

Encouraging Your Children to Play

Your children need to play.

They need to play for many reasons. Many fathers today remember spending countless hours playing with siblings or friends during their childhood. Parents would drop you off somewhere and your imaginations would take over as you became soldiers, famous ballplayers, dinosaur hunters, etc.

There are many factors that make it more difficult for children to play in today's world.

There is an emphasis on early academics. There is more TV watching today by children than ever before. There is the seductive attraction of video games.

There is also the need for constant supervision of our kids in urban environments.

These factors and others have helped to create children who sometimes have forgotten how to have imaginative play. They'll have a house full of toys but say "I'm bored" or that they have nothing to do. They may look to their parents to entertain them, rather than creating their own play.

What is the importance of having your children engage in creative play when they're young?

Creative play is believed by many child researchers to form the foundation of emotional, creative, and intellectual growth in later years. It should be considered a normal part of a child's development.

Sadly, many young children don't have the opportunity to engage in much creative play because they are presented with "alternatives" like video/computer games or excessive TV

watching.

While some of these alternatives claim to benefit children (train your child on computers early to get a head start!), there is nothing like creative play. Other alternatives do not allow your children's fantasies to roam freely.

The idea of replacing your child's creative play with academic work may be based on good intentions, but will rob your child of a precious opportunity.

How can fathers help to encourage imaginative play in their children? Many of us are not knowledgeable about this topic and have left this work to others.

Here are some ideas:

- Be willing to be fully involved with your child's creative play. Yes, that means that you will be a wild horse running through the desert (your living room) at times. Too adult for that? Get over it!
- Realize that you don't have to entertain your kids all of the time. When they start to expect to be entertained, they will be less likely to engage in play. Set them free in a room without TV or video games and let them go to it.
- Get them into nature when possible. Let them play with the soil, the sand, or the water whenever you can.
- Consider "tapering down" the quantity and types of toys that your children have around the house. Having huge numbers of toys that leave little to the imagination does not encourage creative play. Children often do best with simple toys, or even household items that are readily accessible (wooden spoons, pots and pans).
- Provide artistic opportunities for your child to express what he/she is feeling.

- Tell stories with rich images to your children and read to them often. Reading fairy tales is a wonderful way to provide these images as well.
- Consider the amount of TV watching that your child is engaged in each day. Explore alternatives to watching TV that would involve more creative play. You may have to be the catalyst for your child if there is initial resistance to this.

All around us, the adult world is being thrust upon our children at earlier and earlier ages. We are encouraged as parents to help our young kids “get ahead” academically or to buy them the latest fads in toys.

As fathers, it is our responsibility to look beyond all of this to what our children truly need. Our children need to do what they do very naturally when they are given the opportunity.

They need to play.

Give your children the chance to prepare themselves for life as an adult in the best way possible.

It’s the only chance that they’re going to get.

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