

Tip Sheets

12 Types of Play

Play is...

- Self-chosen and self-directed.
- Intrinsically motivated. The means (processes) are more valued than the ends (results).
- Guided by mental rules, but with room for creativity.
- Imaginative.
- An active and alert state of mind, but is relatively non-stressed.

Different Types of Play

Play is not *just play*. There are a variety of types of play and each is important for healthy growth and development.

The twelve key types of play include:

1. Large motor
2. Small motor
3. Mastery
4. Dramatic/fantasy
5. Symbolic
6. Language
7. Creative or expressive
8. Sensory
9. Construction
10. Rough and tumble
11. Games/rule-based
12. Risk-taking

Large motor play

Children explore movement and ways in which they can combine movements through play such as

running, playing ball, jumping, climbing, dancing, and completing an obstacle course. Large motor play develops coordination, balance, and a sense of where one's body is at in relation to the space that surrounds the child.

Small motor play

Small motor play is play with small toys and activities such as stringing beads, doing puzzles, and building with construction materials.

Mastery play

Children often repeat an action or play activity and will continue until they have mastered the skill.

Dramatic/fantasy play

Children take on roles in pretend games about familiar experiences such as going on a family camping trip or a birthday party. They may create props and use them as they engage in adventures, such as creating a castle with a card table and sheets. This type of play:

- Allows children to rearrange the world in their own way.
- Promotes problem-solving and is rich in language and imagination.
- Often begins with the phrase, *Let's pretend*.

Symbolic play

Children take everyday objects and use them to represent something else such as a prop for make-believe play. For example, towel becomes a superhero cape.

Language play

Children develop mastery of language by playing with words, rhymes, verses, and songs that they



make up and change. They tell stories and act them out. Children are fascinated by other languages, especially

when these languages are presented in playful ways such as a in a song, rhyme or a story.

Creative or expressive play

Children have opportunities to express ideas and emotions through art, music, and writing. This type of play supports the development of creative thinking.

Sensory play

Most children enjoy sensory play with water, sand, mud, and other materials. This provides gives them the chance to explore the properties (textures, sounds, smells, etc.) and functions of materials, equipment, and objects.

Construction play

The development of visual/spatial, fine motor, and math skills are supported by constructive play. This type of play requires skill and use of the imagination.

Rough and tumble play

This essential type of play involves playful fighting, wrestling, and chasing games. The purpose has less to do with fighting than children being curious about touching, tickling, and measuring their own strength with that of a peer as well as discovering physical flexibility.

Games/rules-based play

Children follow or create rules to reach a shared goal. This might include playing a game outdoors such as Hide and Seek, creating their own games, and computer, card, or board games.

Risk-taking play

Children learn to master challenges through risk-taking play. Most children know how far they can go without getting hurt. Many children do not have opportunities for this type of play because most play spaces are designed to be as risk-free as possible. But, through this type of play, children can learn to assess risks and set boundaries for themselves.

Additional Resources

Healthychildren.org | The Power of Play - How Fun and Games Help Children Thrive

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Caution-Children-at-Play.aspx>

Minnesota Children's Museum | The Power of Play
<http://www.childrensmuseums.org/images/MCMResearchSummary.pdf>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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