

## **The Importance of Children's Play - Handout**

### **Benefits of Play:**

- Gives children a sense of power and control
- Promotes imagination
- Allows for investigation and repetition
- Promotes longer attention spans
- Encourages deeper interests
- Decreases stress
- Allows children to practice different roles
- Encourages language development and memory
- Teaches children about rules and values of their culture
- Fosters important social skills, including sharing, turn taking, coping with feelings
- Builds physical skills of coordination, balance and fine motor control
- Enhances self esteem as child succeeds in play
- Is fun!

### **Parents' roles in Children's Play:**

- Be attentive; maintain good eye contact and get down on child's level
- If possible, have regular, uninterrupted playtime to let child know you value play
- Listen first, reflect and then respond
- Model communication skills
- Communicate thoughts and feelings sincerely
- Encourage child to express feelings and opinions while playing; listen when child speaks
- Let the child lead
- Don't make comparisons to other siblings or friends
- Focus on what child does not how well child does – describe this for child
- Make memories; record funny moments and accomplishments

### **Optimal Play Materials for Children:**

- Materials should be simple, flexible, and open-ended to best encourage creativity
- Materials should be safe and age-appropriate
- Materials should be appropriate for a wide variety of uses
- Materials should be flexible enough to use for continually-developing mind
- Materials should provide opportunities to develop fine-motor skills
- Materials should encourage language development
- Materials should support activities to learn cooperation, helping and sharing
- Materials should provide opportunities for problem solving
- For example: Building blocks, mobiles, music boxes, unbreakable mirror, push toys, balls, climbing equipment, empty food cartons, beads and thread, doll houses, action figures and dolls, paper and paint/crayons/markers, play dough, dress-up clothes, books, music, board games

### Developmental Stages in Children's Play

#### Birth – 6 Months:

- Begins social play and interaction with caregivers (looking, smiling, moving, etc.)
- Plays with fingers (early eye-hand coordination)
- Holds and looks at small toys
- Reaches and grasps rattle
- Holds rattle with two hands; shakes rattle; places in and out of mouth

#### 6 Months – 10 Months:

- Stretches to reach small toys and holds toys with both hands
- Passes toy from hand to hand
- Starts to look for toys hidden from view
- Drops toy and watches to see how and where it falls
- Bangs and slides toys on surfaces to see how this sounds
- Pokes objects with index fingers
- Holds toys between thumb and index finger
- Able to take wooden pegs/shapes out of holes

#### 10 Months – 15 Months:

- Begins to pick up small objects using thumb and index finger
- Starts to show a hand preference
- Enjoys sound-making toys and repeats actions to make sounds
- Pushes and pulls large toys
- Imitates activities such as ringing a bell or rattling a spoon in a cup
- Enjoys imitating adult “play type” speech sounds
- Gives a toy to adult when asked (and sometimes spontaneously)
- Plays social games like Pat-a-cake
- Begins to show an interest in pictures

#### 15 Months – 24 Months:

- Intense exploration of environment, especially looking in boxes, bags, drawers
- Develops more coordination in pincer grasp
- Holds a crayon and imitates scribbling
- Enjoys putting objects in and out of containers
- Enjoys brief times of pretend play with doll house, small dishes, etc.
- Enjoys Picture books, especially if with noises
- Enjoys nursery rhymes and will try to join in
- Points to body parts
- Uses single words and some short phrases

**Year Two:**

- Uses push and pull-along toys well
- Builds a tower of 6 – 7 blocks
- Draws by scribbling in circles; can imitate a straight line
- Recognizes fine details in picture books; names and turns pages
- Exhibits definite hand preference
- Rides and steers a small push-along toy using feet
- Asks names of people and objects constantly
- Puts two or more words together to form simple sentences
- Experiments with water, sand, play dough; not able to plan or produce final product
- Shows interest in pretend play
- Understands what miniature toys represent and how to play with them
- Early parallel play

**Year Three:**

- Matches shapes and three or more colors
- Copies a circle and very basic human figures with a head
- Cuts with scissors
- Enjoys wide variety of toys and materials
- Enjoys listening to stories
- Repeats nursery rhymes
- Participates in prolonged make-believe play – transitions into symbolic play
- Early stages of cooperative play

**Years 4 – 5:**

- Counts out 5 or more objects correctly
- Drawings become more detailed – arms, legs, body
- Climbs on equipment or trees
- Pedals a bike easily
- Enjoys building toys
- Completes more complicated jigsaw puzzles
- Plays well with miniature toys such as doll house, farm sets, etc.
- Enjoys early rule games
- Enjoys imitative play with peers, such as doctor, school, etc.

**Years 5 – 8:**

- Increased gender specific play
- Enjoys more organized games and activities, with increased focus upon rules
- Beginning team sports with usage of gross motor skills