

PLAY

An Essential Process of Childhood

■ by Jessica Parks, MSW, LCSW

- Continued from Page 1 -

How Parents Can Encourage Play

Many parents, especially busy parents of young children, struggle to find the energy or motivation to engage in play with their children. It certainly can be difficult to come home from work and jump right into an imaginary submarine or blow bubbles with your child when there is dinner to make and laundry to do. Here's the good news: while playing with your child can be challenging, a little goes a long way.

Here are some strategies for encouraging play for your child:

- **Make time for play.** It is tempting to fill our children's schedules full of enriching activities. Although learning an instrument or exploring science are also beneficial, they do not replace unstructured play. Make room in your child's schedule for imaginative play.
- **Limit screen time.** Video games and social media may have a role to play in a child's life, but screen time is not unstructured play. Again, make time for play without distraction.
- **Focus on your child.** Put away any of your own distractions, like cell phones. Be as present as possible, setting aside thoughts of your 'to do' list. Set a timer for yourself if necessary, and communicate that your child has your full attention until the timer alarm sounds.
- **Allow your child to choose the activity.** Make suggestions only when necessary for safety or when requested. Attempt to enter your child's frame of reference and engage with them there.
- **Observe and ask questions** about what your child is doing, such as "I see you put the red block on top. What will you do next?" Questions like this help facilitate language development and planning skills. Asking questions also communicates that you see your child's play as worthwhile.
- **Allow your child to direct the play.** As difficult as it can be for adults to relinquish control to children, play is an appropriate time to do so. Allow your child to lead. Did her stacking blocks suddenly turn into a pack of lions? Roll with it. Your child is doing the work of play.
- **Follow up.** Say "I really enjoyed building blocks with you today. Thank you for showing me how you balance the blocks and sharing your toys with me."



Adults often see a child's play as loud and disruptive, but Jesus did not see it that way. He welcomed and encouraged children, instructing us all to "welcome...these little children in [my] name" (Mark 9:37). With or without parent encouragement, children play. As parents, grandparents, and other caregivers, we have an opportunity to protect and encourage children's playful nature. They play to grow, to learn, to connect, and to cope. They play because God created them to play. ■



Jessica Parks is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and sees

Article taken from the May | Jun 2019 issue of *PRESSING ON*, a Publication of Chicago Christian Counseling Center
Chicago Christian Counseling Center has locations throughout Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana

www.chicagochristiancounseling.org

708.845.5500 | info@chicagochristiancounseling.org

facebook.com/ChicagoChristianCounseling | Text CCCC to 22828 to join our email list

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.