

MSU Extension Publication Archive

Archive copy of publication, do not use for current recommendations. Up-to-date information about many topics can be obtained from your local Extension office.

Play and Your Child's Development
Michigan State University
Cooperative Extension Service
Home and Family Series
Margaret Jacobson, Extension Specialist in Family Life
April 1972
8 pages

The PDF file was provided courtesy of the Michigan State University Library

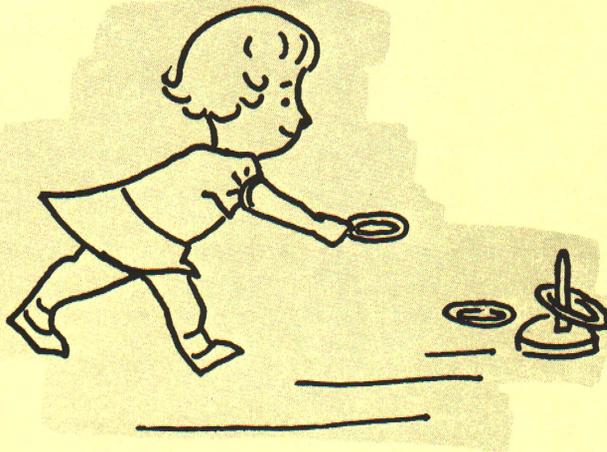
Scroll down to view the publication.

FILE COPY
DO NOT REMOVE

PLAY and your child's development



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, East Lansing, Michigan



Material for inside front cover of PLAY AND YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

Children spend a great deal of their early life in what we adults call play. We sometimes wish we could have fun in the same all-absorbing way in which children enjoy playing. To children play is fun too, but it's also their business. It's an end in itself to them, but it is also their way of learning many of the skills they need in order to cope with the tasks of life. Play helps them release tensions and anxieties, too.

Creativity is a great need among people today in order for them to use their imaginations, intellects, and bodies to live fully and enjoy each experience and day to the utmost. Our world needs creative people, too, to solve problems and to bring beauty, health, knowledge, security, and well-being to all people. The materials and experiences we provide, the toys we select or make, the encouragement, love and guidance we give to our children can help them live creatively.

Watching television and seeing other people perform in music, sports, dramatics have some value, but are not substitutes for active participation. Give your child the chance to be a doer; that's the way he will learn how to get along in the world.

This bulletin discusses the ways in which play helps a child's development. Pages 5, 6, and 7 give suggestions for equipment and activities to help meet developmental needs of children of various ages. These can be guides for making or selecting toys and other play equipment. The bulletin also gives suggestions for ways parents can contribute to children's play.

Margaret Jacobson

Extension Specialist in Family Life

This publication is adapted from the publication, *Your Young Child Develops Through Play*, written by Florence S. Abington, former specialist in Family Life, Louisiana State University. The cooperative Extension Service of Michigan State University expresses appreciation for permission to reprint the Louisiana publication.

PLAY and your child's development

Play

To your young child, play is the most important thing in life. It even comes before eating and sleeping at times. In it he tries himself out. He selects naturally the plaything that will help his stage of development most.

Aids Development

He learns to walk and immediately begins to pull his train or a cart across the floor. He's building strong leg muscles that will help him grow. He learns to use the large muscles of his arm and begins to throw everything within reach. He picks things up and drops them. He takes his spool board apart and puts it back together again. He's learning to manage his fingers. In play, he gains skill in managing his body.

Children learn much about the world about them while playing. They want to handle your glasses, the curtains, the ice in a glass. They want to taste the soap, the flowers, the soil you are spading. They take pans out of the cupboard, clothes out of the chest of drawers. They have a great eagerness to know how everything feels and tastes.

In play, children learn that some toys are heavier than others, that different sized blocks will not fit together. They learn that a rubber ball bounces, a boat floats, water can be poured from a cup, a bucket holds water but a box doesn't. They learn to recognize colors and to imitate what other people do. They come to know they will fall, if their balance is poor. They become afraid of things that will hurt. Sometimes they get pleasure from playing with the group.

There they learn how to get others to cooperate. They become conscious of how sharing works.

