



CHD104: The Importance of Play in Early Childhood Handout

Welcome to CHD104:

Play is not a form of entertainment or a way to pass the time: for young children, play is absolutely essential for the mind and body. This course provides information about different types of play and ways to incorporate them throughout the daily curriculum.

Objectives:

By taking notes on the handout and successfully answering assessment questions, participants will meet the following objectives as a result of taking this course:

- Identify ways in which play promotes cognitive development
- Identify the relationship between play and the development of the executive brain functions
- Select ways to promote problem-solving through play
- Define *passive entertainment*
- Identify ways in which play can improve academic achievement
- Differentiate between structured and unstructured play
- Identify characteristics of the early (infant) stages of play
- Identify characteristics of Parten's Six Stages of Play
- Identify and define different types of play (e.g., fantasy or constructive play)
- Identify ways in which child care professionals can promote play in multiple environments

References:

1. Armstrong, A. (2019). "Key Aspects of Play in Early Education." Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/article/key-aspects-play-early-education>
2. Cela. (2020). "Simple ways to promote inclusive play in an early learning environment." Retrieved from <https://www.cela.org.au/publications/amplify!-blog/sep-2020/inclusive-play>
3. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2023). "Play in Early Childhood: The Role of Play in Any Setting." Retrieved from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/play-in-early-childhood-the-role-of-play-in-any-setting/>
4. Charles, M. & Bellinson, J. (2019). *The Importance of Play in Early Childhood Education: Psychoanalytic, Attachment, and Developmental Perspectives*. Routledge.
5. D'Souza, K. (2021). "Why child's play is serious business in early education." Retrieved from <https://edsources.org/2021/why-childs-play-is-serious-business-in-early-education/664339>
6. Hassinger-Das, B., et al. (2017). "The Case of Brain Science and Guided Play: A Developing Story." Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2017/case-brain-science-guided-play>
7. McCabe, C. (2022). "Parten's 6 Stages of Play." Retrieved from <https://getparentpal.com/confident-parenting/partens-6-different-stages-of-play/>
8. Morrison, G., Woika, M.J., & Breffni, L. (2020). *Fundamentals of Early Childhood Education, 9th edition*. Pearson Education, Inc.
9. Rock, A. (2022). "11 Important Types of Play for Growing Children." Retrieved from <https://www.verywellfamily.com/types-of-play-2764587>
10. Trawick-Smith, J. (2019). *Young Children's Play: Development, Disabilities, and Diversity*. Routledge.
11. Yogman, Michael. et al. (2018). "The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children." Retrieved from

Additional Resources:

1. Anderson-McNamee, J. (2010). "The Importance of Play in Early Childhood Development." Montana State University Extension. Retrieved from <https://www.montana.edu/extension/health/documents/MT201003HR.pdf>
2. Carlson, F. (2011). *Big Body Play*. NAEYC.
3. Elkind, D. (2007). *The Power of Play: Learning What Comes Naturally*. Da Capo Lifelong Books.
4. Frost, J., Wortham, S., & Reifel, S. (2009). *Children, Play, and Development, 4th edition*. Pearson.
5. Lillard, A., et al. (2012). "The Impact of Pretend Play on Children's Development: A Review of the Evidence." *Psychological Bulletin*. Retrieved from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22905949/>
6. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (N.D.). "Why is Play Important?" Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/play>

Course Notes:

Use the space provided to record important information from the following sections of the course.

The Importance of Play

Write a 1-2 sentence summary explaining why play is important for young children:

How Playing Benefits the Brain and Body

- **Memory:**

- **Visual and spatial awareness:**

- **Language:**

- **Communication and social skills:**

- **Attention span:**

- **Fine and gross motor skills:**

Cognitive Flexibility

Theory of Mind

Anticipation

Problem-Solving

Decision making

Working Memory

Additional executive brain functions promoted through play:

- **Emotional self-regulation:**

- **Sequencing:**

- **Inhibition:**

- **Verbal Reasoning:**

Play and Physical Development

Various forms of play can promote all sorts of motor skills, including:

Gross motor skills:

Fine motor skills:

The Perils of Passive Entertainment

What is ***passive entertainment***, and how does it compare with various forms of play in terms of mental and physical stimulation?

Play and Relationships

How does play help build stronger relationships between children and caregivers, and why is this important?

How can play improve a child's communication skills?

Play and Academics

In what ways can play promote better academic performance?

