

REPORT to PARENTS

RP 27:9

The Importance of Play

Play is a child's "job." Unfortunately, between television, computers, and scheduled activities, children are left with very little time in which to do their job. Playing provides great learning opportunities and also gives children some much-needed time to simply be children. Playing also helps children develop their imaginations and build motor and social skills. Here are some great tips to help get your children playing.

Limit TV. Children spend too much time in front of the television and computer. Limiting access will encourage them to engage in other activities. If they need or enjoy the background noise, turn on the radio. Music will entice your children to sing, dance, and use their imaginations.

Don't rush. Just like adults, children need time to unwind and time for their imaginations to start working. Try to provide daily time for unstructured and unscheduled play; time when your children can decide what, when, and how to play.

Be creative. Children don't need the latest and greatest toys. All you really need are a few basic essentials such as crayons, dress-up clothes, books, and balls. Keep "open-ended" materials around—things that children can use for more than one type of play, from modeling clay to old sheets to wooden blocks to cardboard boxes.

Don't believe the hype. Many educational toys tout benefits you might never see. Before you spend a lot of money on educational toys or electronics, ask your child's teacher or principal for

recommendations. While that electronic globe looks great and has a lot of features, puzzles or a craft kit might better serve your child's needs. Involve your child in the discussion and purchase of toys. You want to make sure you choose toys with which they will actually play.

Run around. Regardless of whether or not your child plays organized sports, make time several days a week for them to run around and exercise. From swinging a bat to swinging on a swing set, physical activity helps kids grow strong and release some energy.

Play games. When children play games, they learn important social lessons. Team games help teach skills such as how to work together, how to handle conflict, and how to strategize. Board games teach skills such as sharing, taking turns, and the art of compromise. Playing games also teaches children how to be graceful winners and good losers. While parents and caregivers can be game "partners," it's more important to have children interact with siblings or peers.

Expect play. After-school and summer childcare programs can be wonderful opportunities for children to play—or they can be play busters. When looking at these programs, ask how much time your child will have to play and how much time is spent watching TV and playing computer or video games. Choose a program you feel allows your child enough time to play and use his or her imagination.

The most important thing is to allow your children to be children and learn through play.

