

# Child play

[Family](#), [Children](#)



Play and early childhood education is not just a way to fill time for children who are too young to go to school. Some people think of play as the “work” of children (Berger, 2000). Through play and early childhood education, children build the foundation for later learning as they solve problems and increase their understanding of themselves, other people, and the world around them. Being in a stimulating environment, such as an early childhood center, provides a child with the much needed support to develop skills for dealing with emotions, expanding language and vocabulary, and an array of other skills.

Putting children in environments where they are not stimulated can be harmful to their development during the play years. For young children, “play” includes a variety of activities that are fun and interesting. These activities include quiet play, creative play, active play, dramatic play, games, and manipulative play. Play may be structured or unstructured. Structured play has rules or a specific way of doing things. Games such as active games, card games, and board games are examples of structured play. Unstructured play includes activities such as dress-up play, doll play, building blocks, running and climbing, and riding tricycles.

These activities are sociodramatic and rough-and-tumble play (Berger, 2000). A child may play alone or engage in social play by including other children or adults. Social play has a critical role in helping children learn to interact with others. Some research has identified stages of social play. Children pass through these stages as they grow, becoming capable of more interactive play as they develop. According to Berger, Onlooker play occurs

when a child seems to be playing alone while watching others' play activities.

Solitary play occurs when a child plays alone or near another child with no interaction between them. Berger states that Parallel play refers to children's play when they are near each other and using similar materials but with little or no social interaction. Associative play is similar to parallel play but involves some social interaction. Cooperative play includes common goals and collaboration, and may involve complex negotiation, collaborative decision making, and rule setting (Berger, 2000). While we were at the VCU child development center, I witnessed children playing outdoors.

I saw some cooperative play in games such as hide-n-seek and duck-duck-goose, where the children played the games by rules that were taught to them. Most of the play witnessed was unstructured play in which the children decided what they wanted to do and how they wanted to do it. One little boy sat in solitary play building mini castles out of sand, while another large group of children just ran in circles around the playground screaming. Many kids just sat back and watched as others played games, while they sat in the sand box occasionally scooping sand which demonstrated onlooker play.

Lastly, a group of children sat in a corner observing flowers or bushes having conversation about them, which demonstrated associative play. Children's play sometimes has less to do with other people than with finding out about the world. Young children naturally explore their environments in playful ways that help them understand the physical environment and their own bodies. This type of play is sometimes called sensorimotor play. As they vary their actions and interact with toys and other objects, children discover what

their own muscles can do, and they gain practice of the movements that they need for everyday life.

They also have affordances to learn about gravity and other principles of the physical world. What children learn through play is also very much affected by the quality of the early education care program that they are in. When searching for child care, every parent wants to leave their child knowing that they are handled by a warm, nurturing adult, who has knowledge of how children grow and develop. The adult should also have an understanding of the needs and interests of individual children because this is essential for a child's growth.

Children should be valued for themselves and not for what they do or how they look. Good caregivers tend to view children positively and help them learn what to do rather than focusing on what not to do. They help children learn to take responsibility for their own actions and eventually develop self-discipline. Rules should be reasonable, consistent, and well explained. Children are treated with respect. When caregivers view themselves positively and feel good about their work, they model a good self-image for the children. It is essential for caregivers and teachers to help parents feel a part of the program.

The parents and school teachers should share information in order to understand more fully a child's needs and provide the best coordinated twenty-four-hour schedules for the child. Parents can share important family values, goals for their child, methods of discipline, and changes in the child's home environment while teachers can share the program goals, special activities for the child, weekly plans, and how they

believe children learn (Azria-Evans). Teachers also can utilize appropriate community resources for the school and help parents find needed resources. Good relationships among staff members are important.

If the children see adults working together cooperatively and solving problems successfully, they will learn to use some of these skills. All staff members must maintain professional ethics, which includes protecting the privacy of the children and families in their program. Centers also are required to go through a process to make sure they are meeting state standards. Licensing of child-care centers and family child-care homes gives parents some protection. States vary in their requirements for the facilities and the staff, criminal clearance of caregivers, health and safety regulations, and child-adult ratios (Azria-Evans).

The adult-to-child ratio affects the individual attention given to each child and the group size affects the interactions of children. Ages of children are followed by adult-to-child ratio and group size (Azria-Evans). Multi-age grouping is permissible and often encouraged. The adult-to-child ratio and group size requirements are based on the age of the majority of children, but when infants are included, ratios and group size for the infants must be maintained. Child care center may also choose to attain an additional certification through The National Association for Education of Young Children (Azria-Evans).

By getting this certification a child care center shows that they have gone above and beyond state standards to provide the best care and learning environment for children. Along with that the center should be a good fit for the parent and child (Azria-Evans). It is essential that parents visit a center

and talk with the director, teachers, and children before enrolling their child there. The child should also visit the program before being enrolled. The school should welcome unannounced visits. The parents must check for safety in the total environment.

Is the equipment appropriate and in good condition? Are gates latched so children cannot get out? Are activities well supervised? There should be a variety of developmentally and culturally appropriate activities as well as equipment and materials so that each child can develop in all areas such as: physical, social, intellectual, emotional, and creative. Physical development includes large and small motor skills and health issues. Particular attention should be paid to routines such as eating, toileting, and resting. Intellectual development involves the acquisition of language skills as well as general knowledge about one's " world" and how to function in daily tasks. Children need opportunities to play and work with other children as well as to play and work alone. Activities should be balanced between active and quiet play both indoors and outdoors. Some activities should be teacher-directed while others should be selected by the child. The transition times between activities should be relaxed and provide pleasant learning experiences. Learning centers should reflect children's families, cultures, and interests.

Learning centers should include table-top activities with manipulative materials, activities with housekeeping props, dramatic play, books and quiet corner, music and movement, art and creative activities, cooking and science areas, and a block area. Look for outdoor climbing equipment, space to run, wheel toys, sensory motor activities such as obstacle courses, balls, beanbags, and hoops. Children need carpentry, gardening, and ample

sand, water, and mud play. There should be nature walks and trips away from the center.

At the VCU child development center the children had built a replica of New York City, with demonstrated a table-top activity. Outdoors the play area had two wooden playhouses, and the entire play area had little garden throughout. There was also a sand pit in the middle of the playground. The arrangements families make for their children can vary dramatically, including care by relatives; center-based care, including preschool early education programs; family child care provided in the caregiver's home; and care provided in the child's home by nannies or babysitters.

How a family chooses this care is influenced by family values, affordability, and availability. For many families, high-quality child care is not affordable, which results in compromises. The benefits of high quality care are that when care is consistent, developmentally sound, and emotionally supportive, there is a positive effect on the child and the family. The children that are in a poor quality environment are less likely to be prepared for school demands and more likely to have some development problems, which sometimes can not be fixed.

These include reading and language problems, because the children have not been in a nurturing environment to develop these skills. These students are more likely to fall behind in school. All in all, the play years are essential to a child's development. The type of play that they do and the child care center that they attend is very important in determining how a child develops. A lot of thought should go into choosing a child care center,

because we all want our children to get the proper amount of play for their age group to make sure they develop the skills needed later on in life.