

Kids and Play

Young children need to play! Kindergarten and grade one teachers have always known that play promotes social development. Children learn to solve problems, to take turns, and to get along in groups. They also learn how to make (and keep) friends. They develop coordination, strength and flexibility. And of course, the fresh air and exercise is good for their health.

Recent research also shows that play builds 'emotional resilience'. Kids develop adaptability, self-control and confidence. They learn how to adapt to change. Kids *can* experience stress; play helps them to deal with it in a positive way.

But teachers get a benefit too. Children learn when they play. There is a connection between make-believe and early language and literacy development that is well-supported by research. When playing, kids explore the idea of symbols; a stick can represent a phone the same way a word represents an object ... and an idea. Skills like this are needed for reading and writing.

When kids make up stories and act them out, they are using the portions of their brains responsible for memory and planning. Kids exercise social and emotional self control when they have to wait their turn, or stay hidden in a game of hide-and-seek.

Researchers have also discovered that kids use more complex sentences and vocabulary than they would ordinarily use, when they play.

Play grows brains as well as bodies. How can teachers and parents help?

- Take time to play with children
- Encourage and support outdoor play
- Encourage and support make-believe activities
- Let kids be in control of their own play
- Encourage and support unstructured, spontaneous free play
- Remind yourself that play has no goal. It's valuable for its own sake

[From an article by Jane Hewes, PhD, Chair, Early Learning and Child Care, Grant MacEwan University]