



Play Today, Lead Tomorrow

The Importance of Play in the Early Years

Presented by Action for Children's Child Care Information and Referral Team

Why Play Matters

Play is not just entertainment—it's a powerful tool for growth and the foundation of early childhood development. It helps children explore, build skills, and prepare for success in life and school.

The Brain Science Around Play

Neuroscience shows that during play, especially imaginative and social play, the brain forms and strengthens neural connections that are critical for cognitive, emotional, and social development. Play stimulates the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for problem-solving, self-regulation, and decision-making—skills children will use throughout life.

Foundational Development Standards Engaged During Play

- Social-Emotional Development: Sharing, turn-taking, resolving conflicts, empathy, confidence and expressing emotions.
- Cognitive Development: Problem-solving, memory, critical thinking and imagination.
- Physical Growth: Fine and gross motor skills are strengthened through movement and hands-on activities.
- Language and Communication: Talking, storytelling, and using new vocabulary during playtime.

Tips for Parents

- Set up a play-friendly space at home with open-ended materials like blocks, art supplies and pretend play items.
- Let your child lead the play and make time for it daily.
- Join the fun sometimes—playing with your child builds bonds and models social skills.
- Limit screens & encourage hands-on, active play.
- Encourage outdoor play—playing outside encourages physical activity and motor skill growth.

When kids play, they learn. Encourage it, enjoy it, and know that every moment of play helps shape a strong, smart, and happy child!

