upstairs to bed" is much more fun than walking. And playing "peek-a-boo" has stopped many a baby from fussing while being dressed. On long car or bus trips, invent stories about the people you see, or the houses you pass by. Play number games with license plates or look for letters the child knows.

Provide playmates. Invite children from the neighborhood to your home. Set up a cooperative play group. Or take your children to parks and playgrounds where there are other children. Such activities can help children learn new things and develop the skills they need to get along with other people.

Be available to help when your children get together with others to play. They need a bit of tactful help, a new idea, or an agressive playmate now and then.

Take them to see people and places outside your home. The more children experience, the richer their play will become. The best trips are active. For example, children need to climb on an a fire engine, get in the driver's seat, and listen to the siren. Afterwards, you can supply a few basic props such as old galoshes and a garden hose to recreate their experience.

Often the most interesting things go on at home. The street is repaired, the telephone pole is restrung, or a new house is built. Take a walk around the neighborhood now and then to see what is going on.

Oregon State University

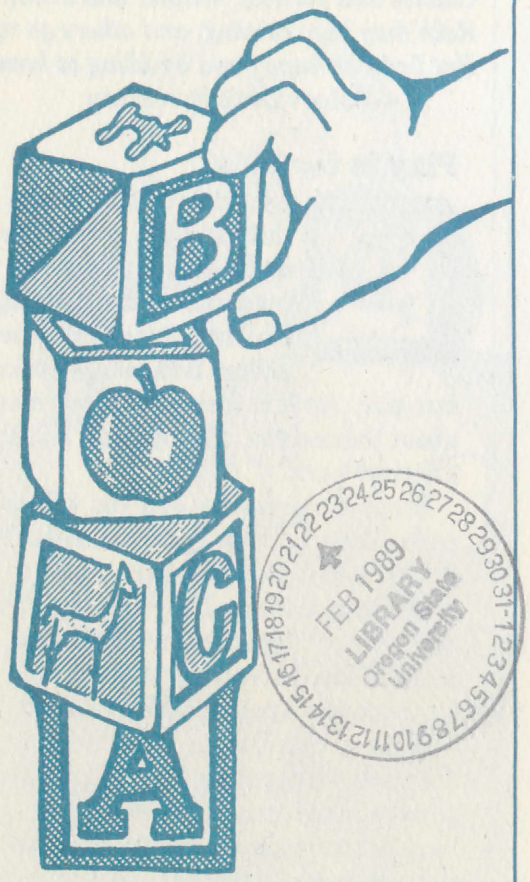
Reprinted from a University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service publication and adapted for use in Oregon by Cindee M. Bailey, Extension child development specialist, Oregon State University.

Extension Service, Oregon State University, Corvallis, O.E. Smith, director. Produced and distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. Extension work is a cooperative program of Oregon State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Oregon counties. Oregon State University Extension Service offers educational programs, activities, and materials without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Oregon State University Extension Service is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

S
537
.07
A54
no. 1297

HELPING ❋ CHILDREN ❋ GROW

Learning Through Play and Fantasy



FEB 1989
LIBRARY
Oregon State University

EC 1297
January 1989

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION SERVICE

Learning Through Play and Fantasy

What are you able to build with your blocks?
Castles and palaces, temples and docks.
Rain may keep raining, and others go roam,
But I can be happy and building at home.
—Robert Louis Stevenson

Play is for kids

Days without play are no days at all to a child. To a child, play is as vital as breakfast in the morning. Children put every ounce of energy and concentration into play, for it is their way of learning about themselves, other people, and the physical world.

Watch children play and you will see tremendous growth. From the start they love action. Babies practice single exploratory actions. They kick their feet and shake their rattles over and over again. Older babies and toddlers set harder tasks, such as hiding under a blanket or filling a box to the brim.

Preschoolers get big ideas. Their play is more imaginative, planned, and varied. They explore objects, arrange them in order, build, and pretend with them. This is the time of make-believe and imaginary playmates, the age when children transform tricycles into race cars and jungle gyms into rocket ships.

Think of how this activity affects children's physical development. Squeezing a rubber toy, putting spools in a can, or jumping over a block tower helps build muscles and dexterity.

Play develops brain as well as brawn power. Naturally curious, children figure out increasingly difficult problems. They learn how far to stretch to reach that rattle. They start to envision how one container fits inside another. They begin to use and interpret symbols. For instance, they pretend water is coffee. They become Mommy or Daddy.

Through play children learn to get along with themselves and other people. Play helps them work through feelings like fear of the doctor's needle or anger at parents' rules and restrictions. Play gives children control over what happens. It also builds self-control. They learn to share a doll, ask for something they want, and cooperate on building the hideout.

Play is for parents, too

You will find that playing with your children can be fun and helpful. It's a relaxed and easy way to learn about your child's interests, skills, and worries. It is a way of showing your child that you care, and it is one way you can contribute to your child's total development.

To make the most of the opportunities play offers both you and your children, try these ideas:

- Join in your children's play.
- Add fantasy and playfulness to everyday situations.
- Provide playmates for your children.
- Take your children to see people, places and things outside your home.

You'll find that play offers lots of possibilities to build on.

Making a place for play

When we think of play we usually think of children. We forget that it is parents who create an accepting and playful atmosphere in the home. Here are some ways you can support and encourage your children's play.

Join in your children's play. Watch to see what games your children enjoy, then play along. This may be imitating funny sounds or playing lions and tigers. Or it could be letting "Doctor Jane" give you an injection with her plastic syringe.

Listen to the games your children play with words. They like to make funny rhymes or put words together in new ways. You can make up a private family language.

Provide things to play with. Materials and objects found around the home, things you make, or store bought toys are all good. Toys should help children pursue new interests and practice new skills. A string tied around an old stuffed animal can transform an ignored plaything into an exciting pull toy for a toddler who is beginning to enjoy pushing and pulling things about.

Outdoors is sometimes empty and boring. Old ties, ropes and chalk are tools to start imaginative play outside.

Add playfulness to everyday events. Games can help both parents and children relax and enjoy everyday routines more. "Flying your helicopter