

Engaging During Play: Five Ways to Promote Your Child's Learning & Development

Proximity

Take yourself down to your child's level and be present by having physical closeness, watching, making eye contact, and smiling as your child explores their world. Being close, present, and engaged during your child's play strengthens your relationship, your child's sense of trust, and their confidence.



Narration

Narration: Talk aloud to your child as they play. Use their actions as a script, almost as if you are a sportscaster! Describe what you are seeing, hearing, and doing. Narration supports children's brain development and supports the development of language and communication skills. Example: "I see that you picked up the yellow rattle. Shake, shake! You are shaking the rattle."

Verbal Expansion

If your child is not yet verbal, take note of the sounds they are making. As you engage with them, imitate the sounds they are making. This teaches the very basics of verbal exchanges or back and forth conversations. If your child is verbal, playing with your child provides opportunities to acknowledge their thoughts, ideas, and questions while expanding their vocabulary. For example, if your child says "ball," you can respond, "You do have a green ball." You can pause and wait to see how your child responds. You then might say "Will you roll it?"



Scaffolding

While playing with your child, consider how you can gently guide or encourage your child in ways that extend their learning and development. Scaffolding is a strategy that challenges your child to try the next step and allows for slow and natural skill progression. Example: If you notice that your child loves to stack blocks and knock them over, you can challenge them in a playful and fun way to first stack the first three.

Parental silliness and playful interactions:

Playful interactions are powerful because they are built on mutual joy. Find moments in your day to tune everything out. Be present, be silly, simply play, and focus on the connection between you and your child.

