

Bonding and Learning Through Play (Play for Big and Little Kids)

Is feeling connected and bonded to one another at home one of the most important aspects of family life? We think so. Understandably some of the time together in isolation may be causing some stress, but this will hopefully be counterbalanced with the opportunities to bond and feel more connected now that the rushing off to work and school and scheduled after school activities have lessened or completely stopped. To feel connected, we need to have fun together. We need to play, to laugh and trust that those around us are enjoying the time together too. It is interesting that when talking with some children about adults playing with children, they respond with a pulled face and something like, "Adults don't play, only the kids play." Are you a parent who plays or tells your child to go off and play? Children crave time with parents. It makes them feel special. Finding time to spend playing with your child/ren on a regular basis is not only good for your relationship right now, but 'credit in the bank' for your long-term relationship. Make time to play one to one with each child as well as in group time as a family. It says to your child they are valued, interesting, and fun to be with.

Being an adult who plays, who tells stories, perhaps of your growing up years, finds books that are enjoyable for multi ages and reads to your children, will naturally bring greater connection than being the adult who tells children to go off and play. Yes, read to your children no matter if they are already great readers themselves. One multi age recommendation is A.B. Facey's 'A Fortunate Life'. Take every opportunity to teach card games, play board games, play real life scenarios, play inside and out – do whatever it is that bonds you with your child while having fun together.

You might be interested in reading an article by Michael Grose from Parenting Ideas, 'Maintaining kids' mental health during the coronavirus pandemic' as he covers the aspects of building the foundations of good health including diet, exercise, sleep, social connection, staying in the present, spending time in nature and **enjoying yourself at play**.

View the helpful article on maintaining kids' mental health during the coronavirus pandemic [here](#).

Here are five elements essential to meaningful play that create those rich memories we treasure:

1. Children make their own decisions.

When children choose how to play for themselves, they experience freedom in making those choices. They also begin to see connections between choice and the consequences or results of that choice. The type of toys or materials parents offer can help their children make more meaningful decisions. Open-ended materials can be used in many ways so children can decide for themselves how to use them. For example, a child can imagine a block to be a fire truck or any number of things. A toy fire truck, on the other hand, is usually used as a fire truck. Foam pieces, little wooden sticks, ribbon scraps, and other reusable resources are all open-ended materials that inspire creative thinking and delight when children use them to make something no one has ever made before.

2. Children are intrinsically motivated.

The impulse to play comes from a natural desire to understand the world. This play impulse is as strong as your child's desire for food or sleep.¹ It is this intrinsic motivation that allows a child to regulate her own feelings and desires in order to keep playing. Because children eventually find it more important to be part of play with their friends than to satisfy their own wants and needs at that moment, children learn self-control. And self-control has been

shown to lead to success in later years, especially in today's information age, where distractions are part of daily life.

3. Children become immersed in the moment.

In true play, children are so fully engaged that they lose awareness of their surroundings, time, and space. In this risk-free atmosphere where reality is suspended, children have the security and safety they need to experiment, try new ideas, and investigate the laws of nature. Although they are immersed in their play, children still can recognize reality versus fantasy, something parents often wonder about.

4. Play is spontaneous, not scripted.

Often, play is totally unplanned. Other times, play is planned but a child impulsively makes a change. One child changes his mind, or perhaps a toy does not cooperate. This sense of the unknown provides children with opportunities to develop flexibility in their thinking and decision making, which is a vital life skill.

5. Play is enjoyable.

Play always has an emotional response attached to it. Without this emotional connection, the experience is simply an activity; it is not PLAY. Enjoyment is the direct result of engaging in play. It is FUN! These five essential elements of play outline why play provides your child with a rich experience. And isn't that what we want for our children, to develop play memories that will become the 'good old days'?

(naeyc.org – an article by ML Nell and WF Drew)

Memories of joyful and meaningful play experiences help bind families together emotionally, even long after children are grown. Are our children experiencing joy, meaning, and family bonding in their play? How will your children remember their time during the pandemic?

The article [here](#) is a thought-provoking example of a parent finding that learning through play is an organic way for children to learn and loads of fun too.

Please do not hesitate to contact either of us by email if we can assist your child.

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