

Learning is Child's Play



Why is play important?

Play is the way in which children learn. They learn most effectively when they are relaxed and having fun. Children's learning becomes meaningful when they are free to learn at their own rate and in their own way. It has previously been thought that teaching children earlier is better; that teacher-directed work is the most efficient way for children to learn and play has little value. Research shows us that a work-oriented, rigid approach to learning is not likely to help children develop a love of learning or provide the skills and attitude they need to be life-long learners. Tension and anxiety can inhibit learning.

What are the benefits of play?

- Play enables children to develop all their skills – and as children develop so does their play.
- Play provides opportunities to improve small and large muscle skills and maintain physical health.
- Play helps to develop imagination and creativity, provides a context in which to practise social skills, acts as an outlet for emotional expression and provides opportunities to understand value systems.
- Providing for play includes ensuring that the child has opportunities, resources and time for play appropriate to each child's stage of development.
- Long periods of uninterrupted play build children's concentration and the inner motivation to take responsibility for their own learning.

A positive sense of self is the most powerful tool for all learning.

What is play-based learning?

A play-based program does not mean that children just do what they like all day. In a play-based program there will be times when children come together as a group, listen when others are talking, follow the rules of group living and begin to take responsibility for their actions and their environment.

Children are offered choices that reflect their developmental stage. The choices are determined by adults and are provided within limits of safety and within the group setting.

In practical terms, a play-based program gives emphasis to encouraging children to express their own ideas in play, - to represent their world in order to understand it better.

In the process of representation, as they play with others, children's language and social abilities are fostered. They are encouraged to think flexibly and creatively as they seek solutions to problems and conflicts; they share their understandings with others and explore and experience the content associated with all the learning areas.

What is the adult's role within a play-based program?

Within a play-based program, the adult's role is to guide, evoke and extend but not to dominate or dictate. Adults continually evaluate children's play to discover what it is children are learning and to then help shape and extend this learning.

This involves adding materials (child initiated or adult supplemented), using questions to expand the play, interacting, participating, consolidating, observing and monitoring the play.

The result is children learn to think, they are focused, can follow through with their ideas, discussions and negotiations.

These skills transfer to working independently and in groups. Children develop inner motivation and readily take responsibility for their own learning, so are equipped for higher learning and life skills.

"The most important play for young children is play with parents – make sure you make some time for play every day."