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Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities

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Play in Preschool: Why it Matters

Parents often hear of the importance of play in preschool. But playing with dolls and blocks seems to have little to do with the academic knowledge that children will need to succeed in kindergarten. So why is it so important?

Play is the foundation for all learning for young children, and giving your child the time and a few basic toys can provide her with a variety of valuable learning opportunities. "Play is how children begin to understand and process their world," says Angie Rupan, Program Coordinator for Child Development Center in South San Francisco, CA and early childhood educator for over 20 years. "Children's play unlocks their creativity and imagination, and develops reading, thinking, and problem solving skills as well as further develops motor skills. It provides the base foundation for learning."

Why is play so important and what do preschoolers learn when they play? Try a few of these simple ideas with items you have around your house and learn about the educational benefits that each can provide for your child.

Language and Vocabulary Development

When playing with other children or adults, vocabulary and language skills are fostered. Your child will listen and learn the language she hears without even realizing. Children will learn to use language to communicate meaning as well as picking up new words and hearing the grammatical structure of the English language.

- *Vehicles and Animals.* Playing with cars, trucks and trains as well as animals provides for many new vocabulary words as children learn the names of each, what they do, what they eat or where you can find them. Additionally, children and adults can create all kinds of scenarios that the vehicles or animals might find themselves in, providing for further language and vocabulary development.
- *Dollhouse and Dolls.* Playing with a dollhouse or dolls allows your child to reenact what happens in her everyday life, using the words and phrases she hears. You are likely to hear your own words come out of her mouth as she recreates events that have happened, perhaps with an outcome more suited to her liking!



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Parents Learning About Needs and Skills

4108 Montgomery View NW
Calgary, AB T3B 0L9
Phone: 403-685-4229
Fax: 403-685-4227

www.bigplans.org

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Imagination and Creativity

In our fast paced and high tech society, children have fewer and fewer opportunities to use and develop their creativity. Children who are not given frequent opportunities to play may have a difficult time entertaining themselves as they simply do not know what to do without instruction. By providing opportunities for open ended play, your child will automatically get her creative juices flowing, and the possibilities are endless.

- *Dramatic Play.* Provide a few props such as dishes and play food, empty food boxes and a cash register or stuffed animals and a doctor's kit, and your child will be transported into a different place! Watch and be amazed at what she will come up with as she plays.
- *Craft Supplies.* Without a specific project to complete, provide your child with a variety of craft supplies such as markers and crayons, scraps of fabric or paper, empty boxes or containers, glue, buttons and stickers. Allow her to create anything she likes and watch her inner artist emerge!

Problem Solving and Mathematics

Children can solve complex problems that arise as they play and learn a few mathematical principals as well. Blocks and puzzles are excellent "basics" to provide your child with many opportunities to foster these important skills.

- *Blocks.* Playing with blocks provides for many problem solving scenarios. How can we make it balance? How tall can we make this tower? Can we build a castle? Children also learn some basic math concepts with the various shapes and sizes of the blocks.
- *Puzzles.* When trying to make puzzle pieces fit, children are gaining important math and problem solving experience. Learning a bit about sizes (is the piece too big for that spot?) and shapes (does the shape of the piece look the same as the hole?) You can encourage this learning by engaging in conversations as your child plays. Your child will also gain an

important sense of accomplishment as her practice leads to a completed puzzle in the end.

Gross and Fine Motor Development

Gross motor skills involve the large muscles of the legs and arms while fine motor development is building the muscles of the hands that will be used for writing. Play can provide many opportunities to work on strengthening these muscles without your child even being aware of it!

- *Stringing Beads and Lacing.* Giving children beads and plastic tipped laces provide a fun way to work on fine muscle control. Your child can create a beautiful necklace while strengthening the fine motor muscles. Lacing cards or child safe needles and burlap will also provide fun "sewing" projects for young children.



- *Balls and Balance Beams.* Kicking balls and walking on balance beams can help your child become more coordinated. Get outside and kick a ball around, create a goal area to make it a game. Anytime you see a narrow brick wall or wooden plank, give your child some assisted practice at balancing.

Gather up the toys you have around the house and make it a point to provide ample time for play. Playing around with your child is sure to provide many wonderful childhood memories and reap some great educational benefits as well!

By Traci Geiser. Reprinted with permission by Education.com. For more articles on Preschool Play, visit www.education.com.

Are you a parent of a child with special needs?
Do you feel isolated and overwhelmed at times?
Are you in need of information, support, and relaxation?

We have a group that is perfect for you:



EVENING GROUP:

1st Wednesday of Each Month 7:00 – 9:00 pm
CP Kids and Family Office - #116, 7015 Macleod Trail SW



SOUTHWEST DAYTIME GROUP:

2nd Tuesday of Each Month 9:30 – 11:30 am
CP Kids and Family Office - #116, 7015 Macleod Trail SW



NORTHWEST DAYTIME GROUP:

2nd Wednesday of Each Month 9:30 – 11:30 am
Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church – 4612 Varsity Drive NW



GRANDPARENT GROUP:

3rd Monday of Each Month 9:30 – 11:30 am
Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church – 4612 Varsity Drive NW



MULTICULTURAL GROUP:

3rd Thursday of Each Month 7:00 – 9:00 pm
Clarion Hotel – 2120 16th Ave. NE (10th Floor Boardroom)



Socials are for adults only. Please note that childcare is not provided. Dates for socials may change due to holidays – please call to confirm. For more information or to RSVP, call 403-230-9158. Coffee socials held September through to June.

