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PLAY: A FUN WAY TO BUILD LIFE SKILLS

What is the first childhood memory that pops up in your head? Is it making sand castles on the beach, or going on a family picnic to the farm. Is it dancing in the rain or making those paper boats just to go out and float them in the puddles. It could also be going to the park with your friends and taking turns to sit on the swing, or playing cricket with your friends on the ground. I'm sure there are many more memories for each of you, but a common link to them all is that it was a time when you had fun. Ask yourself another question, who was your favorite person as a child? It could be your parent, grandparent, neighbor or friend. What made them your favorite person? The fact that they did what you liked, gave you what you wanted; made them your go to people. Most importantly they were the ones who listened to you, engaged with you, and encouraged you to do something new. They would appreciate you and make you feel like a star every step of the way.

These childhood memories with your favorite people have one more common link, no points for guessing *"It was all play!"* My point is that anything fun with somebody who will listen to you, engage with you and encourage you is essentially "PLAY". It can be as simple and silly as playing peek-a-boo with your toddler or as complex as playing soccer with your son and his friends.

It is commonly stated that your childhood experiences, shape the individual you are today. Another well-known fact is that the most important occupation of a child is Play. Think about it now there are a number of things you learned just by playing. Touching and feeling taught you affordances of different objects. The numerous attempts you made to climb up on a chair in order to reach your favorite toy, taught you how to use your muscle and motor plan your way through tasks. All those times you pretended to be a scientist helped



build your imagination and abstract thinking. The first time you were made captain of the throw-ball team, taught you all about teamwork, problem solving and responsibilities.

Hence, we must realize that play is an important medium of growth, development and learning for every child. It can promote appropriate motor skills, stimulate the imagination, and enhance social skills. Play provides the child with an opportunity to establish interests and improve intellect as well as language processing.

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Early on, play is a means of engagement with your child. It is extremely essential for every parent and therapist to encourage meaningful and age appropriate play with his/her child. The most basic play is unoccupied play as seen in infants. For infants the world is like a **horizon**. They are essentially experiencing everything for the first time. Everything is new, so when you are thinking about playtime with your toddler all you have to do is give them opportunities to move and use their bodies just because it is fun and interesting to do so. It can be as simple as putting them prone on the pillow and handing them a rattle or their favorite toy, so they can learn to move forward and reach for the fascinating object.



As the child grows up the play becomes slightly more evolved, the child starts developing preferences and areas of interest. This is when he begins to play by himself/herself. The child may be seen running around the park and falling, or sitting quietly in a corner and just turning the pages of his/her book all alone. The stage is called as independent or solitary play. It is an important stage as here the child begins to explore his/her environment independently. This leads to building your child's gross motor and fine motor skills.

As your child grows a little older he/she learns a great deal just through imitation. It is during Onlookers play that your child actually observes other people (children as well as adults) playing but still doesn't play with them. It builds the foundation for your child's social skills and his/her ability to interact and play along with other children at school or in the park. This is a stage of play, where in as a parent you can create various opportunities to teach your child how to play. Just playing a piano or any other musical instrument in front of the child, going to the park and allowing your child to watch others play, encouraging your child to observe his/her elder sibling play is a great way to teach them how to engage in play as they grow older. This also is a good time to introduce the concept of pretend play to your child. Playing with stuffed animals, dolls, toy furniture, puppets etc. will help

the child learn about various objects, gender roles, and lay foundation for development of skills.



Around the age of two and a half - three years your child still will not be playing in a group. This is the stage where he/she will build on his/her pretend play skills and engage in imaginative play. You might notice your child in the park picking up a stone and making it fly in the sky like an airplane, or using a rectangular Lego block as a phone and pretend to have a conversation. What you are also likely to see is, your child engaging in their own game alongside their playmate who is also doing his/her own thing, even when they maybe playing with the same toy. This is called as parallel play. It is an important stage of play development as here the child learns to play in the presence of another child. You'd be surprised to see how much your child actually learns just by observing the other child and imitating his/her actions with the same toy or in the same game. Although, this is the first time your child will be expected to share and take turns. Meltdowns related to "that toy is mine" maybe common. It is best to introduce toys that are multiple, readily available, shatterproof and can be easily cleaned like building blocks, sorting beads and peg board puzzles. You can also create simple obstacle courses with tunnels, low climbers with pillows, mattresses etc. can promote engaging your child along with the playmate in the game building on their gross motor skills and basic social skills.

