



Language and Play

There are tremendous opportunities for language development through different types of play. Through play with toys and everyday objects, children discover that they can make things happen. Providing a wide range of household objects as well as toys for children to explore helps them learn about shapes, sounds, colors, and textures.

Physical play and rough-and-tumble games give your child experiences with movement and space. This helps him develop an understanding of the meaning of action words (throw, kick, run, jump) and prepositions (up, down, on, in, under).

Play is also closely associated with language development. Children learn by experiencing different situations. Real experiences and everyday routines are very important for the development of children's imaginary play, vocabulary, and language. Words are symbols. Children have to be able to think symbolically before they can make sense of language. Pretending to give a doll, teddy, or person a drink from a cup is one of the first steps of symbolic play.

Learning to play together is an essential part of early communication. Children learn language and social skills from each other and spark off imaginative ideas in play. At the same time, it is important for children to have time to play on their own and to "talk to themselves." This gives them a chance to experiment with sounds and language. Younger children may babble to themselves and enjoy listening to the sounds that they make. This type of sound play is not intended for communication, but helps children work out sound patterns in their brain.

Ideas for Facilitating Language and Play

- Share games, such as large lotto and picture dominoes, that are based on matching colors, animals, facial expressions, and everyday objects.
- Offer manipulative materials to foster problem solving and eye-hand coordination: large beads for stringing, brightly colored cubes, puzzle boxes, large, plastic interlocking bricks, legos.
- Provide toy replicas of farm and zoo animals, families, cars, trucks, and planes for sorting and imaginative play.
- Read to your child regularly. Provide colorful picture books for naming objects and describing everyday events. Use simple illustrated storybooks (one line per page) so your child can learn to tell the story.
- Share nursery rhymes, simple finger plays, and action songs. Respond to, imitate, and make up simple games based on the child's spontaneous rhyming or chanting.
- Set out (and keep a close eye on) washable paints, markers, chalk, large crayons, and large paper for artistic expression.
- Help with make believe activities, for example, save empty cereal boxes, discarded cans with intact labels for playing store.

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- Provide wagons; large trucks and cars that can be loaded, pushed, or sat on; doll carriage or stroller; a rocking boat; bean bags and rings for tossing.