

## Stages of Play

### Making a Playful Home

Go on—be silly with your kids! Spend some time playing with your children every day. It's good for you and your kids. It helps your kids grow emotionally, socially, mentally, and physically. Best of all, playing can reduce stress in the home. Play can help you relax and enjoy family time and can give you some great memories to share together.

Try these surefire hits with children of different ages: Babies love peek-a-boo. Its more advanced version, hide and seek, is loved by children of all ages. Try build-up-and-wreck-down games with toddlers. Nothing seems to delight them more than stacking blocks and knocking them over. With your young preschooler, try playing house. Pretend to cook, eat, and sleep; that's all you need for a satisfying play time with this age group. Older preschoolers enjoy imaginative games like pretending to be their favorite character. Children grow so fast—take the time to play today!

### Play Is the Way

Did you know there is one thing your child should do every day to help her succeed in school, to be able to get along with other children, and to grow emotionally? Play is the way.

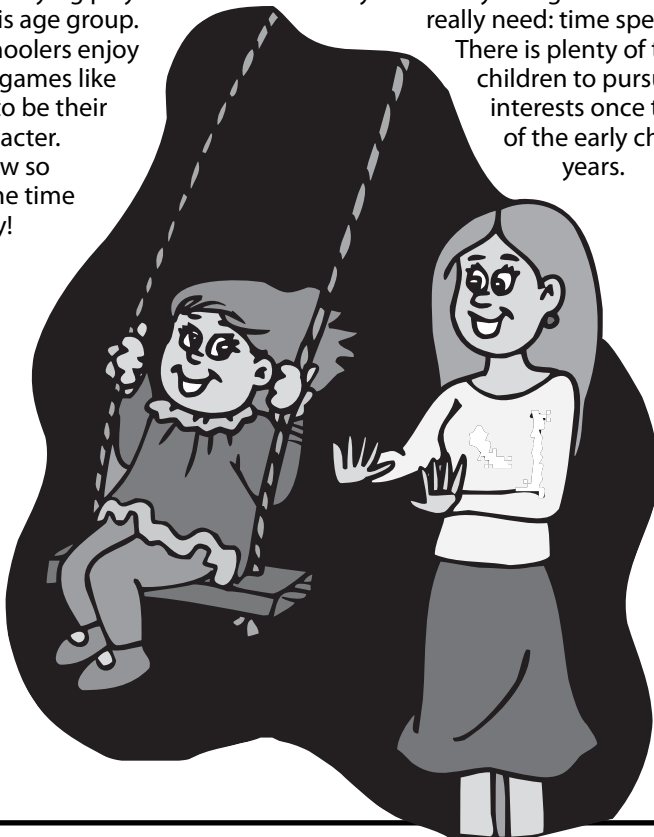
What can you do to make sure your children are getting the play they need to grow? First, make time for children to play. Many children have little to no time to play in their lives. Choose a child care provider who understands the value of play for young children and who gives children plenty of time to play however they want to. Then set aside other time during the week for play. Children under the age of five benefit more from time spent playing than they do from time spent in classes or organized sports, so save your money and give kids what they really need: time spent playing.

There is plenty of time for children to pursue special interests once they are out of the early childhood years.

You don't have to spend lots of money on toys to support your child's play. Many toys don't have much real play value. Toys with batteries are usually interesting for only a short time before children lose interest. Many of the best toys are not toys at all. One caregiver noticed that the children in her care were "making" cupcakes in the sandbox, so she brought outside her muffin tins and they endlessly filled the tins with sand. Simple things like blankets, pillows, and boxes give children many hours of happy play.

Play with your infant and toddler. They really benefit from the time spent interacting with you. As your child grows older, invite playmates over to play. Around the age of three, when children become more social in their play, they begin to enjoy having a special friend for play. Remember, play dates like these are most successful when they are shorter rather than longer. Help children learn to talk with each other about their differences rather than fighting.

Expand your child's play by reading to him about the things he's most interested in. If you have a child who loves trucks, ask your librarian for books about construction that are at the right age level. Visit construction sites together and suggest that your child try playing some of the new ideas. For instance, you might say, "Let's pretend they are building a bridge" and then see if your child is interested in the idea. Play can become more and more complex as kids learn more and more. Your attitude matters. If you believe play is a valuable way for children to spend their time, children will gain the most from their time spent playing.



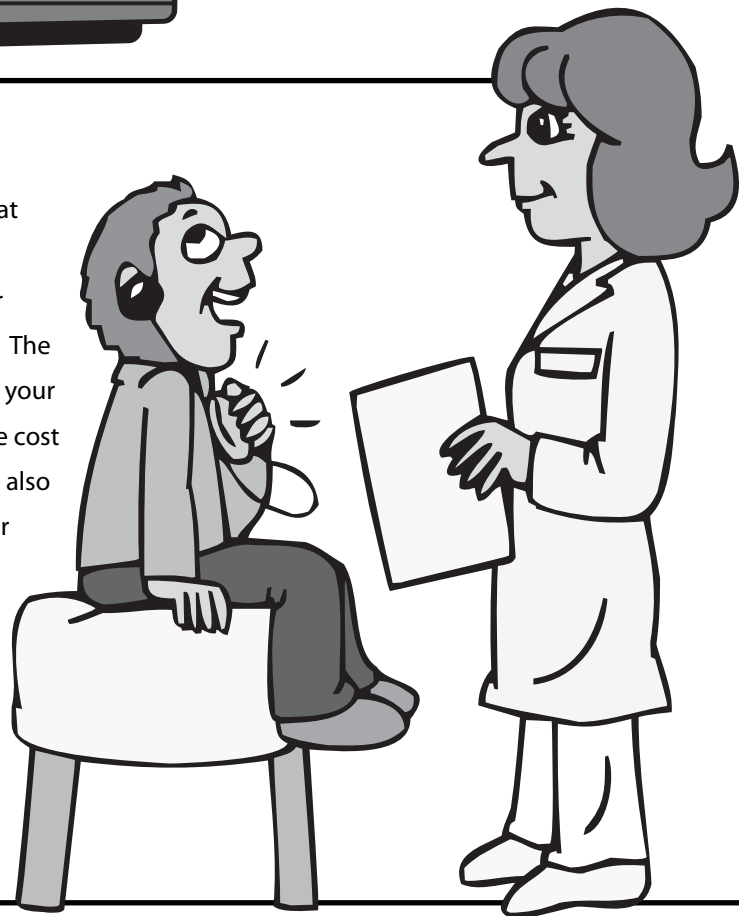
## Turn off the TV

Children need play time every day. With our busy schedules children do not always get this time. Children get much more from time they spend playing than they do from time spent watching TV, so make sure they have more play time than TV time. Why do kids gain more when they play than when they watch TV? Because children learn much more when they move their bodies and use their imaginations.

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## Is My Child OK?

If you are concerned about your child's ability to play, what should you do? If you have noticed that your child is not playing the way you would expect, you can talk with your child's pediatrician. Ask for a developmental assessment. The pediatrician can refer you to a specialist who will observe your child at play to understand your child's development. The cost of this is normally covered by most health insurance. You also may have free developmental screenings available in your community. Ask your pediatrician about these services.



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