

Understanding How You Currently Play With Your Child

Why is Play So Important? Play:



- ☐ Brings you closer to your children
- ☐ Helps your children become more independent
- ☐ Helps your children learn how to work problems out
- ☐ Develops their concentration and imagination
- ☐ Develops key skills needed for life and learning in school

Check Out How You Play!

Get a friend, partner, or relative to watch you playing with your child and to jot down a few notes. Have him or her try to observe the following:

- ☐ Who decides what to play?
- ☐ How long does it last?
- ☐ Who is most interested?
- ☐ How much enjoyment is there?
- ☐ What good behavior is praised and encouraged?



Discuss what was observed and work out a plan from ideas within this tip sheet on how you can develop your play skills further. Set yourself simple and achievable targets. Involve your friends and family and check your progress weekly. Make it FUN! You could observe your friend playing with their child in exchange for them helping you. REMEMBER you are the experts on your own children, so pool your knowledge and experience! If you can't get a friend or member of your family to help, you can still make your own personal plan.

Ask Yourself:

- ☐ Do I enjoy playing with my child?
- ☐ How often in an average week do I play and for how long?
- ☐ What are the barriers that can get in the way and how can these be removed?
- ☐ What does my child think about play times?

So, now what? With this information, how do you improve the quality of play times with your children?

Involving Your Child: Ask your children what they enjoy playing. Let them choose what they want to play. You would be surprised how many parents automatically decide how, what, and where they are going to play. Children learn best and enjoy play more when they decide how they want to play and at what pace. Importantly, their concentration, enjoyment levels, and good behavior increase as a consequence. Hence, there are strong "pay-offs" for both the child and parent.

Getting Down to Your Child's Level: Preparing for play is important. Make sure you are close to your child, have eye contact and show that you are interested. For example, if your child is playing on the floor, sit on the floor with him.

Describing What You See: Let your child pick a play activity. As your child is playing, concentrate on describing what you see in a very positive voice, for example, "Oh, you have picked up the red brick and are placing it on the blue brick." (**Avoid** directing your child's play. Keep away from saying such things as, "I know, let's put this brick on top of this other brick.")

Praising What You See: When you feel comfortable with describing what you see, try to begin to use descriptive praise, for example, "Great balancing that red brick on the blue brick." Be close when you praise, smile, get eye contact, use touches, hugs and strokes. Be sincere and genuine. Praise helps children learn self-confidence and to explore further.

This tip sheet was adapted from an article written by Dr. Andy Gill and posted on www.practicalparent.org.uk, a British parenting Web site. Visit the site for other reproducible articles on topics involving parenting.

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