

Keeping the Learning Going @ Home: The Power of Play



We must not overlook the Power of Play Photo: PDST

[Katherine Donnelly](#) June 08 2020 06:00 AM

In this series, specially written for Independent.ie, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), offers some valuable pointers to parents across a range of different learning areas.

PDST is a Department of Education and Skills support service.

This article, about the power of play, is the tenth in the series.

In previous weeks, the PDST shared tips on how to make the most out of reading time, how to support children in developing digital storytelling, how to keep happy, healthy and learning movement skills and how to measure a minute.

The Power of Play

These are testing times for us and perhaps the ‘Playful’ aspect of our lives is being eroded through self-isolation or work. However, we must not overlook the ‘Power of Play’. It is through playful learning experiences that children begin to make sense of the world around them and develop their social, emotional and communication skills.

Let’s explore ‘PLAY’ in more detail.

P is for Pretend!

Children are naturally playful and will often play by themselves, making up stories, pretending, role-playing with toys etc. We, as adults, on the other hand, are not as naturally playful. However, the learning opportunities that are created during interactive play are limitless and you only need your imagination!

Let your child take the lead. Children will be more motivated by a topic that interests them. This might take the form of a favourite story, for example, 'Billy Goats Gruff', whereby we are re-telling the story, building a bridge for the 'troll' in our sitting room, visiting the make-believe Veterinary Clinic with a 'sore hoof,' or making play-dough goats.

For older children, perhaps it is re-enacting a scene from World War II, searching for the nearest bomb shelter upon hearing the air raid siren, or creating a 'Ration Book' for next week's grocery shop. The possibilities are endless! Just remember, however, to give 'playtime' your full attention - children know if you are not paying attention.

L is for language development

Children are learning language all of the time and it is part of everything we do. Therefore, as parents, it is important that we maximise language-learning opportunities continuously throughout the day. For example, if we are role-playing at the 'Doctor's Surgery', we can introduce language that is more complex:

Adult: 'Hello. Welcome to the Doctor's Surgery. Please take a seat at reception while I notify the Doctor of your arrival.'

Children will soak up the words you use and soon will begin repeating everything you say. However, make sure not to interrupt your child to correct a word or mispronunciation when they are speaking as this can affect their confidence. A more gentle approach would be to 'recast' what they say like this:

Child: "I brang my dog here to the vet cos he has a sore leg."

Adult: "Oh I see! You brought your dog here because he injured his leg. Let's take a look."

For older learners, pose 'Big Questions', as broad, open-ended questions provoke thought and discussion while also enhancing language development;

'How could we make the world a better place?'

'How did that story make you feel?'

'I wonder what it was like to live in Ireland during the famine?'

Just remember to give your child time to think and that there are NO wrong answers.

A is for Arts

The arts provide wonderful opportunities for language development. Take a virtual tour of the National Gallery of Ireland. When there, visit the work of Irish artist Jack B. Yeats and his infamous 'The Liffey Swim', or, skip down the sweeping staircase to the Shaw Room and see Daniel Maclise's impressive painting, The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife. Use this as a springboard for discussion. Do you like the painting? Why? Does it remind you of anything? Have you ever been to a wedding? Have you ever visited an art gallery before? Alternatively, create your own sock puppet from household materials. Ask him questions, tell him stories and even put on a show!

Y is for Your Role - Get involved!

Select two or three days per week where the entire family engages in a playful activity. This could be reciting tongue twisters, solving riddles, building a fort ... whatever takes your fancy! You can infuse playfulness into every activity that you do at home - the trick is just to make it fun!

'Nothing lights up the brain like PLAY!' (Stuart Brown)

