The Parent Press

Electronic Newsletter

*Programs for Parents, Inc. monthly newsletter features family focused articles and resources on parenting, health, policy, and community information.*

**How to Encourage Playful Learning in Children**

Children are naturally inclined to play—it's how they learn. Like all of us, kids learn best when they are having fun. That’s why it's so important for young children to have unstructured time where they can freely explore and enjoy themselves. They will instinctively engage in activities that support their developmental needs.

What is Playful Learning?

Playful learning is any learning that occurs in the context of kids having fun and enjoying themselves. It can be self-directed play, such as filling a bucket with sand and water at the beach or bouncing a ball on a field, or it can be more structured such as a game of Pictionary or a challenge to see what kids can build out of magnets.

A sense of wonder and curiosity is ignited when we let kids play. "A child learns through interacting with his or her environment, trying new things, and seeking new experiences," says Lauren Starnes, PhD, EdD., a child development expert, author of *Big Conversations With Little Children*, and Chief Academic Officer at *The Goddard School*.
The Benefits of Playful Learning

Cognitive Development

Play is the best way to learn. It’s a proven fact that we retain information better when the learning process is joyful and engaging. “When we engage children in learning where they are active participants in the learning we not only teach a concept but also build skills developed through play like sustained attention, motor skills, and social skills in a holistic way,” says Holly Peretz, a pediatric occupational therapist with over a decade of experience working with children and toddlers.

Playful learning engages the prefrontal cortex, building problem-solving skills and emotional regulation. When play is collaborative, children build their social skills as well.

Intrinsic Motivation

You probably want your child to develop a love of learning, rather than just doing the work for the grade. Playful learning helps intrinsic motivation and a sense of curiosity about the world. Equating learning with fun from a young age helps develop lifelong learners.

“Play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth.”

Hands-on learning

The younger the child, the more they need to learn through concrete, hands-on experiences. Playing allows kids to tap into their natural learning style. Learning and retention are maximized when children make and do things with their hands and their bodies.

Play can help kids understand abstract concepts by making them concrete. “Think of a triangle, which is an abstract concept—three edges and three corners,” says Peretz. “Building triangles out of sticks or playing a game where kids search for triangles around the room makes the concept much more understandable and concrete.”

Longer Attention Span

Children learn best when they have sustained attention and focus. Because of this, it’s important to find ways to help kids stay engaged and on-task. Making sure that learning is fun and allowing children to participate joyfully is key. “Because play elicits curiosity, children are engaged, and they show longer sustained focus and attention, which yields a stronger learning,” says Dr. Starnes.

Parent Education

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Encourage Freedom of Movement

Too often children are required to sit still and listen. Instead, they need to feel free to move their bodies. Finding ways to incorporate movement will help to encourage playful learning. This also means that kids should be free to move as they would like to, and that they should be able to choose their body’s position, such as standing to draw or lying on their stomach to read.

Foster Social Interaction:

Younger children thrive on their individual learning experience, but as they grow, social interaction becomes more and more important. By the mid-elementary school years, play becomes a collaborative experience. “Playful learning creates a more relaxed and upbeat social and emotional climate for the child,” says Dr. Starnes. “The child does not feel pressured to demonstrate learning but instead is able to actively engage with other children and the adult in what the child sees as a fun social interaction.”

Incorporate Choices:

Find ways to incorporate choices into your child’s play. Let them make some decisions, such as what to play with and for how long. For example, if you leave crafting materials out, make sure there are a variety of colors and materials to choose from. When kids play outside, let them direct as much of their play as is reasonably safe.

Tips for Encouraging Playful Learning

Create a place to play

A thoughtfully prepared space will encourage children to explore and engage with their environment. This does not need to be fancy or over-the-top—kids thrive in simple, clean spaces where they feel safe and encouraged.

Make sure that the games and toys in your play space are visible and easily reachable for small people. “A toy shelf that is at the child’s eye level, offers open-ended exploration, and has resources that appeal to children will get far more active engagement than toys packed away in a closed cupboard,” says Peretz.

Focus on open-ended materials that allow the child to control the experience, such as plain wooden blocks, dress up clothes, baby dolls, or Legos. The space should be clean and well-organized. Change out the toys periodically to keep children engaged and try to choose activities or games that are related to their current interests. 17 Fun Learning Activities for Kids

How To Encourage Playful Learning In Kids (parents.com)
All Things Pumpkin

Did you know that a pumpkin is technically a fruit from a botanist’s perspective? However, pumpkins are credited as a vegetable in the CACFP, as are tomatoes and avocados, which are also technically fruits. Check out “Pumpkin 5 Ways”.