Builds the Child's Mind

Children can concentrate on play, if they have much free-play time without interruption. Concentration helps children solve many problems in their play. They can build the blocks into a house that will stand. They will probably fail at first but, with time, by trial and error they succeed.

Play offers many problems for solution: how to fit parts of the puzzle into the right spots; how to dress and undress the doll; how to remember to keep pedaling so as not to fall off the new, two-wheeled bike; how to take turns at using play equipment; how to share ideas with playmates. A child will not be able to solve some problems, of course, until his mind and body can work together—can coordinate. This must wait on physical development. Play does much to help this coordination.

Helps Him Make Decisions

Children's minds are developed through creative play—in making something out of things at hand. Creative play will come natural to most children, if they are surrounded with proper tools. The "do-with" type of play equipment makes it necessary that a child decide what to do with it. "Do-with" things are blocks, sand, water, cans, or boxes that nest, fingerprint or crayons, plain paper, materials for crafts, costumes, rhythm

instruments, kits for keeping store. With these the child can experiment to his heart's content.

The mechanical toy winds up and rattles across the floor. It is not creative. It leaves nothing for the child to do but sit and watch. The real fun in play comes from doing or making something with the things he has to play with—from the feeling of having mastered materials at hand.

Eases Tensions

A child's play life can help him gain emotional balance. He gets satisfactions from learning to control his body and to build a good house of blocks. This makes him a happy little person. He learns to like the beauty of colors, the melody and rhythm of music. He overcomes the fear he feels when swinging high or riding fast. With fingerpaint and a piece of paper, he can put down what he feels—he can get the feeling out!

If the child is allowed to play permissively (as *he* wishes) with his dolls or stuffed animals,

he is likely to express his anger or hurt. In many ways, wholesome play will help him to make an adjustment to life. He can express feelings that he dare not show in everyday living. In play, he is free from the domination he experiences in the adult world about him.

Can Form Good Habits

Play can be a means of helping your child form good habits. If the playroom atmosphere is permissive (free) enough, he can learn perseverance and originality. Besides, he can be taught respect of property and the rights of others. This comes from seeing that no one else uses his playthings without his permission. Certainly in group play, he will learn to share his toys or to give and take with other children. He learns, in supervised games, to be a good loser as well as to play fairly. Habits of orderliness can grow out of having a place for his toys and help in putting them away at the end of the play period or before he goes to bed at night.

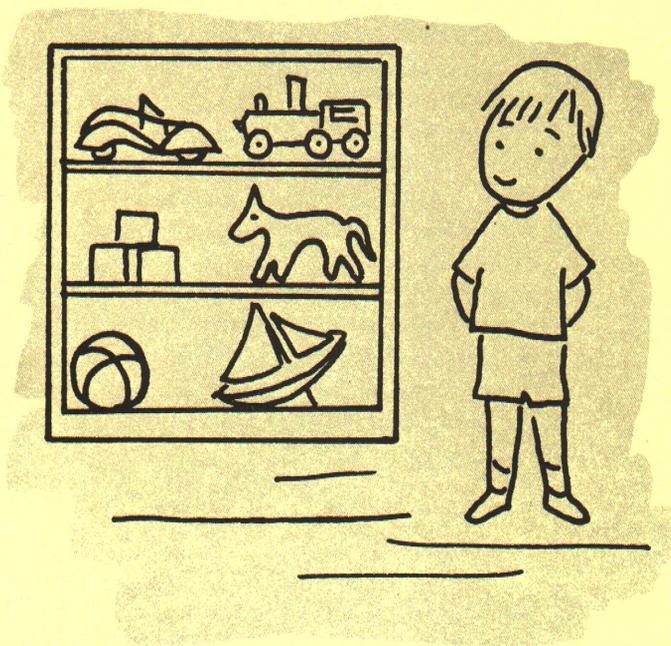


Figure 1—Making choice of toy provides early lesson in making wise choices.

