

**Play
is
Children's
work**



Child and Play

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“The child has the right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities.

UN-CRC. Article 31

Right to rest, relax and play in ways that suit their ages is an important aspect of a Child’s Right to Development. However, the developmental and learning value of play is often undermined by most of the people.

Some of the reactions to the statement “children have a right to play” tell us about the attitude of adults about play.

A parent: “Right to play??? “They play all the time anyway. They better get down to doing some serious work”.

A child working in a restaurant: “Yes, I would love to play, but where is the time to play?”

A Teacher: “Enough is enough, “only three months are left for the final exams. No more play, no sports, no TV, no radio. You must concentrate on studies and only on studies.”

Educationist: "Play while you play, work while you work. Only work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

The above cited reaction of adults and children indicate that while children love to play, adults do not attach importance to play because-

- They have very narrow concept of play
- They think play is only for recreation and
- They are ignorant about development and therapeutic value of play, therefore they think that play is a waste of time.

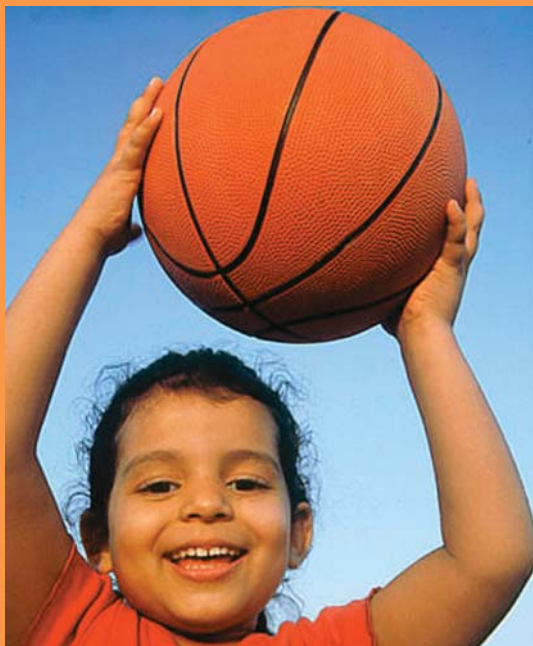
Meaning of play in the context of children

Play is natural and spontaneous to children. For babies, free body movements, sounds and responses to adult stimuli are part of the play. As children grow, play becomes more organised and activity oriented i.e. running, jumping, playing with toys etc. At a later age, children participate in simple games where they learn to follow certain rules of the games. Besides games, other forms of play

All Children have a Right to Play

include completing a half told story, singing, creative drama, riddles etc.

Play has different connotation for children and adults. Adults are busy working all the time and they play for recreation to break the monotony of work. Children play all the time except when they are sleeping. Hence it can be said, "Play is to a child what work is to an adult". In other words, "Play is child's work."



Categories of play

Children sometime participate in free play and sometimes organised play.

Free Play: Children play with outdoor or indoor equipment of their choice without following any specified rules.

Organised play: Children play games or participate in organised sports, recreational activities where they follow certain rules. Organised play can take place outdoor or indoor.



Development Value of Play

Play is not a waste of time for children. On the contrary, it contributes to overall development of a child. Let us see how.

Physical and Motor Development through Play

Physical and motor development involves height, weight, general appearance/tone of the body and coordination of large and finer muscles.

During infancy, a baby kicks her/his legs and move arms. Later, s/he learns to climb ladders, balancing, digging, pulling, pushing objects during toddler hood. Threading beads, holding toys are other activities which promote physical and large motor development. Drawing, painting, scribbling, writing are other activities which leads to eye-hand coordination and finer muscular development.



Cognitive Development through Play

Cognitive development includes forming self-concept, forming concepts of size, shape and colors.

By playing with different types of blocks, beads, toys, clay, sand, puzzles and other natural materials, children learn to differentiate between different shapes, size, color, texture and volume, which are prerequisites to reading and learning numbers.

Socio-emotional Development through Play

Socio-emotional development includes establishing relationships, developing behavioral controls and social skills that make them acceptable in their family, school and community.

Play activities such as singing, story-telling creative, drama, role play and puppetry help children in relating with others and in recognising their own and other's feelings.



Language Development through Play

The activities described above plus word games, riddles and group games encourage development of language in children.

Learning about Health and Nutrition through Play



Simple games such as adaptation of snake and ladder, simple rhymes set to the popular tunes and riddles enable children to learn concepts related to health and nutrition. For example, while playing snake and ladder if the counter reaches the square where the message reads “I brush my teeth twice in a day-morning-before bedtime,” the child climbs a ladder and gains points whereas when the counter comes to a square which reads “I do not like spinach,” the child loses points.

Therapeutic Value of Play

Play also helps children with emotional disturbance and social adjustment problems. For example, doll’s play, clay modeling, finger painting and such activities help children to give harmless outlet to their built up aggression whereas activities such as role play, creative drama, story telling, singing help children with their inter personal relationship.



Play for the Disadvantaged Children

The description about how different forms of play promote different development of children raises a question, “What happens to a child from a slum or from a poor family in village who has no toy, equipment or material to play with? Don’t these children play and develop?” The answer is, these children certainly play. They find their own play equipments from the objects/materials available in their environment. Haven’t we seen children rolling an old cycle/scooter tyre or pulling a cardboard box with a string? The experience is more or less the same as a child from a middle or upper-middle class using a handcart or pushing and pulling a toy. Similarly, haven’t we heard children singing most melodious songs in the train with a simple musical instrument made of two wooden pieces or a bell? Haven’t we seen children playing on the roadside with stones or using an old rope or a torn sari or bed sheet as a skipping rope?

