



## 11 DEVELOPING THROUGH PLAY

Play is most commonly associated with children and young people; however, everyone can play. We experience a lengthy developmental process; this period of relative helplessness experienced from birth lasts longer. Play during this period of immaturity is especially important in the processes of development.

### What distinguishes play from other types of behaviour?

The characteristics of play tend to relate to motivation and emotional attitude. This definition draws closely on the work of Bob Hughes and Frank King, and is widely accepted in the field of play work.

- **Freely chosen:** The motivation to play comes from within the child, and play can be described as an expression of freedom as the player has chosen to participate rather than feeling obliged to do so.
- **Personally directed:** Children choose not only to play, but how they play. Children direct their own actions and play can be considered to be a democratic process where leaders and rules may arise but usually at the will of those involved.
- **Intrinsically motivated:** Play is activity conducted primarily for its own sake and is a process rather than an end product that is important.
- **Active engagement:** In the state of play, players are usually alert and actively thinking about what they are doing. However, play is relatively free from pressure or stress due to the lack of external demands or goals.

### Play has a purpose

There are many different types of play and children can be involved in more than one type at any time. Different types of play have different roles in child development and when children play they are practicing skills in every area of their development simultaneously. The exploration and learning that is central to play is open-ended and has been linked to psychological, personal and social development, as well as gaining skills and knowledge.

### How children develop through play

- **Social:** Forming relationships and getting along with others is an important skill that children develop over time. Children can learn good social skills; these skills enhance play with others such as sharing, cooperation and self-control.
- **Emotional:** Developing the ability to manage a range of emotions is very important. As children grow they become exposed to different situations and their emotional lives can become more complex. Children often use role play to release emotions, work through feelings and gain a better understanding of their place in the world.
- **Physical:** Active play such as running, climbing and jumping strengthens larger muscles, builds bone density and protects the cardiovascular system. Fine motor skills are essential for performing everyday life tasks such as dressing and feeding. Playing with building blocks, drawing, and painting all help develop precise movements of the hands and fingers.
- **Cognitive:** Children progressively build the skills required for learning such as focus, planning, memory, thinking and problem solving. Play is an ideal state of mind for learning because the mind is focused on the process and children can feel free to experiment with new ways of doing things. Children are naturally curious which drives their own learning and development by the choices they make and the interests they develop.
- **Language:** Being able to communicate is one of the most important skills a child will learn. During play children communicate both verbally and non-verbally. They may hear different forms of language as they interact with others and as a child's vocabulary increases, so does their skill and language. Children often experiment with different forms of communication using words and gestures, role play, telling stories and jokes or by singing and reciting rhymes and poetry.

### Further Reading

Play Types Toolkit:

<https://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/Play-Scotland-Play-Types-Toolkit-bringing-more-play-into-the-school-day.pdf>

### Smart Play Network Members Support

Member you have access to telephone and email support. For more information about the topics covered in this guidance sheet, or any other queries you may have about your project, please contact us using: 0131 554 2620 or [admin@smartplaynetwork.org](mailto:admin@smartplaynetwork.org)