So What's Doing?

family fun made easy

We all struggle with what to do with our kids and it can be a chore to find an activity that will entertain the whole family. More often than not, we give up and wind up doing errands or just staying home. You can find many sites that have listings of all the activities going on around town, but there can be so much information that it gets overwhelming and then difficult to choose one thing to do.

So What's Doing is a free tool for finding activities to do with your children. So What's Doing does all the leg work, researching everything happening in and around town and suggesting a daily activity for you and your family . . . taking the guess work and research out of planning your activity schedule! It's fast, easy and best of all, free!

Visit www.sowhatsdoing.com/calgary for more information and to sign up for the weekly newsletter listing great activities and events you can choose from.

Animal Charades

Materials:

- * Variety of stuffed animals
- * Pillowcase

Directions: Place several stuffed animals in a pillowcase. Close your eyes while your child takes one out and looks at it. Have her put it back in the case and act out the animal, while you try to guess what it is



Read more on FamilyEducation:
<http://fun.familyeducation.com/family-time/35557.html#ixzz3Km6bye2r>

How to Help Your Child Have a Successful Morning

Brooke Brogle, Alyson Jiron & Jill Giacomini

Do you struggle with stressful mornings when you want to lay your head down and cry before 8:00 a.m.? Do you often leave the house in an angry, frantic rush? Mornings can be a particularly challenging time for parents. Getting your entire family up and out the door is no easy task! It is important to understand that your morning routine serves as the foundation for your family's entire day. You can create a morning routine that not only helps your day to begin more smoothly, but also teaches your child important skills that he needs to become more independent and confident. A morning routine can also reduce challenging behavior such as crying, whining and tantrums.



Try This at Home

- Use a visual schedule with items such as photos, clipart, or objects that shows your child the steps in his morning routine. This visual schedule can help him to understand the expectations of the morning routine. To learn more about how to create a visual schedule, go to challengingbehavior.org and search the site for "visual schedules" in the search box located in the upper right-hand corner of the screen.
- If your child has trouble waking up in the morning, it might be because he is not getting enough sleep at night. Set a consistent bedtime and stick with it. When a child's bedtime changes it can make it harder for him to wake up in the morning. For more information on bedtime routines, go to challengingbehavior.org and search the site for "bedtime routines" in the search box located in the upper right-hand corner of the screen.
- Plan Ahead. Use your bedtime routine to plan for the next day together.
 1. Lay out the clothes your child will wear.
 2. Pack his backpack.
 3. Discuss the morning routine, show him pictures and talk about the day ahead.
- Give your child some power over his morning routine by offering reasonable choices. For example, "First, get dressed. Then, you get a choice! Would you like to have cereal or pancakes for breakfast?"
- Include bonding time in your morning routine. Time to read, bathe or snuggle will help your child feel loved and calm as he begins his tasks for the day.

- Encourage your child. When your child completes a task and follows the routine, provide positive and specific encouragement. For example, say "Wow! You got up and got dressed all by yourself! Now we will have a few extra minutes to play with trains. What a great way to start the day!"



Practice at School

Teachers use routines to provide a predictable structure to your child's day. When a child understands what she should be doing and what will come next, she feels less anxiety and more excited to participate. While the specific activities in the classroom might change, the routine does not. For example, while 10:00 may always be art time, the specific craft (painting, cutting, gluing) may vary from day to day. Children become eager to try new activities because they are confident and comfortable with the routine.



The Bottom Line

A morning routine is a daily opportunity for you to build and nurture a positive relationship with your child. When you follow a repetitive morning routine you allow your child to gain practice with important skills such as dressing, bathing and grooming and give him a feeling of confidence and success. A calm, loving morning routine at home sets the tone for the entire day for both you and your child.



www.challengingbehavior.org

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In Sync

Helping Parents Build Healthy Attachments with their Children

The interaction between a parent and their child is an interesting one to observe. Seeing the subtleties and the nuances with an attuned, mindful parent along with their child who is achieving social and emotional milestones is a magical thing to watch. It's what we hope for as a parent as we move along this path called parenthood.

