Will play get my child ready for school? **Absolutely!**

Playing and learning go hand in hand. Research continues to demonstrate that children under the age of five learn best through play. Important connections occur in a child's brain as the child manipulates objects and experiments with the environment.

Neuroscientists have shown that the brain of a young child is different from the brain of an adult. Until the age of six, children primarily use their senses to learn. They learn through play . . . by exploring and interacting with the world around them!

Play is the natural way a child learns. Through play, children learn to concentrate, exercise their imaginations, try out ideas, practice grown-up behavior, develop a sense of control over their world, and practice the new skills they are learning. As children put blocks in and out of a container, they are learning about "in and out" and are developing muscles in their arms and fingers that they will use later for writing. Pushing a toy along a "road" helps develop skills needed for guiding a pencil. As children learn to sort blocks or beads, they learn about colors and shapes that will help them learn letters.

Play is hard work for infants and toddlers. Make sure that your child has time and materials to support play. Look for childcare that encourages learning through play.

Infants

Infants need a variety of touch, sight, and sound toys. Toys for infants include:

- Safe toys to mouth and chew
- Rattles
- Clutch balls
- Unbreakable mirror
- "Busy box"
- Toys to grasp and squeeze
- Bath toys
- Toys that make noise
- Simple shape sorters
- Small plastic cups that nest and stack

One Year

One-year-olds are explorers in the land of "take apart and put together." Some toys one-year-olds enjoy are:

- Stacking rings
- Snap-lock beads
- Bath toys
- Sand toys
- Surprise box
- Toy telephone
- Lightweight blocks
- Small riding toy
- Simple shape sorters
- Ball
- Toys to push

Eighteen Months

One-and-a-half-year-olds need toys that deal with the real world. They have fun with:

- Shape sorters
- Push and pull toys
- Wooden blocks
- Teddy bears and dolls
- Small cook stove
- Crayons and markers
- Shopping cart
- Dump truck
- Pounding board
- Toy drum
- Big plastic building bricks
- Simple puzzles

Two Years

Two-year-olds are busy building muscles and playing make-believe. They enjoy:

- Rhythm instruments
- Riding toys
- Pull wagon
- String beads
- Rocking horse
- Chalk board and chalk
- Simple object puzzles
- Pegs and pegboard
- Dolls
- Small cars and trucks
- Doctor's kit
- Wooden blocks
- Dress-up clothes

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