



[How to get the best from your child through play](#)

1. [Heuristic Play](#)
2. [Imaginative and Symbolic Play](#)
3. [Characteristics of play](#)
4. [Stages of play](#)
5. [Analysis of Play](#)
6. [Adult's role in Play](#)
7. [Play Equipment](#)



Heuristic Play

... allowing children to learn things for themselves

Heuristic play for babies starts with the magical treasure basket with sensory objects for babies to investigate.

Inquisitive toddlers explore heuristic objects that keep them absorbed in play by allowing them to investigate and make discoveries for themselves.

Heuristic play with objects was devised over 30 years ago by Educational Psychologist Elinor Goldschmied. She developed a method of play that helps babies and toddlers to learn naturally, as nature intended.

The word 'heuristic' comes from the Greek word 'eurisko' meaning "serves to discover or reach an understanding of."

Children without language learn by 'doing' and they learn best when they are allowed the freedom to make choices for themselves, to investigate the toys and objects that interest them, making any discoveries along the way. They are instinctively curious.

They will look at, touch, bang, open, close, shake, carry, post and sort all objects in order to understand them.

Heuristic objects have infinite possibilities for play and learning as they have no right or wrong way of being played with.

Imaginative and symbolic play

The following are brief descriptions of the different types of play our children engage in.

Imaginative play includes pretend, fantasy and symbolic play. Imaginative play is also often referred to as pretend play children come to terms with and practice different aspects of daily life. They can act out familiar scenarios and can work through experiences.

Fantasy play – common between 3 years + 8 years. Children pretend to be certain characters such as a dinosaur, superhero etc.



Symbolic play – Children use an object in play and pretend it is something else – for example buttons can be used as money. Symbolic play becomes role play when a number of objects are used together, e.g. chairs put together to make a bus or plane, paper is used for tickets, passport etc. Small world play, dressing up, tea sets.

Energetic play – Children engage in physical play which also promotes exercise and large physical play, e.g. running, jumping using apparatus, balls and outdoor equipment which can be an outlet for energy. Music & movement, drama and group games are also categorized as energetic play.

Creative and Messy Play – This can include art & craft with use of a variety of materials, self expression through music & dance messy play using cornflour, flour, paint, dough, clay, mud, shaving foam, soap flakes and foods such as pasta, beans and jelly. These are fun materials to explore and experiment with. Tactile experiences are open ended and undemanding. There is no right or wrong way to use the materials. They can be soothing and a link from home. Children can often spend long periods of time exploring textures, properties and the feel of these tactile experiences. The most versatile materials are sand & water, which can be presented in many different ways!

Characteristics of Play

Play:

- is enjoyable, freely chosen by the player
- can be abandoned without blame
- has no preconceived outcome, the agenda can develop as play goes on
- gives pleasure and often counteracts stress
- develops skills which are important to overall development

Birth to 3: 4 aspects for the development of the under 3's

- A strong child
- A skillful communicator



– A competent learner

– A healthy child

The foundation stage is divided into 6 areas of learning:

- 1) Personal, Social & Emotional development
- 2) Communication, Language and Literary development
- 3) Mathematical development
- 4) Knowledge and understanding of the world
- 5) Creative development
- 6) Physical development

The foundation stage is the term used for the overall development of children aged between 3 and 5 years.

The History of Play

Various theorists have offered accounts of the origins, functions and pattern of play. Until the 1800's children were largely regarded as small adults with no special provision made. Babies were swaddled to prevent too much movement. Once laws were passed prohibiting child labour, children no longer worked and the number of children per family went down. Play was then used for self improvement and there should be a purpose.

Children's play can be divided into the following age categories:

Stages of Play:

0-2 years – Solitary play: Toddlers live in a very private world. They play with things in all kinds of inventive ways, exploring and trying things out. They engage in play alone and tend not to involve other children or adults.

2-3 years – Parallel Play: Although aware of each other's existence, children aren't able to co-operate for very long since each is thinking egocentrically. They will play alongside, but not with each other.



3 + years – Associative Play: The awareness of the other child is increased as they start to communicate.

Co-operative Play: As children start to be able to take other people's wishes and needs into account they start to become more sociable. They gradually learn that cooperation can lead to new and interesting things to do and games to play. They start to be able to make 'best friends' out of people who live near and have similar interests, although they can also 'fall out' just as quickly!

Analyses of play

As we strive to understand more about play, it could be helpful to consider the different reasons people give for playing. This applies to both adults and children. Perhaps you would like to analyze your own reasons for playing in this kind of way?

- Fun reasons: for enjoyment
- Skill reasons: to improve some aspect of performance
- Social reasons: to make or meet friends, the activity itself being less important
- Fitness reasons: to maintain or increase health
- Challenging reasons: taking risks, seeking thrills
- De-stress reasons: seeking release from pressures elsewhere

The list shows different reasons for playing. The main reason is developing skill reason, this suggests that learning is a part of play. the common question asked by parents/carers is: 'Do children learn as they play? This can therefore be answered as "YES!"

Isaac (1933) description of play:

"Play is a child's life and the means by which he comes to understand the world he lives in."



Adults role in play

For both Parent and Practitioner: Our role is to facilitate, organize and support play. We observe and protect from injury or hazards.

Children should be able to explore and experiment freely. Time, space and play equipment need to be provided. Children need to be stimulated so adults can provide additional resources to adapt and extend play. Children should be enabled and confident to direct and lead their play with an adult taking on a more passive role. This will enhance children's self esteem and self worth. An adult can observe, listen and make suggestions, allowing children the freedom to choose, explore materials and investigate equipment.

Play Equipment

Ideas for toys and materials:

babies to 2 years:

- Heuristic objects
- Materials
- Boxes
- Containers
- Soft Toys
- Shiny Objects
- Sorting Objects
- Trolleys

2 to 3 years:

- Dolls
- Homecomer equipment
- Outside Apparatus
- Messy Play
- Sand and water
- Construction
- Puzzles
- Small world
- Drawings etc.



3 to 5 years:

- Books
- Colouring
- Scientific Exploration