

Use Play in Child Care to Enrich Learning

Children learn by doing, so it is important for child care providers to offer fun, stimulating and enriching activities in their play. Activities need to be appropriate for the age of the child, as well as where he or she is developmentally.

It is important to build these activities into a daily routine. Children need and want routines, with both active and quiet times in their everyday schedule. Children are likely to behave better when they know what to expect.

Children's activities can be grouped into categories that often overlap. Each type of play is important and benefits children in different ways.

- **Active play** involves large muscle movement and physical activity – activities like running, jumping and climbing. Children might use toys such as balls, slides, swings, crates, blocks, tricycles or bicycles. Indoor ideas include musical instruments, finger plays, bean bags, "dress-up" clothes, cars and trucks.
- **Quiet play** allows children time to process the things that they are learning about, and develops their thinking and reasoning skills. This type of play often involves looking at or reading picture books, listening to music or books on tape, stringing beads, coloring or playing with pegboards, puzzles, dolls and stuffed animals.

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- **Creative play** allows children to develop their imagination through hands-on learning. Through this type of play, children learn problem-solving skills and ways to interact and get along with their peers. Creative activities include painting, drawing, music and dancing. Materials for creative play may include play dough, sand, water, and cleaned empty plastic and cardboard containers.
- **Cooperative play** involves groups of children playing together. From this type of play children learn how to interact with others and how to act in social situations. Options for this type of play include playing dolls or house, block play, board games and hide-and-seek. Other outdoor ideas include tag, ball play, swings and seesaws.
- **Dramatic and creative play** may also be called social play. In this type of play, children play make-believe and expand their imaginations. This play may be done quietly or actively, alone or with others. Children might dress up as a firefighter, grocer, doctor or a parent. Whatever they choose, it is important that they be allowed to act out their play.
- **Manipulative play** involves the use of hands, muscles and eyes. By developing their fine motor skills, manipulative play will help with coordination, control and other skills. Examples of this kind of play include coloring and painting, cutting with scissors, playing with play dough and stringing beads. Playing with puzzles, dolls and trucks, and using tools and building blocks are all things children can do in manipulative play.

Each type of play does not need to happen on a daily basis. But in looking over plans for the week, it's best to try to incorporate as many different kinds of activities as possible. Exposing children to many types of play provides the opportunity for them to learn many new skills and ideas.

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