

Resources for Parents of Children with Disabilities

Learn More about the Value of Play Through Research and Great Resources

In these busy, hectic times, why should parents take the time to read, research and review information about play? For the same reasons parents check out the best schools, research after-school activities and search for the best books and summer camps. It is all about giving their child the best growth opportunities--and there are a lot of growth opportunities inherent in play.

Play is not frivolous, is a point researchers, school administrators, play advocates and pediatricians like Dr. Kenneth Ginsberg keep hammering home to parents of children of all abilities. Even animals play when young. Why? They do it to develop the skills and abilities to survive the threats of life.

Play is at risk today as schools trade it to prepare for testing. Over-scheduled children are pushed toward academic experiences at the expense of experiential learning that can be garnered through the various acts of play.

Ellen Metrick, Chief Toy Evaluator at the National Lekotek Center has spent decades helping children with disabilities grow, learn and develop thorough the experience of play. She has seen firsthand children who respond to toys and play in ways that allow them to push beyond the barriers and limitations that they currently have. *"When a child is focused on play they forget what they could or could not do yesterday and simply chase the ball or move the blocks. The joy of play is an amazing motivator for a child to overcome all kinds of physical, cognitive and sensory issues and the payoff for them is just having fun. I tell parents to learn and read more about the benefits of play because they hold many keys to their child's potential."*

Here are some great resources to learn more about play and what it adds to a child's life.

The Strong National Museum of Play is the only museum devoted solely to the role of play in learning and human development and the ways in which play illuminates American cultural history. They believe that play sharpens a person's mind and boosts their creativity. It helps people grow and keeps them healthy. When children play, they learn to solve problems, make decisions, express themselves, and recognize boundaries. Children who play do better in school and become more successful adults. Make sure you check out their, "Toy Hall of Fame," which includes an amazing array of items that have inspired play in children for decades—including the simple cardboard box.

- Find them at: www.museumofplay.org

The American Journal of Play is a forum for discussing the history, culture and psychology of play. The Journal aims to increase awareness and understanding of the role of play in learning and human development and the ways in which play illuminates cultural history.

- Find them at: www.americanjournalofplay.org

Alliance for Childhood is a wonderful resource and advocate for play. The Alliance promotes policies and practices that support children's healthy development, love of learning, and joy in living.

- Find them at: www.allianceforchildhood.org

Playing for Keeps is a part of the Association of Children's Museums. They promote the necessity of play and advocate that communities and families make play a daily habit that has become more important than ever.

- Find them at: www.childrensmuseums.org/programs/playingforkeeps.htm

AblePlay, a website sponsored by the nonprofit National Lekotek Center that researches, rates and reviews mainstream toy for children with special needs. The National Lekotek Center is a leading authority on play and children with disabilities.

- Find them at: www.ableplay.org

So parents of children with special needs, take some time and do a little "fun" reading and learn why play advocates are so devoted to preserving time for children to explore playful experiences. When you think about it, the only activity that might be as worthy of your time spent researching play, is to spend time playing.

This article was brought to you by AblePlay at www.ableplay.org, a website for parents of children with special needs to find toys, play products and often a few ideas and inspiration. AblePlay is part of the nonprofit National Lekotek Center, the leading authority on play for children with disabilities at www.lekotek.org.