



## The Importance of Play in the Parent-Child Interaction

**As parents, we know that play is important work for young children, but how important is play to the parent-child interaction?**

A recent study conducted by researchers at West University of Timisoara in Romania, has found that different forms of play help both in the harmonious development of the child, as well as the parent-child interaction, if parents involve themselves in forms of play with their children. These forms of play include creation play (spontaneous initiation and development) construction play (prefabricated materials), didactic play (blends play with learning), movement play (contributes to general physical development) and sportive play (more complex physical development and development of cooperation, team spirit, resilience etc).

The study affirmed that play is the foundation that contributes to development, wellbeing, socialisation, learning, creativity and imagination. All children, regardless of sex, ethnic, cultural or social background, will involve themselves in play. Every child needs to play in order to develop and to form his/her individual personality. The playful atmosphere signifies freedom and joy, a withdrawal from the realms of reality and stepping into the world of imagination and of the impossible, which can become possible.

The importance of playing with our children is fundamental in the construction of the parent-child relationship, in the understanding of the child and in gaining the child's trust. Play can also be used by the parent as an efficient and pleasurable means of educating and disciplining the child.

### KEY FINDINGS

- A low involvement by the parent in the play activity with the child means a low level of quality interaction between the two.

- Play helps a child interact with their environment, providing possibilities to develop their capacity to use their senses.
- Play in itself involves a plan that implies purpose and rules, so that a child can realize a certain action that produces satisfaction.
- Up to school age, play is affirmation for a child.
- Play offers children a sum of impressions and experiences that contribute to the enrichment of knowledge of their world and life.
- Children enhance their capacity to understand complex situations through play.

## THINGS YOU CAN DO

- ✓ Get down and dusty. Dig in the garden, try water play or rolling in grass.
- ✓ Rather than buy playdough, Google a recipe and let your child help you cook up a saucepan full.
- ✓ Give children space and time to use their imaginations.
- ✓ Have toy free days.
- ✓ Encourage tactile play for younger children, or playing shops for older kids, incorporating numeracy and literacy.
- ✓ Invite other children over for play days.
- ✓ Allow children to sort any conflict themselves, rather than step in and mediate.
- ✓ Make good use of park and playground time.
- ✓ Take nature walks together, collecting leaves, feathers, stones. Pack a clip board. Kids love clipboards.
- ✓ As a family, play board or card games together, especially for older kids.
- ✓ Monitor electronic devices in favour of creative play.

Source: *The importance of play in the parent-child interaction*, Runcan, Petracovschi & Borca. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 46 (2012) 795-799. [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)



## TAKEAWAY

FROM PROFESSOR MICHAEL BERNARD  
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The more a parent engages in play activities with their child, the better the quality of their interaction will become. Play gives kids opportunities to make sense of their world and when we interact with our kids in play, we as parents have the chance to bond, get to know our children, and share their wonder and creativity. We can also help to instigate fun activities to enhance their physical development, and social-emotional learning.