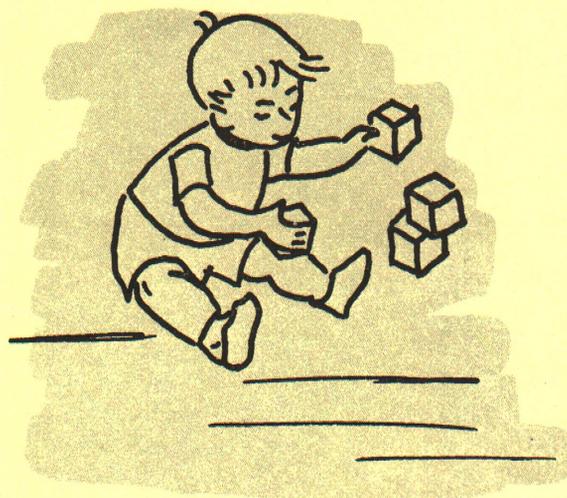


Figure 2—"Do-with" toys foster creativeness.

Your Child Grows and Develops Through Play

Recognize His Developmental Needs	Watch For His Interests	Provide Equipment or Activities for—*		
		the Toddler	the Preschool Child	the Elementary Child
Vision	Look at pictures	Nursery rhymes with large pictures	Collection of pictures Comics	Prints of famous paintings
	Learn colors	Spool board	Colored cloth or painted spools	Water colors Puzzles
	Match shapes	Pots and pans	Jig-saw puzzles	Birdhouse building, etc. Sewing (doll clothes)
	Read		Stories of animals and children	Books of adventure, fiction
Hearing	Make noise	Rattle Stiff Paper Bells	Humming Singing	Group singing Whistling
	Learn rhythm	Pot lids to rattle	Rhythm instrument Record player, records Whistle	Musical instrument Record player, records Square dancing
	Enjoy harmony		Record player, records	Children's concerts Music on radio
Sense of balance	Climb	Steps Small slide	Seesaw Slide	Mountain climbing
	Ride	Rocking Horse	Seesaw Tricycle Pony Swing Stick Horse	Bicycle Roller skates Horse
	Dance			Square dancing Social dancing

*Many toys and activities suggested for a younger age group will still be suitable for an older age group.

Your Child Grows and Develops Through Play

Recognize His Developmental Needs	Watch For His Interests	Provide Equipment or Activities for —			
		the Toddler	the Preschool Child	the Elementary Child	the Adolescent
	Jump Run Skip		Large boxes Kite Games	Hopscotch Volleyball Jumping rope	Track Basketball Baseball Football Dancing
Creative ability	Create	Sand Water	Crayons, plain paper Clay Puppets Blocks	Fingerpaint Paper, water colors Marionettes Soap carving	Oil paints and canvas
Imagination	Make believe	Shadows on wall Boat	Play house Cans, boxes for playing store Costumes Doll clothes	Dolls, doll house Housekeeping toys Magic set	Masquerades
Skills	Gain know-how	Any toy that helps child coordinate mind and body	Storytelling Play with other children	Games, such as: dominoes Sewing kit Camera and developing set Crafts (metal, glass, leather) Chemistry set	Typewriter Auto parts and old cars Lumber, saw and nails Hobby materials Radio or TV parts

Your Child Grows and Develops Through Play

Recognize His Developmental Needs	Watch For His Interests	Provide Equipment or Activities for —			
		the Toddler	the Preschool Child	the Elementary Child	the Adolescent
Sense of touch	Feel	Cuddly toy Rag doll Materials of different texture	Clay Finger paint	Clay Finger paint Handicraft sets	Ceramics Leather Finger paint
Finger control	Take toys apart or put together	Nest of cans or boxes Disc pegboard Coupled train cars	Clothespins on pan Simple puzzles String macaroni Shoes and shoe strings	Weaving set Marionettes	Model planes Musical instrument
Large arm muscles	Throw	Stuffed animal Large rubber ball	Bean bag games Basket quoits Ring toss	Darts Softball Basket or volleyball Archery set	Baseball Basketball Badminton Archery set Volleyball
	Build	Large blocks	Interlocking blocks, trains or trucks	Tool set, boards, nails, hammer	Vise and work bench, plane, chisel, saw
	Pound		Peg board	Punching bag Hammer, nails, wood	Woodcraft set
	Dig	Sand box, shovel spoon	Sandbox, shovel	Garden tools	Garden tools
	Lift				Body building weights

Parents' Contribution to Child's Play

Play can be a very meaningful thing for the child. This will not just happen, of course. A parent "sets the stage" so that the child will be able to develop to the fullest through his play experiences. The following paragraphs suggest some of the things that you, as a parent, can do to make your child's play more meaningful.

