



Fruitful Play | Jonas Sauder

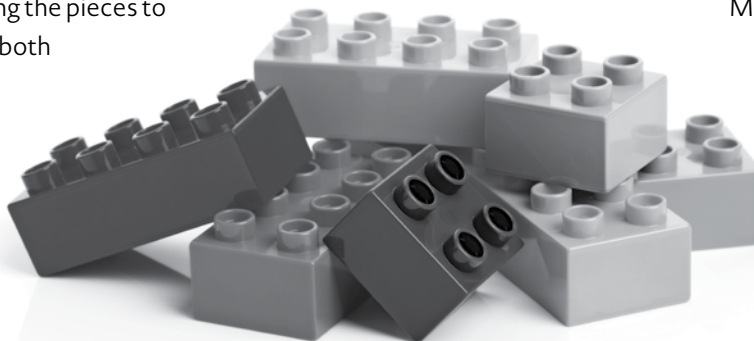
Normal children play. Play is critically important for their development. Through play, they develop their skills and learn how the world works. Wise adults notice the types of play children under their supervision pursue. They encourage their children to engage in a variety of play to reap the fruits of each type. Although they cannot “command” children to play, they can introduce them to types of play they may not discover on their own. Some specific examples of fruitful play include:

1. **Memory games.** Children enjoy finding pairs of identical cards. They can also remember increasingly longer lists of objects and recite them, as required in playing a game such as “I’m going on a trip, and I’m taking a duffel bag, a pair of shoes, a comb, a hat, and . . .” The first type of game develops their visual/spatial memory skills, the second their auditory memory skills.
2. **Sorting games.** Objects can be sorted by shape, size, color, and so on. This develops the ability to discriminate by one specific quality and to create categories. Beads, buttons, or marbles can be sorted into an egg carton. Colored beads can be strung according to given patterns.
3. **Puzzles.** Identifying small parts of a larger picture and manipulating the pieces to fit the puzzle develops both visual and fine motor skills. Fine motor skills require close eye-hand coordination, which is needed

- for writing with a pencil and cutting with scissors.
4. **Building.** Constructing with stacking blocks, stick-together blocks, toy logs, or other sets of construction toys provides opportunity to imagine and build things or to build by following a given pattern.
5. **Tracing, coloring, and drawing.** These develop eye-hand coordination and promote creativity, on paper or sidewalk.
6. **Follow directions.** The traditional *Simon Says* game develops the disciplines of focused attention, following directions, and quick response.
7. **Outdoor play.** The outdoors offers children some of their richest play experiences as they notice nature (tree bark, bugs, bird nests), play in a sandbox, play house, hunt imaginary animals, romp, run, climb, and explore while taking risks.
8. **Gross (large) muscle movement play.** Movement games require children to bounce, throw, and catch balls, to jump rope, to hop and skip, to throw plastic discs, to roll hoops, or to swing. All these activities are fun ways to develop spatial awareness, coordination, and strength.

9. **Fine (small) muscle movement play.**

Many simple activities develop eye-hand coordination as children tie knots, string patterns of beads, sew scraps for the fun of it, or trace, cut, and glue shapes or pictures.



10. **Board games.** Young children enjoy simple games that involve rolling dice to move player pieces around the board. Eventually, they can play old standbys such as checkers, Scrabble, or chess. Playing board games exposes children to great variety while introducing them to following rules, cooperating with others, and accepting the reality of winning or losing.
11. **Imaginary play.** Most children spontaneously use their imagination as they play with dolls, toy trucks, farm equipment, and cookware. They name their dolls, talk to them, teach them, scold them, rock them, and put them to sleep. They cook meals, operate restaurants and stores, plant crops, fight fires, and chase wild animals. They cooperate: one becomes “the horse” to be harnessed with a rope while the other is “the farmer.” Sometimes they talk with imaginary friends from day to day. This is a kind of play you can’t really initiate or teach. But you can encourage it by accepting the fresh-made pizza from their kitchen or buying something from their store. Imagining what could be is an important skill for children to develop; real life involves total engagement in a task (such as cooking or weeding) to eventually achieve results (a meal or a clean garden).

Many of the games listed already can be played in one or more *modes*, as noted below. Each should be encouraged for its own benefits.

Spontaneous play is a blessing for children. As they explore their world through play, their curiosity is stimulated. This, in turn, motivates them to pursue even more playful activities that help them mature.

All children need time for spontaneous play, and they should be able to “go play” on their own, without the assistance or constant direction of adults. Spontaneous play originates out of the child’s own heart; it is self-initiated.

Children who complain of being “bored” need to learn to

initiate play. Perhaps they would benefit from a suggestion to go play _____. But if they are never “weaned” from having an adult involved in their play, they can develop an unhealthy dependence that limits their ability to independently explore the world around them.

Directed play includes an adult or older child. This person also enters into the play, joining the spirit of the game while providing some direction. He helps choose the game, interprets directions, mediates disagreements and difficulties, and models how to play well. Directed play is a form of disciplined fun that helps develop character through following directions, interacting with others, and developing skills.

Individual play is solitary. The child builds with blocks, plays with a doll, or goes hunting all by himself. Individual play focuses the child’s attention directly on the world around him without the distraction of other people. It serves to develop his ability to actively pursue interests on his own without others’ participation.

Group play draws children out of themselves as they interact with others. They experience and learn from others, through others, and with others as they explore their world together. They learn to give and take, lead and follow, share and cooperate. Group play provides interaction that helps children develop social skills.

Many are the fruits of real play. Though many worthwhile games have been digitized, it must be noted that screen play should be avoided due to its hypnotizing effect, which works against most of the purposes of play enumerated above.

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Christian Light ParentLines is published by Christian Light Education, a division of Christian Light Publications, P.O. Box 1212, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 22803-1212. Ken Kauffman, editor.

ParentLines is printed two times a year as a service to Christian parents and is distributed in conjunction with Christian Light LightLines, a publication for Christian schoolteachers. **ParentLines may be freely copied for distribution to parents.**