



THE BENEFITS OF PLAY FOR CHILDREN

Peter Gray Ph.D, formerly of Boston College, defines “free play” “as play a child undertakes in him- or her-self without adult direction which is an end in itself, rather than part of some organized activity. When children are in charge of their own play, it provides a foundation for their future mental health as older children and adults. Gray mentions five main benefits:

1. Play gives children a chance to find and develop a connection to their own self-identified and self-guided interests.

As they choose the activities that make up free play, kids learn to direct themselves and pursue and elaborate on their interests in a way that can sustain them throughout life.

2. It is through play that children first learn how to make decisions, solve problems, exert self control, and follow rules.

As children direct their own free play and solve the problems that come up, they must exert control over themselves and must, at times, accept restrictions on their own behavior and follow the rules if they want to be accepted and successful in the game.

3. Children learn to handle their emotions, including anger and fear, during play.

In free play, children put themselves into both physically and socially challenging situations and learn to control the emotions that arise from these stressors. They role play, swing, slide, and climb trees ... and “such activities are fun to the degree that they are moderately frightening ... nobody but the child himself or herself knows the right dose.”

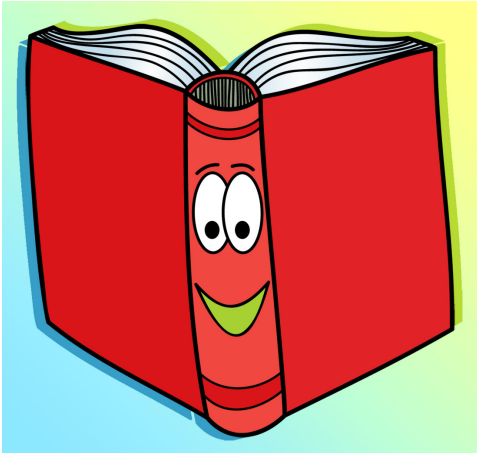
4. Play helps children make friends and learn to get along with each other as equals.

Social play is a natural means of making friends and learning to treat one another fairly. Since play is voluntary and playmates may abandon the game at any time if they feel uncomfortable, children learn to be aware of their playmates’ needs and attempt to meet them in order to maintain the play.

5. Most importantly, play is a source of happiness.

When children are asked about the activities that bring them happiness, they say they are happier when playing with friends than in any other situation.”





Literacy corner:

Early literacy development simply means increasing what your child knows about reading and writing before he or she learns to read and write formally. There are six pre-reading skills that children must master in order to learn to read:

Vocabulary—Knowing the names of things.

Print Motivation—Being interested in and enjoying books.

Print Awareness—Noticing print, knowing how to handle a book, and knowing how to follow the words on a page.

Narrative Skills—Being able to describe things and events and tell stories.

Phonological Awareness—Being able to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words.

Letter Knowledge—Knowing that letters are different from each other, knowing their names and sounds, and recognizing letters everywhere.

To build these skills, vary activities for children of different ages. In the March newsletter there will be examples of some activities for each age group. This list is also available in the Read Aloud Guide.

Taken from Trident United Ways Read Aloud Guide. This guide is available at www.tuw.org under the Child Care Resource and Referral icon.

Please be sure to check with your local school districts for Kindergarten registration dates and events coming soon!