# Children and Play

Most parents view playing as a waste of time. They would like a child to grow out of the love for playing and get into more serious things like studies, research, or even household chores. It seems more like a childish behavior that must be tolerated, and the sooner it is over the better. However they forget that play is an important part of growing up, and is vital for the physical and emotional development of the child. Play is the first source of learning basic social skills necessary for life.

A child loves to play, and it is a form of punishment for the child to be deprived of playtime. This desire to play, anywhere and with anything, is most evident in the early years. It is a sign of emotional and physical health. A child who does not wish to play should be a source of concern.

## Benefits of Play

### Physical benefits

A child's body develops through physical play. His senses sharpen, his reactions become refined, and he learns the use of appropriate limbs to achieve his goals. In the beginning years, play helps a child learn about the world around him as he touches and feels the objects within his reach. Bones become stronger, vision is sharpened and the limbs become stronger. Running and exercising helps the flow of blood and results in a healthier, happier child.

### Mental Benefits

Play provides answers to the curiosity and restlessness of the child. The imagination of a child is very strong, and play helps to bring it out. A child can thus imagine that he is a principal and his friends are the students, or that he and his friends are part of a family and they take on the role of adults. Such play makes the child creative as he puts himself in another's role.

The child also learns certain forms of behavior through play. He learns about fairness and justice, about sharing and caring. He learns to become alert and watchful. He becomes lively and enthusiastic. He learns to invent solutions when he is in a fix and how to outwit his rivals in play. All these tactics are of great use later in life.

### Emotional benefits

Children often get angry when they do not achieve their desires. When they lose a game, they

may sulk, or whine, or even attack the rival/s. In time, and through the help and guidance of others, they will learn to control themselves. This is especially true if the play is supervised or at least watched by an adult. Through play the child will learn to accept defeat, and not feel jealous of another's victory. It removes the self-centeredness that is very common in children.

## Social benefits

A child should be encouraged to play with others. Some children are shy and hesitate to participate in playing with others. Parents should try and contrive gatherings of friends whom the child knows and will feel comfortable with. He will thus overcome his shyness. Many social problems can be overcome by playing co-operatively with others. Parents today find it difficult to arrange for their children to play with those whom they know and trust. Stressful lifestyles, distances etc. all do their part in keeping children apart. However parents should try as much as possible to ensure that their children get occasional chances to play with others. Playing at home with siblings or parents also has similar benefits.

Children benefit differently from playing. For many it is a path to gaining confidence, recognizing one's abilities, and learning about others. Play uplifts the spirit of the child, making him cheerful and lively. It removes sorrow and anger, and is a good medicine for an unhappy child.

## Types of play

A young child can play with almost anything. He does not need fancy and expensive toys. Simple inexpensive forms of play could include playing with old utensils, scraps of cloth and paper etc. Parents should be creative and look for things the child could play with, rather than buy the latest in the stores. A child who keeps on getting new toys will soon become dissatisfied, and will not be content with anything. Many children these days are quick to lose interest in a toy. They should be shown creative ways of playing.

Forms of play differ according to age and ability of children. Younger children like to play with water, scrap materials, paper and glue, etc. They like to build and destroy. As they grow older they begin to play in groups. They like organized games and a chance to show their skills through play. Children may develop interest in a particular sport or hobby. Parents should encourage this if possible, and help their child develop his talent.

## Parents and Play

The Holy Prophet (s) loved to play with his grandsons. He would seat them on his back, and

pretend to be a camel. He told his companions that he was proud of the two riders on his back. He taught us that to play with children is not a waste of time. It is an expression of love and respect.

Parents should try and play with their children sometimes. Some parents believe it is childish and stooping to a low level. It is a great joy for children when their parents play with them. As the child grows, sports and board games could be a chance for the family to play together. This binds the family closer.

But parents should remember that this play is for the sake of the child, not for themselves. They should not seek to have everything according to what they think is right.

A little flexibility is recommended. They should also let the child gain some small victories so that he does not despair whenever he plays with his parents. Playing with children is a good way of getting to know the child and his temperaments. It should not however be turned against him with taunts and scoldings.

## Companions in play

Children are very influenced by the friends they play with. Parents should be careful that they do not pick up bad habits and behaviors through their play. If a change in behavior or speech is noticed, parents should at once ask about whom the child plays with. The child should be explained that such forms of behavior will not be tolerated. Some children pick up rude forms of speech, aggressive behavior and even a disrespectful attitude. It is thus necessary to be careful about the playmates of the child. If necessary, the child should be prevented from associating with inappropriate playmates.

## Some important points

1. Too much play is harmful for the child. He must not be allowed to spend all his time in play. Life must be a balance, and work is also essential. From childhood, it is necessary to learn that there is a time for everything. So a child must learn that he cannot run around and touch everything in someone else's home. He cannot play when he has schoolwork or chores to finish. He cannot spend his entire holidays just playing. He needs to do some useful things at the same time.

2. Children must not be forced to play. Some parents insist that their children play with the board game they have bought them. Or they demand that since the children are bored, they must play outside. If children do not wish to play it is a form of punishment to be forced to do it. Left by themselves, most children will play occasionally.

3. The environment for play must be child-friendly. If there are too many rules and restrictions, it limits the freedom and independence of a child. Some rules are necessary, but sometimes parents become extremely concerned about things around the house, or about the cleanliness and organization of their home. There must be a place for children where they can play freely, even if it means they make a mess. They should be taught to clean up after themselves, not stopped from ever making a mess.

4. There should be a variety in playing. Different forms of play such as sports, board games, puzzles, imaginative acting etc. all help to build a healthy and strong character. It is wrong to emphasize on only one form of play and neglect others. A balanced individual has had the chance of trying out and enjoying various forms of recreations and the skills they build.

**Words of Wisdom**

.1. Whoever has a child should be like a child with him