Keeping Informed

Read about and study your child's development. Try to learn what he is capable of and what he needs to learn. Know the benefits he can get from different toys and play equipment.

Interest in Youngster's Play

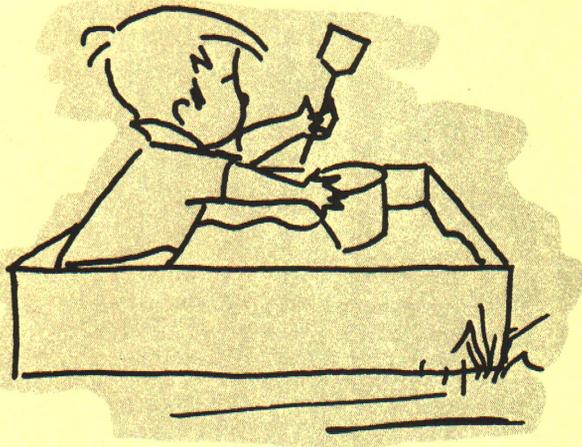


Figure 3—Playing alone helps child to develop initiative.

Have a genuine interest in your youngster's play. He may want to play alone at times but he wants to feel you are interested in him and in what he is doing. Help him to get started playing alone—for those times when he must play alone. When school begins, he is the only child at home, you know. He will miss his brothers and sisters, but, if he knows how to play well alone, he will get over being lonesome.

Family Fun

Develop a habit for a set time for playing as a family, even when the child is young. This means that you will have to schedule your work so as to be free when other family members are free. It means also that the play must be something that even the youngest can take part in. Listen-

ing to good music, acting out nursery rhymes, singing, playing games (as ring toss or basket quoits) are a few pastimes that are suitable for any age.

Freedom of Choice

Avoid forcing a child to take part in any activity, no matter how much you may feel it will benefit him. There may be a good reason why he doesn't take part. For example, he may not be able to—because he cannot coordinate mind and body or he may be afraid of something. And don't discuss it; the less said about it the better. Given time, he will likely come to enjoy the activity.

Storage for Toys

Provide a place for the child's toys. Space in his own room is best. Shelves with well-loved toys in sight make the room more attractive to him. A closet with shelves within his reach may help to keep order. A low drawer often can hold the train and its track. Maybe you will want to make a set of shelves from several apple or orange crates put together lengthwise. A coat of paint on them will work wonders! The alcove under the stairs might house a tricycle, hobby horse or roller skates. And then there's the chest or large box which slides under the bed for the toys he uses less often.

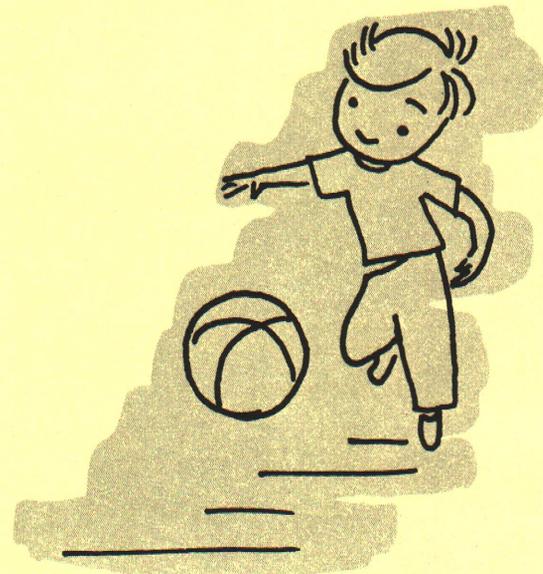


Figure 4—Active play helps build muscles.

Varied Play

See that your child gets different play experiences throughout the day—quiet play, active play, creative play, group play and make-believe play. Mornings may be a good time for active, outdoor play for the preschool child. The school child needs some active play, preferably outdoor, after school hours to make up for a quiet day in school. Before bed or nap time is a good time for quiet play to help calm or relax a child. Part of his play should be with a group, although at times he needs to play alone.

