

The importance of play

A guide for parents



**West Lothian Child and Adolescent
Mental Health Services
(CAMHS)**

Introduction

Play is one of the most important areas of a child's development. There is nothing wasteful or unimportant about play. Play helps your child develop physically, learn about the world, learn to express emotions, develop conversation skills, develop creativity and learn how to be sociable. In addition, by playing with you and their friends, they will learn how to deal with arguments, work out solutions to problems and develop their language skills.

So you can see, play has a very big part in developing a child's social, emotional and thinking skills. But, adults often think that children just "know" how to play and that parents "know" how to play with their children. Some parents find it hard to let a child play without telling them how to do it or feeling they have to set rules on the play. This leaflet gives some tips and hints on how to make playing with your child more enjoyable and help them learn all the skills mentioned above.

Some common problems

- Making children play like adults and telling them how to do it
- "Going too fast" and not giving the child enough time to play or repeat games
- Expecting too much of the child
- Not paying attention to the child when he/she is playing, e.g. doing chores rather than playing together
- Getting into arguments while playing, often when you expect the child to play a certain way
- Children having tantrums when it is time to stop playing.

Things to do

- Follow children's lead. Tell them that this is **their** special time with you and they can decide how to use it
- The occasional hug and kiss can make the play more enjoyable

- Give the child time and let them repeat a game if they want to
- Be appreciative and praise them for their play
- Ignore mistakes and minor misbehaviour during the play
- Copy what your child is doing
- Be flexible. Allow your child to change the games as he/she chooses
- Although it is good to encourage children to play with toys aimed at their age, there are some times that letting them play with “younger” toys will be helpful. This is particularly true when your child is upset or worried. At these times, he/she may get a lot of comfort from playing at a younger level
- Use warnings and reminders when playtime is about to finish. If you want your child to stop playing and get ready for bed, start to prepare them in advance. Tell them you have 10 minutes to finish playing before you will ask them to stop.

What to avoid

- Don't give commands and orders
- Don't change what your child is doing
- You don't have to try to teach your child anything. He/she is already learning while you are playing together
- Don't go too fast, and don't expect your child to be like an adult and play by the rules like you would.

Toys

- Parents are under a lot of pressure to buy the "right" expensive "educational" toys. You don't have to do this. Here are some ideas about what makes a good toy
- Toys do not need to be expensive

- They have to be safe, i.e. not easily broken and no small pieces for young children
- Toys don't have to have a set purpose. Simple toys, which can be played with in lots of different ways, are best
- Toys should be easily handled by the child, so smaller children should have simpler toys
- You can help your child make very exciting toys using everyday household materials, e.g. you could try cardboard box houses, uncooked pasta jewellery, toilet paper flowers and paper masks. Let your imagination go wild!
- When you buy toys, they should be aimed at the child's current age, not too young or too old.

Finally, play is fun!

Play should be enjoyable for both parents and children. If you let your child be the leader in the games and you are the follower, he/she will be learning very important skills without you even noticing.

Through playing with you, your child will feel understood and supported. When they do, their everyday behaviour will also improve. Play is one of the most important parts of their life and is like their "work."

It is also wonderful that it is so much fun!



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