

Child's play: It's not all fun and games

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Who hasn't heard the old saying "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy"¹? It turns out there's a lot of truth to it.

Play helps children grow

Albert Einstein said, "Play is the highest form of research."² The work of child experts like Jean Piaget and Maria Montessori showed that children do most of their early learning through play. In fact, children may actually learn how to learn through play.

Types of child's play

Most play may look the same to adults watching kids. But there are different kinds of play. Each teaches different skills that children need in order to learn and grow.

- **Active play.** Physical play helps develop coordination. When kids handle and play with small objects, they're improving their fine motor skills. When they crawl, run, jump, skip and do other vigorous activities, they're practicing gross motor skills.
- **Imaginative play.** Children love fantasy. And there's no shortage of toys – from superheroes to dolls and more — to help kids use their imaginations. This type of play lets kids dream, pretend and "try on" different roles, emotions and ideas in a risk-free way.
- **Play with other children.** Once children are old enough to play together, they enter a whole new phase. Now they need to learn sharing, cooperating and taking turns.
- **Creative play.** Kids create when they build towers with blocks or sandcastles at the beach; when they draw on paper or on

the sidewalk with chalk. Painting, making music and "playing house" are more examples of creative play. These kinds of activities help kids experiment with roles and ideas. Later, these translate into problem-solving and abstract thinking abilities.

- **Games with rules.** These include board games and games like Follow the Leader, Hide and Seek or Simon Says. It also includes sports like kickball or baseball. All of these help kids learn to follow and adapt to rules – a critical skill at school, work and in so many other aspects of life.

Play: 2015 style

Electronic and computer toys and gadgets are all the rage. Yet they engage children in passive play. Kids don't get dirty or sweaty playing e-games. They don't interact face-to-face with other children. While such games aren't "bad", they also don't offer a full range of learning skills.

If you're a parent, you may want to try limiting your children's computer recreation. Encourage your child to call a friend, go outside or play something else that doesn't keep them glued to a screen. Remember that the mental, social and intellectual skills kids build now will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

¹www.phrases.org (The earliest mention of this proverb may go back to Egypt in around 2,400 B.C.)

²www.brainyquotes.com