The dance of a child physically moving close to a parent for a reassuring hug or for comfort, and then receiving a kind loving response that says all is well is just enough for a child to have their "emotional cup filled". This rhythm of "coming in", then "moving out" is very simple yet powerful message that creates security and happiness in children. This is what is called a secure attachment. Attachment is having an emotional connection with your child, which is the foundation for their emotional and social development. When a child's needs are met they learn to feel safe and trust the world they live in. This creates a sense of value and meaning in their life. Parenting in a way that creates strong connections can help children gain confidence as they grow and have fewer social or emotional challenges as they get older. (Perry, 2001)

Babies are born with 100 billion cells ready to make connections. **Every interaction a parent has with their child creates a connection in the brain. Having loving, playful, engaging interaction with a baby or a child increases your child's brain development.**

Did you know that the eyes can say it all? Without words the eyes can communicate love, joy and acceptance. A mother's gaze with an infant actually connects mom's brain with baby's brain! You are actually wiring your child's brain – preparing them to live in our world. Sometimes life can take us on an interesting journey and we find parenting is tougher than expected and stressors in life outweigh the joys as a parent.

References

- Perry, B.D., M.D., Ph.D., (2001). *Bonding and Attachment in Maltreated Children*. *The Child Trauma Academy*, 3, 1-17.
- Burgess Chamberlain, L., PhD, MPH, (2008). *The Amazing Brain: What Every Parent and Caregiver Needs to Know*. Philadelphia, PA.
- Calgary Health Region, 2005, *Growing Miracles*. Calgary, Alberta. grafikom. Calgary

Carya, previously known as Calgary Family Services, offers a program for families called In-Sync, which can help parents find their way and build healthy attachments with their children. In-Sync is a play-based, multi-sensory program aimed at building, enhancing, and strengthening the parent-child relationship. Through the program, parent(s) and their child (ages 0 to six) engage in planned, playful, and multi-sensory activities that help foster healthy development and attachment in young children.

A healthy and secure parent-child relationship points to the importance of sensitive, responsive and engagement on the part of the parent.

In Sync teaches the parent to respond to their child's needs at an emotional level, and to do so with excitement, pleasure and full engagement. The goal of this program is to provide many opportunities for children to view themselves as lovable and competent, in a world that is trustworthy and an exciting place where it is safe to explore, and with a parent that is reliably available and responsive to their needs.

Rachel contacted the In Sync program after her family was in an automobile accident with their one year old son. Since the accident Rachel could see that her son Ethan was having challenges which were creating stress at home and he was showing

distressing behavior in which Rachel had difficulty managing. Rachel could see that her son had fewer moments of joy at home, difficulty following mom's boundaries, and wanting to be held by mom on an ongoing basis, and having little interest in exploring or playing on his own. After many sleepless nights due to Ethan's nightmares and not able to sleep on his own Rachel asked for support from In Sync.

An In Sync counselor worked with Rachel and Ethan in their home for four months. Rachel began to feel more confident in her parenting and was better able to help soothe her son when he was distressed. Ethan began to show ability to regulate his feelings with mom's help and spend more time playing and exploring. Rachel and Ethan began to laugh more, and find more joy in their day to day interactions. Ethan gained more trust and confidence in following Rachel's direction which made daily routines much easier. Ethan continues to struggle with bed times but Rachel is better equipped with ideas of how to soothe him and "fill up his emotional cup" to go back to sleep in his own bed.

For further information on attachment resources or to contact the In Sync program, call: 403.205.5238. In Sync is a free program for families with children ages 0-6 who live in the Calgary area. Support is provided for families in home or in our office.

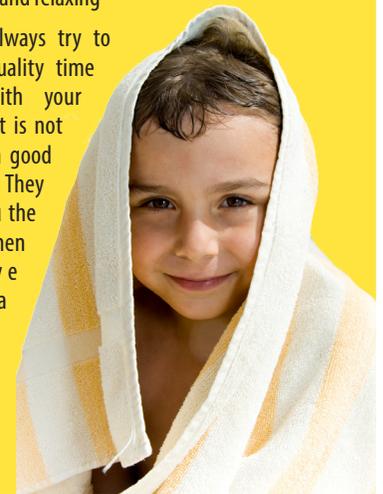
Did you know . . .

- A baby's brain uses THREE TIMES the amount of energy that your brain does!!
- By 6 years of age, a child's brain will be 95% of its adult size and have more connections than all the stars and planets in the galaxies.
- Children who watch more television during the first three years of life are more likely to have problems with attention deficit disorders when they are 7 to 9 years old. (Chamberlain, 2008)

Try This At Home

The following are a few simple play activities to enjoy with children during busy times of the day that can keep the connection a positive one!

- Playing red light green light on the way to brush teeth makes it a little more fun
- Counting sparkles as you comb hair to avoid those power struggles
- Wrap your little ones up in their towel at bath time and pretend to eat a taco, don't forget to add some tasty ingredients
- At bed time offering a soft back rub or drawing shapes with your finger on their back can be soothing and relaxing
- And...always try to spend quality time daily with your child that is not based on good behavior. They need you the most when they've had a tough day



Carya, previously known as Calgary Family Services, has dedicated more than 100 years of service to creating healthier, more connected communities in Calgary. With 40 program offerings for individuals and families, Carya provides a full spectrum of interactive counselling and development services for people of all ages — from babies to youth to older adults — and their support network. Their highly skilled team encourages nearly 30,000 Calgarians each year to discover their full potential and build flourishing relationships with their families and community. www.caryacalgary.ca