



The True Value Of Play

Understanding what makes your toddler tick - the key to a happy, well-balanced child



Articles

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In today's modern world with financial constraints, budget considerations, price tags with ever increasing prices, expensive toys and activities how do we measure the value of good, old-fashioned play?

What is the value of having spent the morning or afternoon building with blocks, scribbling with chalk, hanging out in the sandpit, taking a walk or having an imaginary tea party. The answer quite simply is that these activities are invaluable in the rich and meaningful contribution they make to your toddler's development.

In each and every example of age appropriate play there is immense value. My favourite example of this is play with a simple set of building blocks. As your toddler tips out her blocks, picks them up, explores them and begins to place them one on top of the other she is developing a number of muscles in her **physical body**. The **co-ordination** and **concentration** involved in building block towers is a great achievement for your little person who just a short while ago could not purposefully manipulate objects in her world. Your little one by simply playing with blocks is building her **body and brain**.

Building blocks of various colours, shapes and sizes allow your little one the opportunity to explore the properties of squares, triangles, rectangles and cylinders. If you have taken the time to sit down and play with your toddler the opportunities for learning increase ten-fold. As you name the shapes and colours and count the blocks she places on her tower you are enriching her **language development** and enhancing her understanding of concepts like counting and shape recognition. There is so much knowledge to be imparted in the simple activity of building blocks.

In playing with your child you also have the opportunity to enrich her **social and emotional development**. A young toddler will still require lots of practice and gentle guidance before she acquires all the social skills required to make her way successfully in the great wide world one day but the lessons begin here in the toddler years. As you build blocks with your toddler you allow the opportunity for experimentation with sharing, co-operation, taking turns and she learns how to ask for help, to accept failure and to try again. When you offer your little one praise for her efforts you build her self-esteem. When you spend quality time with her and take the time to connect over a pile of blocks you send her the message that she is worth spending time and important to you.

As parents we need to think about what we have at our disposal and what we can do with the resources we have to influence and support our toddler's development optimally. We all want to invest in special toys and games for our children and this special giving is part of the joy of being a parent but we can also use everyday household items and inexpensive materials to encourage sophisticated learning. Making time to play and providing rich learning opportunities is as important, if not more so, than what you play with. Recycled boxes are great for building towers as are the various containers and cups that are in your tupperware cupboard. If we learn to think differently about the things we have around us a whole new world of play and learning can be discovered.

If we can take time each day to connect with our toddlers through play we are adding value to their lives, aiding their development and building and strengthening the relationship we share with them.

The value of good old-fashioned play is priceless.

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Shannon has a master's degree in Play Therapy and works as a Play Therapist in her busy private practice in Johannesburg. Shannon provides therapeutic support and intervention to children facing behavioural and emotional challenges and assists parents who require support, advice and parental guidance. With an in-depth understanding of child development and her practical experience Shannon offers invaluable advice and insight on the importance of play in promoting optimal development in children.

Shannon is the Production Manager for Explore Play and has been integrally involved in developing the expert content and game material for the Explore Play series.