Explain the relevance of the following statement with regard to play in the school environment: "**a clear-cut and significant change in activity enhances the cognitive capacity.**"

Play Is Natural

All Kinds of Play

Structured play, or **directed play**:

Unstructured play, also called **free play**, **self-directed play**, or **undirected play**:

Young children should have opportunities for both

Infant Play

Birth to 1 Month

2 to 3 Months

4 to 6 Months

6 to 9 Months

9 to 12 Months

Parten's Six Stages of Play

Unoccupied Play

Solitary (Independent) Play

Onlooker Play

Parallel Play

Associative Play

Cooperative Play

A Note about Parten's Stages of Play Theory

Different Types of Play

Social Play

Motor (Physical) Play

Big body play is when children:

- Throw themselves onto a chair.
- Wrestle.
- Jump off climbing equipment.
- Chase each other as they laugh.
- Race to a finish line.

According to Carlson:

- Very young children gain a lot of information about their bodies through *big body play*. For example, when a family member kisses or massages a baby's body, the baby learns about their body dimensions, how different types of touch feel, and the names for those feelings.
- When a toddler jumps into a person's lap or runs to hug a friend, they learn how to control and regulate their body movements. They also learn to regulate and adapt their movements to make a safe, appropriate jump. The only way to learn such regulation is through practice, and caregivers can provide the perfect "padding" for such practice.
- *Big body play* promotes both verbal and nonverbal communication skills. For example, when a playmate puts his hand up, it means stop. This important gesture makes sense in *big body play*, such as a game of tag or hide-and-seek.
- When children take turns jumping off a tree stump, they practice compromising and cooperation, as these behaviors are necessary for play to continue.
- Children are calmer for longer periods following very rowdy play. Therefore, greater learning is likely during these calm, focused periods.

Dramatic/Fantasy Play

Constructive Play

Constructive play also teaches children

- Patterning and sequencing.
- To manipulate objects and materials and how to make and test predictions about how one piece will affect another piece.

- Spatial skills and, eventually, high-order executive functions, like the ability to visualize or imagine the components of a three-dimensional model.
- How to (patiently) conduct and apply trial-and-error and problem-solving skills.

These are essential early math and science skills!

Competitive Play

There are valuable lessons in competitive play;

- Children should learn to be good winners as well as good losers.
- Competition can be healthy because it encourages people to try hard, reach further, and run faster.
- Winning is fun, but it is not everything. How one wins or loses is more important.

Other considerations about competition:

- How does frequently losing impact self-esteem and confidence?
- Some children are more resilient than others.

Expressive Play

Reading and Storytelling

You do not need to act out the story physically, but for the read-aloud to be truly "playful," a few things need to take place:

- Everyone should be comfortable, relaxed, and ready for an adventure of the mind.
- Children should be encouraged to ask questions and prompted to make predictions.
- The reader should add dramatic emphasis and alter their voice to match the character and context.
- The reader and listeners should discuss feelings about the story.
- After the reading, a teacher can extend the story to other forms of play, including fantasy play (dramatic retellings or reenactments) and expressive play (pictures or other art activities related to the story).

Making Room for Play

Know the Community

Family Play

Ways to promote play at home:

Try This!

Class Mascot

If you are having trouble getting families to play with their children, you may be able to "force" some play into the home using a class mascot. Choose a doll or stuffed animal (or give the class some options and let them vote). Each child takes turns keeping the mascot at home for 1 week. The mascot should be considered "part of the family," joining them at meals, on errands, and in all other daily activities. Children also need to ensure the mascot has a nice place to sleep, some toys, and a good place to play. The mascot does not return to school until the end of the week.

At the end of the week, children use photos, pictures, and stories to share their actions with the mascot. The basic rules are that the mascot must be well cared for, and the child must have at least 1 or 2 artifacts or stories from each day of the week to share with the class. Other than that, each child and family gets to decide what the mascot gets to do for the week.

Most children will enjoy it, especially after seeing how much fun other children have with it. As a teacher, you can set the standard by keeping the mascot for the first week and presenting all the fun, zany things you do with it. It may sound silly or frivolous, but this idea can promote imaginative play and sharing in the home.

In the Classroom

The Center-Based Classroom

Center areas:

The primary purpose of centers is to

Be Inclusive

To be inclusive, the environment should:

- Provide a wide range of experiences.
- Allow children to choose their experiences.
- Be adaptable so every child can participate fully.
- Encourage socialization.
- Be safe.

[Lisa Fruhstuck](#) is a speech pathologist, and the founder of The Shine Shed offers these 6 ideas for an inclusive play environment:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Promote Diversity

Think of New Ways to Play

The Power of Spontaneity

Be Your (Child-like) Self

Do Not Interrupt a Good Thing

Have Fun!