“Do-with” Toys

Provide a few strongly built, “do-with” toys rather than a lot of cheap, poorly made toys. Give him one—maybe two at a time. This is a good practice, since it gives the child a chance to exhaust its possibilities. Even though his toys are on open shelves in his room, he learns to choose one or two at a time to take down. Put a toy away when a child tires of it. This will help to keep him from becoming destructive.

Group Play



Figure 5—Group play teaches sharing.

Provide opportunity for play with other children. Remember that the nearer playmates are in age, the more benefit they receive from group experience. Forming a neighborhood play-group with your neighbors two or three mornings a week is a fine thing.

Ideas Up Your Sleeve

Keep one or two ideas up your sleeve for the time when the youngster seems unable to think of anything to do. A few that you might try at such times are these:

1. Turn a chair over and let the child have some rubber fruit jar rings to toss over a leg.
2. Give him a hat, a badge and the garden hose. He can pretend the flowers are on fire and he's the fireman.
3. Mix starch and water and furnish a brush to paint the fence. The rain will wash it off.
4. Tie a cord on the end of a stick and let him fish in a bucket or dishpan of water.
5. Hitch the wagon and tricycle together to make a train. The dolls are the passengers and the child the conductor. Pieces of paper are tickets. Give him a punch to mark the tickets.
6. Color a little cooked starch and let him paint a picture on a piece of plain paper.
7. Let him string pieces of macaroni on twine or yarn. Help him thread the darning needle. He might color the macaroni with wax crayons and make a bracelet or necklace of it.
8. Let him practice for the track meet by seeing how far or how high he can jump.

“Make Believe”

Encourage your child to enjoy “make-believe.” Games of “make-believe” will help him develop a lively imagination. Few people succeed in life without imagination. He will most likely be quite ready to pretend he is the mailman, the storekeeper or any other person he knows. Encourage him by accepting him in the part he is playing. Invite the mailman to lunch with you rather than say, “Let's quit pretending and eat our lunch.”

He'll have a lot of fun making a cage for a wild animal—wrapping string around the card



Figure 6—Some toys develop child's imagination.

table that is upside down on the floor. Playing store with a box for a counter and a few cans of food from the pantry shelf will please him greatly. You might provide money and help him learn to make change as a "storekeeper." He'll like being the doctor, the papa, the teacher—many others! The pleasure from being any of these characters may help him to decide to follow in their footsteps when he grows up.

Freedom to Create



Figure 7—Finger painting can increase power of observation.

Avoid showing him "how to" draw or paint, if you expect him to develop creative ability. Instead, help him to notice things for himself — how the dog pricks up his ears or how some flowers are opening on the magnolia tree today. Encourage him to put on paper his experience of going to the store. Let him do it as he wishes. Just have the tools, the materials handy. Be appreciative of his effort rather than criticize his forms. Better to say, "Tell me about your picture" than "That doesn't look like a car to me."

Community Playground

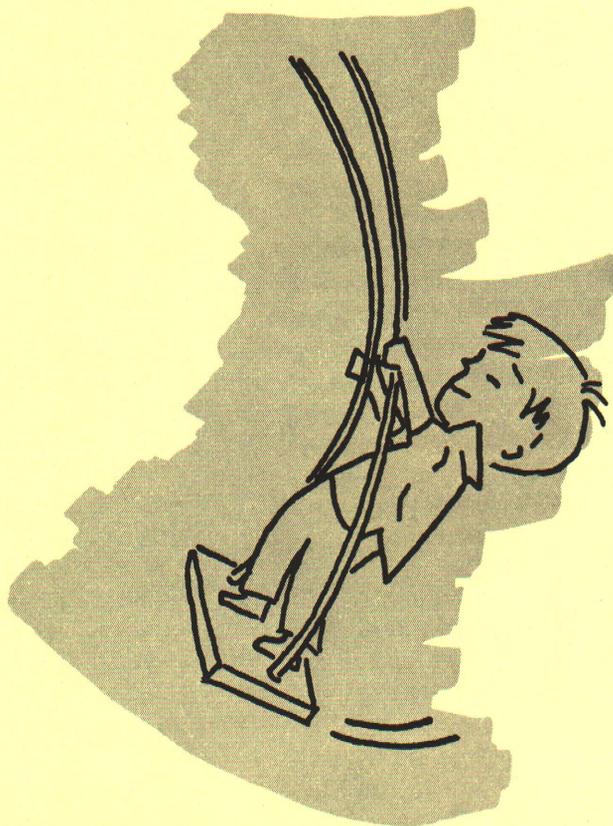


Figure 8—Active outdoor play builds coordination of mind and body.

