

Family Focus

Oct. 2019

Building a Foundation for School Success

Getting Ready for School: Play

Play is an important part of your child's development. Play helps build children's brains and bodies, and they learn about everyday life. Participating in your child's play helps build strong bonds between you and your child. It's fun to play together!

Why is this important for school readiness?

Play is an important part of children's development. Children learn through play. They begin to understand how the world around them works.

Play helps children develop curiosity, language, and social emotional skills. Through play, children learn how to cooperate with others.

Research shows that children who "free play" often have greater brain growth in the front part of the brain. This is the part of the brain where emotions are regulated, planning is done, and problem solving happens. These are all important skills for children to develop to be successful in school and as adults. There are no adult imposed rules in "free play"; in free play, children are allowed to use their curiosity, imagination, and ideas.

Playing with your child is important as it helps to form closer bonds between members of your family. When your child is able to lead the play, your child feels empowered.

Everyday play should build on your child's developing skills. For example:

- ❖ *Large muscle skills-* running, climbing, jumping, pushing pulling
- ❖ *Small muscle skills-* scribbling, painting, stringing beads
- ❖ *Social skills-* sharing, talking, initiating
- ❖ *Emotional skills-* showing feelings, caring
- ❖ *Language skills-* listening, singing, telling stories
- ❖ *Thinking skills-* exploring, planning, matching, problem solving

What can families do to help?

- ❖ You don't need to buy expensive toys to support your child's play. Provide safe household items your child can use in creative, imaginative ways. For instance, an empty cardboard box can become a train or a house.
- ❖ Talk about play with your child. Ask your child what he or she played and with whom. Talking about play gives your child the message that you are interested in play and see the value of it. It also helps the child think about play and see it from a different lens.
- ❖ Daily activities such as getting dressed or cooking dinner can turn into a play activity. Have your child find different articles of clothing (like a scavenger hunt) or set the table (like a guessing game).
- ❖ Play outdoors with your child year round and be sure to provide appropriate clothing. Playing in the rain, sun and snow can teach your child about weather and science.



- ❖ Take a nature walk in a park with your child. It's an opportunity to teach your child about trees, plants, birds and animals.
- ❖ Play make-believe with your child! Every pretend cook needs someone to eat the pretend meal! Every stuffed animals needs to see a doctor.

Activities to do with your preschooler:

❖ Create a dress-up box together: ***Let's Pretend Box or Suitcase***

Girls and boys like to dress up and pretend to be a superhero, a mom or dad, a doctor, and other roles they are familiar with. Create a dress-up box using a plastic tote or a cardboard box, or use a suitcase, if you have an old one lying around. Together with your child, find some old clothes, shoes, hats, handbags and odds and ends to add to the dress up box. When it's time to play, just take out the box. A Let's Pretend Box also makes clean up easy; everything goes back in the box. Have stickers, markers and crayons available for your child to personalize his or her dress up box! Most importantly, don't forget to join in the pretend play! That's what makes it very special to your child.

❖ Help your child build a blanket fort: ***Create A Special Hideaway or Magic Place***

Children like to have their own special place, a place that can become a magic castle, a fort, a cave, or just a cozy place that belongs to your child. Locate a space where a fort can remain for a few days. Build the fort with your child, talking about the process and using your child's suggestions. Be certain that the doorway is big enough to allow you to crawl in and out of the fort so you can be invited to join in the fun too.



❖ After a busy day, take a few minutes to play a fun game: ***Play a Game!***

After a busy workday or preschool day, playing a game may be a fun way to connect with your child and wind down. Play a simple game of "I Spy". For example, in a room of house say to your

child, "I Spy something green". Let your child guess until correct and then give them a turn. This is a great way to learn vocabulary words. Play *Memory* with a few cards from a regular deck of cards (start with a small number of cards and add more as your child's matching skills increase). Play "*Simon Says*" with your child. Give them simple one step movements that helps them move different parts of their bodies. Playing games is not only fun and educational, it's a special time for your child because you're playing with him or her.

❖ Let your child "play kitchen" next to the real kitchen: ***Making Dinner Together***

Children usually love to help you cook or bake. But sometimes having your child help may not be possible, so have your child cook alongside you. If your child has a play kitchen, move it closer to the real kitchen. If your child doesn't have a store-bought play kitchen, it's easy to set one up on a table your child can reach. Add a pot, wooden spoons, plastic bowls and dishes, and you have a play kitchen! You can even give your little assistant cook some ideas of what to make for dinner.

Online Resources for families: [List of 20 Best Board Games for Preschoolers \(And Parents\)](#)

Resources used for this tip sheet:

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