1. Pumpkin Pancakes
2. Pumpkin Pudding
3. Cranberry Pumpkin Muffins
4. Pumpkin & White Bean Soup

Pumpkin Applesauce

Ingredients
- 6 1/4 cups unsweetened applesauce
- 1 (15 oz) can pumpkin puree
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon or more to taste
- 1 tsp ground pumpkin spice
- 12 graham crackers (14 grams each cracker)

Directions
Place applesauce, pumpkin, vanilla, pumpkin spice and cinnamon in a large bowl. Mix until all is well combined. Scoop 2/3 cups of mixture into a bowl and serve with 1 graham cracker for a complete snack.

What is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)?

Respiratory syncytial (sin-SISH-uhl) virus, or RSV, is a type of common respiratory virus which causes mild, flu-like symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, wheezing, fever, runny nose, and decrease in appetite.

Infants/young children and older adults are most at risk for severe disease that may require hospitalization. RSV can also cause severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems or chronic heart and lung diseases.

Within the United States, RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways of the lung) or pneumonia (infection of the lungs) in children younger than one year.

Preventing Severe RSV in children

There are two ways to protect your baby from getting very sick from RSV. One is an RSV vaccine given during pregnancy. The other is an RSV antibody product that provides antibodies to your baby after birth. Get the RSV vaccine, Abrysvo, if you are 32-36 weeks pregnant during RSV season to maximize protection for babies after birth. This vaccine has been shown to greatly reduce the risk of hospitalization for babies in the first six months after birth. See CDC press release for more information. Two monoclonal antibody products—nirsevimab (Beyfortus) and palivizumab (Synagis)—can help protect babies and young children from severe disease from an RSV infection. Monoclonal antibodies are not vaccines. They provide an extra layer of defense that helps fight RSV infections and protect children from getting very sick.

Prevention

You can protect yourself and others from RSV by following a few simple steps:

- Wash hands often
- Keep hands off your face
- Avoid close contact with sick people
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Clean and disinfect surfaces
- Stay home when sick
Looking for fresh produce and local goods at fair prices?

**Farmers Market and Fall Harvest Festival**

NJ SNAP & EBT accepted!  
RSVP today at tinyurl.com/LCDPFarmersMarket and let us know what you want to see there!  
**Where:** 43 Broadway, Newark, NJ (Free parking available at 305 Broad St., Newark, NJ 07104.)  
**When:** Thursday, October 12th, 2023; 2PM-7PM  
**What:** La Casa's Farmers Market  
**RSVP on Facebook!**

**We Foster Thriving Communities ...Community, Faith, and Cultural Processes**

**ALPFA NJ Hispanic Heritage Month Fall Fiesta**

Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations continue with ALPFA NJ! Join us at the Clipper Pavilion within the South Mountain Recreation Complex.  
**Date and time**  
Sunday, October 22, 2023  
1 pm - 5 pm EDT  
**Location:**  
Clipper Pavilion  
9 Cherry Lane, West Orange, NJ 07052  
**ALPFA NJ Hispanic Heritage Month Fall Fiesta**

Come join us for a fantastic celebration of Hispanic culture at the Clipper Pavilion in West Orange, NJ! Our Fall Fiesta is the perfect opportunity to immerse yourself in the vibe, music, and flavors of the Hispanic community.  
**CHILDREN 17 AND UNDER ARE FREE!**  
While you’re there, enjoy a relaxing walk along the path around the waterfront, or play with your children at the Regatta playground. You can even rent paddle boats while soaking in the surrounding fall foliage.

- Food and drinks are available for purchase.  
- The event will move indoors in case of inclement weather.

Parking is available next to the Museum for a $10 fee, with entrances located on Washington Street and Central Avenue.  
**Location:** The Alice Ransom Dreyfuss Memorial Garden  
**REGISTER FOR FREE**
Biden-Harris Administration Announces New Actions to Build on Work to Accelerate Learning and Improve Student Achievement

When President Biden took office, fewer than half of K–12 schools were fully open for in-person learning. Today, thanks to the President's swift actions and historic investments, every school in America is open safely for in-person instruction. Since Day One, President Biden has worked to help every school accelerate academic achievement, open safely for in-person instruction, and build communities where all students feel they belong.

Today, the Administration is building on its extensive record of investment in K–12 public schools and announcing additional actions to improve instruction and accelerate academic success nationwide as students begin the new school year. The announcements include actions to:

- Improve reading and math outcomes for students, including about $50 million in funding to States for literacy interventions and supports;
- Expand school capacity by building a diverse educator workforce and infusing approximately 187,000 new tutors and mentors into schools;
- Support evidence-based strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism in schools;
- Support states in leveraging funding through President Biden’s Bipartisan Safer Communities Act to meet the growing mental health and safety needs of students.

This is all part of the U.S. Department of Education's "Raise the Bar: Lead the World" effort to transform education and bring parents, teachers, community leaders, and students together around what truly works—based on decades of experience and research—to advance educational equity and excellence. Early Learning Newsletter | October 2023 | Welcome Fall! (govdelivery.com)