Look for the nearest playground, if there is no space in your yard for safe play. Your child needs to use the slide, the jungle gym, the swings. If your community lacks a playground, start one. This would help all children in the community. Find a suitable location—a school yard, for example. Get permission to use it. Get some materials donated from the lumber yards for building equipment. Some of the fathers or older boys might volunteer to build the equipment. The Children's Bureau, Washington, D. C., has printed plans for making playground equipment.

A Child's Play Tells Us

Children reveal their inner feelings and conflicts in play. So take time to sit by the window and listen to them playing in the yard. For the same purpose, some nursery schools have one-way vision panels. Parents sit behind a panel and observe children's play without being seen. This is a very valuable experience for parents.

John may cheat at marbles because he feels he has not been treated fairly. Bob, giving orders to other children, may be expressing his resentment of adult domination. Betty may scold her doll in the very tone you used when you scolded her this morning.



Figure 9—Parents need to observe the child's play.

Thus, from play the parent can learn how a child's mind works, what interests him most, what he values most highly and what he has learned from life around him. With more freedom in play than in other routines in the home, the child feels free to dramatize his thoughts, to practice the new words he has heard adults use and to act out his likes and dislikes. Play exposes his hopes and fears. It brings out the things that bother or confuse him. Play also reveals his skills and his personality development.

What to Observe

Watch for the way the child develops in play. At two years, he will need some guidance. He will be interested in one thing for a short time only. He will play better by himself. A little later, at three or four, he will play side by side with another child. Each will play alone and talk to himself. But they will not want, as a rule, to grab each other's play things or even hurt each other as they did at two.

Watch for the roles the child takes in play. Is he the leader or the follower? Does he use his imagination to make-up a new game?

Watch for his destructiveness. A child likes to tear down and take apart. Creative or developmental toys help him to express his inner feelings in harmless ways. If he is constantly destructive to the extent of tearing books or scratching furniture, he may be suffering from insecurity. Give him some smaller things to manage.

Watch to see that he is not too worried over getting dirty, being naughty or breaking things. If he is, perhaps you have set standards that are too high for his stage of development.

Watch to see how he holds his own with the group when he is old enough for group play. The older children are usually the leaders. He will likely develop from being dominated ("bossed") to being dominant ("boss")—a natural stage of growth.

Watch to see how he uses his experiences. Play will be much more imaginative, if you provide many opportunities for him to see. Trips to the zoo, to the steam shovel at work or to the

circus may leave him speechless. Don't mind. He is too busy taking in everything to have time for talk. Watch him use these experiences in his play.

Listen while you watch. His words tell you

what is on his mind and what is important to him. You may need to help him straighten out his confusions and overcome his fears. Listening will show you how readily he is learning to use words correctly.

REFERENCES ON CHILDREN'S PLAY

A Creative Life for Your Children, Margaret Mead.

Children's Bureau, HEADLINER SERIES Number 1.
Order from: Superintendent of Documents
U. S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D. C. 20402

All In Play, Rowena Shoemaker.

Order from: Play Schools Association
120 West 57th Street
New York, New York 10019

A good selection of suggestions and directions for indoor and outdoor play and other creative activities for children.

Choosing Toys for Children of All Ages

Order from: American Toy Institute
1107 Broadway
New York, New York 10010

An inexpensive guide for choosing and buying toys.

Creative Activities for Young Children, D. Keith Osborn and Dorothy Haupt

Order from: Merrill-Palmer Institute
71 East Ferry Avenue
Detroit, Michigan 48202

A useful guide for selecting, making and using a great variety of creative activities and play things.