

## The Benefits of Creative Play

The first five years of a child's life are the most critical time for learning. Much of this learning occurs through play. In recent years, children's play has begun to change as classic toys are replaced with high-tech toys. Rattles, dolls, trucks and blocks have been replaced by electronic toys and games that light up, move, and make sounds. Recent research discusses the concern with the changing trends in children's play. Children need opportunities to use their imaginations which can be restricted by electronic toys with programmed responses. When children become used to playing with electronic toys, they expect all toys to work a certain way and tell them what to do. Classic, open-ended toys can then seem boring. However, classic toys help children create their own play, and help caregivers play with their children in more imaginative ways. This can help to create healthy attachments between caregiver and child.

The amount of time children spend participating in creative play is being challenged. This is primarily because of the increase in time spent watching television, playing video games, electronic toys and using touch screen technology. Electronic media and toys are often marketed as educational and claim to promote language development, which may be misleading. Creative play provides many more opportunities for learning and stimulation of development and language.

To encourage creative play, it is important to choose appropriate toys. Some things to consider when making choices about toys are:

- Can the toy can be used in different ways
- Does it allow children to use their imagination (it is not linked to a character from a television show or movie)
- Does it allow children to guide their own play
- Does it promotes respectful, non-violent interactions with others
- Does it appeal to children at more than one age (the child can learn to do different things with the toy as he/she grows and develops)

There are many common household objects that foster creative play. Items such as pots and pans, wooden spoons, cardboard boxes, paper towel rolls and plastic tubs with lids are some examples. While choosing suitable toys is important, too many toys available at once can be overwhelming for a child. It is a good idea to provide a few toys and rotate them as the child loses interest.

In addition to appropriate play opportunities with toys, children also need frequent opportunities to interact with their peers. Children learn essential language and social skills by watching other children play, and peers can be positive models for behaviour. In addition, children will learn certain skills from their peers more readily than they will learn from adults. Play with peers both at home and outside in different environments will encourage exploration and enhance learning opportunities.

If you have concerns about your child's development, you can contact us at 637-5284.

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