It is reiterated that play is a spontaneous activity and many children and adults have improvised simple toys and play equipment from waste or low-cost materials. There have been scientific studies conducted on dynamic toys made from simple, low cost or waste materials and the scientific principles on which they work. Children are the best improvisers and they find ways and means of playing with simple, non-expensive materials. Hence, disadvantaged children too do not lose the advantage of play. However, some of

us can live up their lives by providing missing materials and guidance at an appropriate time.

So far we have discussed the concept of play mainly in the context of young children. However, older children i.e. adolescents engage themselves in organised play, which also has learning value for them.



Gender Differences in Play

Observation of young children at play reveals that boys like to play with cars, trains, aeroplanes and guns whereas girls like to play with dolls, utensils, dresses etc. They like to play roles of mothers and family members. When children grow-up, the gender differences are evident in the dresses they select and the games they play. There are exceptions also, i.e. some girls prefer to play cricket and some boys prefer to follow artistic pursuits or cook or sew, which are

essentially considered women's works in the home setting.

We need to recognise the natural tendencies of children to pursue different types of games/ activities and refrain from using words such as 'Sissy' for a boy and a 'Tom Boy' for a girl who do not follow stereotype activities perceived by adults as those meant for boys/ girls.

Besides changing their perspective about play, adults can promote multi dimensional development of children through different forms of play.

Role of Various Stake Holders in Promoting Play for Children

As the Government



- Recognise play as an important developmental activity throughout a child's life and hence recognise it as a child's right.
- Provide educational play equipment to Anganwadis and Government schools.
- Ensure that Anganwadi Workers know how to use-develop the play equipment and that they actually use them without the fear of their being destroyed/ damaged by children.
- Encourage design and production of suitable and affordable play equipment and play material for different age groups of children.

- The Govt should enforce and monitor the developed norms like minimum required space for play for children in schools and play materials.

As the Toy Manufacturers



- To manufacture toys and equipment which are safe and have educational value for children.
- To make low-cost indigenous toys and play equipment.
- To encourage artisans who have been designing indigenous toys.
- To discourage production of toys which are harmful to children.

As NGOs /Educational Institutes



- To visualise and recognise play in all its forms and disseminate its value to parents and teachers.
- To design and develop proto type of toys and educational equipment including literature for children,
- To encourage creative manifestation of children's abilities and aptitudes.
- To encourage improvisation of toys, songs, stories, puppets and other materials, which promote socio-emotional development of children.
- To disseminate creative play activities among children regardless of their socio-economic status, caste, creed, religion.
- To impress the parents that play is a right of the child.
- To spot the talent among children for various creative activities and encourage them.

As Parents and Teachers



- Find time to play with children and enjoy the same.
- Take care of the safety aspect by ensuring that the play equipment and play space are safe.
- Initiate and organise play/recreation centres for children in different localities in urban and rural areas and urban slums.
- Help the children to use low cost, waste and easily available material.
- Encourage creative play rather than stereotype play.
- Help children to strike a healthy balance between play and studies/work.

What can Children do?

- To share creative ideas with other children.
- To make / improvise toys, play equipment from easily available materials.
- To maintain balance between play, studies and other responsibilities at home at school.
- Share-exchange toys, play material with younger and differently abled children.



A few Do's and Don'ts for the guidance of the organisers of child's play.

Dos

- Provide enough time, space and materials to children. Encourage children to explore nature and environment around them for play material.
- Remember, it is the process that is important at early age and not the product
- Give freedom to the children to use the material's as they like, but set limits to the freedom when it comes to respecting other's freedom.
- Do not curb child's inquisitiveness and curiosity but answer most questions that they ask.
- Encourage group activities such as making group collage, group drawing, finger painting etc.
- Include disadvantaged and differently abled children in play.
- Help children to be self-disciplined rather than have them follow rigid rules and regulations.
- Appreciate children's work realistically.

Don'ts:

- Don't impose adult standards on children.
- Don't make them conscious of their play materials by constantly reminding them e.g. to keep the crayons new and keeping the block unbroken etc.
- Don't put undue restrictions and rigid rules when children work, lack of freedom and rigidity hampers creativity and originality
- Don't enforce stereotype gender perspective i.e. girls can't play with ball and bat and boys can't play with dolls.
- Don't express negative attitudes to children's work by calling it a waste (of paper, crayons, time etc.)
- Don't use the same monotonous phrases and tone while praising children's work. Their limitations may be brought to their notice.



Conclusion

Play is natural, spontaneous and universal for children. Children do not have to be taught to play. What adults can do is to create stimulating environment with age appropriate and safe play materials for children and play will take care of itself.



About CHETNA

CHETNA¹, meaning “awareness” in several Indian languages and an acronym for Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness is a non-government support organisation based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. CHETNA’s mission is to contribute to the empowerment of disadvantaged children, adolescents and women to gain control over their own, their families’ and communities’ health. Beginning its activities in 1980, CHETNA has broadened its activities in the field of nutrition, health, education and development from a “Rights” perspective.

CHETNA builds the management capacities of education/health practitioners/supervisors/managers with a view to enable them to implement their field programmes from a holistic and gender perspective and advocate for people centered policies.

CHETNA develops need-based training and education materials, which are widely disseminated at the state, national and international levels.

An Information and Documentation Centre (IDC) addresses the information needs of individuals, organisations, academicians, reserachers and students working on health, education and development concerns.

CHETNA has been identified as a Regional Resource Centre (RRC) for Gujarat State and the Union Territories of Daman, Diu and Dadra Nagar Haveli to provide technical assistance to NGOs to improve RCH, facilitate GO-NGO partnership, document and disseminate successful approaches and provide inputs to GOI to ensure effective implementation of policies.



For Children Young People Women

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