



# The Importance of Play

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class Period: \_\_\_\_\_

Courtney Braatz, M. Ed Family Education

The American Academy of Pediatrics has declared that play is necessary for healthy development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children. Unstructured play develops the important skill of executive function, which is a critical cognitive skill that has a number of elements, including the ability to self regulate, control emotions and behavior, resist impulses, and develop self control and discipline.

Play is important in allowing time to practice private speech – children talk to themselves about what they’re going to do and how they’re going to do it. This kind of self regulating language helps children control themselves and police what they’re doing. The more structured the play, the less private speech happens, and as a result, children are no longer directing themselves, but they’re being directed externally. In the long run children who engage more readily in complex play are more likely to take on responsibility, willing to work independently and even assist others without prompting.

Play also provides a great opportunity for parents to be fully engaged with their children. Despite the benefits resulting from play, time for free play has been dramatically reduced for many children. A variety of factors contribute to this new trend, including a hurried lifestyle, changes in family structure, and increased awareness of and interest in school readiness activities and classes.

Play provides an opportunity for children to use creativity and develop their imagination, as well as their physical, cognitive, and emotional skills. Play is important to healthy brain development. At a very early age children engage and interact in the world around them through play. Play allows children to create and explore by taking on pretend roles and exploring in a safe environment and in a world they can master. This exploration allows a child to experience competence that will be implemented in real life situations. Undirected play facilitates learning how to work in groups, to resolve conflicts, to share, to negotiate, and to learn self-advocacy skills. The area of the brain that is used for decision making is engaged when children are engaged in self-directed play. Children lose some of these benefits and learning opportunities when structured, adult-led activities dominate a child’s time in the early years.

Playtime is also an opportunity for parents to observe their children or join with them in child-driven play. A child feels valued when given the full attention of a parent during play and parents can view the world from their child’s perspective as the child creates an imaginary world and interactions. This is especially helpful for parents of more introverted children who may gain a better understanding of their child’s frustrations and emotions. Quite simply, play provides parents a wonderful opportunity to connect completely with their children.