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At or around the age of three - four your child may be ready to play with another child. Although, it's not very evolved or purposeful as yet. Here your child can play with other children but kids their age cannot come up with and organize a meaningful end goal to their game. Giving children games with a preordained end goal is a great idea. This is also a great time to introduce constructive play. It's all about building and creating for example Lego sets or building blocks with models, playdoh, simple art and craft projects etc. This is a good stage for your child to master the social skills of turn taking and waiting. You might notice a sudden rise in your child's language skills, as now they will learn to interact with their peers and friends.

Eventually the final stage of play development is cooperative play. It is self-explanatory, i.e. here your six-year-old child learns to cooperate with peers. He/she will learn to follow the rules of the game. Now the play is much more organized, there will be a group leader and every player will have a well-defined role and responsibility. This is a stage where the child learns teamwork and problem solving. Cooperative play utilizes all the skills learned since birth and puts them to use while playing. Whether it participating in a science project, playing a game of soccer/basketball, or preparing a class skit, it all requires cooperative play. This is the stage that forms the basis of future life social skills and interactions.

Play is an essential skill. **Appropriate play development moulds the child to succeed in other life skills. It is the building block to many life skills and it is always fun to engage in irrespective of the age. Hence, let's make your child's learning much more fun and interesting. Follow your child's lead and build on his/her skills through engagement and play, adding to his/her happiness.**



TEACH YOUR LITTLE ONE HOW TO DRESS

Each one of us has experienced those rush hour mornings where in, we've had to be at an early morning meeting in office, make breakfast and also get our child ready for school. Going to office and making breakfast are two almost unavoidable responsibilities. Where as, you have a way out when it comes to dressing your child. The way is to instead enable your child to independently do so! This will definitely save your time.

While you are at it, the process of teaching your child how to dress may seem rather time consuming and stressful. Patience on your end and practice on their end will make the skill perfect. There will be times where you want to just help your child or do it for him/her. Stop yourself and remember the more you step in is the less they'll learn.

Developmentally readiness for dressing starts as early as at the age of one.

It is important for us to acknowledge that dressing is not just putting on your clothes. Along with the motor skills (fine and gross) it also involves cognitive understanding and attention.



There are many ways to encourage your child's independence; it can be done keeping the following things in mind.

Modify the task and make it fun:

- As parents it is a good idea to buy clothes that are easy to don and doff. Invest in Shorts/Loose pants/pajama with elastic band instead of belts or buttons, shirts with zippers and bigger buttons and buttonholes, coats jackets etc. provide shoes that are slip on as opposed to those that have laces. This will reduce your child's effort and make the process easy.
- Lay down the clothes with the correct side of the clothes facing up and in the sequence of dressing this will help simplify the task for the child.
- Allow your child to choose the outfit of the day. This is a good opportunity to help them match their clothes according to season and weather. Start by giving him/her a choice between two outfits and eventually progress to having your child plan the whole outfit.

Alter expectations:

- Allow plenty of time: Realistically, a child learning to dress will take time to get ready. Also don't step in or rush your child. Pre-plan your time accordingly and ensure that you give enough time to your child to get ready.
- At the beginning of the training let the child do only the last step of the process. Gradually reduce your assistance, promoting their independence.

Modify the environment:

Establishing a dressing corner in your child's room can be beneficial. Ensure that there is a chair (or any other steady surface) for extra stability so your child can sit and dress. Also ascertain that the corner is near a mirror, this will allow the child to see what he/she is doing and aid independence.



Teaching Strategies:

- Teach using backward chaining: break down the steps of wearing any piece of clothing. Assist your

child until you're on the very last step of the task, let the child complete this step independently (for example while wearing a pajama help your child put his/her leg in the pants all they have to do on their own is pull the pant up). This will help your child experience success, whilst learning the skill.



- Promote bilateral hand use. All dressing tasks involve use of two hands. It is important that the child realizes the role of each hand while dressing (for example: 1. while wearing your t-shirt you pick it up using two hands to roll it and put it around your neck, after which you place your helper hand in followed by the doer hand in the arm hole, then using both hands you pull the t-shirt down, or 2. while zipping up your jacket your helper hand holds the base of the jacket together while the doer hand pulls the zip up)
- Encourage fine motor control and precision activities involving use of thumb, index and middle fingers to promote ease in buttoning, tying shoelaces and pulling zippers and other fasteners.
- Use a lot of praise and positive reinforcement to encourage learning. If the child makes an error in dressing ensure that you praise his/her effort and subtly point out the error to help rectification.

Give your child enough opportunities to practice these skills. With time, patience and consistency they will definitely master it. The ability to dress self will build their confidence and the sense of achievement. Also once your child has mastered the skill it's one less thing for you to do

For any question or concerns regarding the newsletter please write to us on: reachtcf@gmail.com

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