

HAVING FUN WITH YOUR CHILD - PLAYING TOGETHER

Playing with your child helps to build a strong relationship. It shows your child that you like the person that they are and can have fun with them. This makes them feel loved and confident because they have your support.

What is child-centred play?

What it is:-

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- Being able to let your child take the lead. For example, letting your child choose the game, not making the rules
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- Encouraging your children to use their imagination. For example, this may mean showing approval and laughing when your child pretends a cow is able to fly.
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- Rather than saying “cows can’t fly” say “wow, your cow is a flying cow”!
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- Finding things to praise (and being specific about what you are praising, e.g., “You are clever being able to build the blocks so high without them falling”)
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- Putting up with a little bit of annoying or silly behaviour (when it is normal for the child’s age)

What it isn’t:-

- Teaching
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- Criticising what your child is doing, even if what they are doing seems a bit strange to you. For example, if you were making a farm and your child put a cow on top of the cow shed, don’t correct them and put the cow in the paddock. Your child may have an active imagination (let them use it) and in their game the cow might be a special cow that can fly. By taking the cow off the roof you may make them feel that they have done something wrong.
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- Being mean or saying that the game is silly.

How to do mindful child-centred play

Mindful play is about being focused on the child with the aim of emotionally connecting with the child. This means refocusing from distracting thoughts and letting go of negative emotions such as boredom or frustration as they occur.

Mindful child-centred play is a combination of the three things:

Mindful Observing

Observing your child: Watch and really notice what your child is doing. Ask yourself questions as you watch your child. What are they doing? Why did they choose this activity? Wonder (to yourself) why they enjoy it so much?

Observing your own reactions: Be aware of sensations such as the feel of the floor, sore muscles from sitting in an unusual position, the sounds being made, notice the colours of the blocks. Be aware of distracting thoughts (what you need to do tomorrow) and negative feelings (boredom or frustration) and try to let go of these feelings.

Whenever your mind drifts into thinking about other things (what happened yesterday, what else you could be doing right now, what you need to do later), you won't be noticing your child. Try to let go of those thoughts and return to simply observing your child and what they are experiencing.

Playing with your child and taking an interest in what they are doing is a good way of connecting with them. You are learning about your child's experience of the world and sharing that experience.

When playing with your child, try sitting close and just observing for 3-4 few minutes before describing or participating.

Describing

This involves saying out loud what your child is actually doing. For example, "You are building the blocks up high, one on top of the other".

It is important that the descriptions fit the child's experience. Let go of thoughts like "that block doesn't look like a plane; you have a toy plane you could use". Do not interfere by telling your child what to do. Try to limit questions to your child about what they are doing as this may interfere with your child's imagination and focus on the activity.

It can be hard to accurately describe what your child is doing when he is using an object to represent something, but we don't know what. For example, a child may be pretending a block is a plane. The parent may say "you have a block". If the child says "it is a plane", the parent would say "you are taking the plane for a ride in the air".

Never be critical or sarcastic when describing what your child is doing.

Describing can be like a commentator of a horse race (except much more slowly). It is a description of what is happening in the activity.

The aim of describing what the child is doing is to let the child know you are there and are interested and attending to what they are doing.

Try describing for 3-4 minutes before participating (keep observing!).

Participating

This involves joining your child in play. A good way to become involved is to ask your child: "What would you like me to do?", or "How can I help?"

Make sure you do not take over the activity. Follow your child's lead, do what they ask you to do..

Try not to be self-conscious about what you are doing (which is acting like a child).

Have fun! Play is meant to be fun so allow yourself to be silly and laugh. Laughter between you and your child means that you are enjoying each other's company.