child or complete household tasks. Delight in their play and /or creations as soon as your work is done!
- Telling stories and teaching concepts during play and work: count stairs, name colors, label feelings, and compare sizes.

Ask your Support Specialist for Ideas if:

- your child whines for your attention excessively
- your child shows no interest in independent play
- your child becomes aggressive or has very frequent tantrums

Increase your Enjoyment of Play by:

Scheduling at least a couple of hours each week to interact with adults, whether or not children are present

Listing, prioritizing and crossing off completed chores so that you are rewarded with a sense of accomplishment

Singing or listening to music during work or play to enhance brain functioning and spark pleasure sensors in the brain

Including physical activity in play daily to increase energy and release stress-reducing hormones while building muscle strength: work out or dance with children, try some yoga, or set up a family obstacle course

Including outdoor activity in play: take a walk with a stroller; ride a bike with a safety seat, search for items in the neighborhood with your child, plant a garden, care for it, and watch it grow, play ball, blow bubbles, chase, and catch them, hike or swim safely

Ask your Support Specialist for Ideas if:

- You are having difficulty prioritizing play
- You lack enjoyment during play
- You need more ideas!