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# Introduction

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## The value of play

For preschoolers, everything they do is learning. The more your child plays and does, the more opportunities they have for finding favourites. Imagine, if you will, what would have happened if Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's family had never set him on a piano bench and placed his little hands on the keys? Nothing. What a loss that would have been for the world. One of your most important jobs as a parent is to find out what natural talents lie within your child.

When a child is born, they have over a hundred billion brain cells. Through play, trillions of synapses develop connecting these hundred billion cells in the brain. Each time your preschooler plays a game, listens to music or stories from picture books and interacts with you, new synapses develop and the child's intellect is enhanced. Play, although it sounds simple, must be taken seriously. Play is your child's work!

**Physically**, a preschooler develops well-balanced fine and gross motor skills during recreation. Toys are not just for fun. It is no accident that down through history, in all cultures, toys are a part of early childhood. Games with equipment teach the learner how to manipulate and like the old adage says, 'practice makes perfect'. Nursery rhymes, musical games and dancing about is play with rhythm and rhyme that orchestrates balance, coordination and grace.

**Emotionally**, play is therapeutic. Since play is a natural medium for self-expression, it provides the preschooler with a safe space to experience, express and celebrate feelings. In play, the child gradually adds increasing complexity to their world. Playing in play groups gives preschoolers the opportunity to learn social skills: sharing, taking turns and cooperation. Patterns of behaviour, acceptable ways to interact and ways of playing safely are also part of this whole socialisation process. As a bonus, through play, children develop a sense of humour and an ability to show empathy to others. The more difficult and less obvious advantage of play is that it allows a child a place to learn how to handle anger and aggression. Although this is a long process, expressing turmoil openly in socially acceptable ways is vital for a child's emotional wellbeing. Emotionally speaking, play is vital to mental health and stability.



# Fingers 'n' thumbs

## Fine motor development..



### Think about it!

Fine motor development refers to the development of skills associated with the use of hands and fingers. It includes using fingers and thumbs for manipulation and grasping. Hand-eye coordination and spatial awareness are associated skills.

Three-year-olds want everything for themselves. Children develop both the muscular control and the concentration needed to use precise finger and hand movements. They want to know how things work. Craft tools and materials such as scissors, hole punches, clay, paint, paintbrushes, crayons, chalk and sand will provide hours of enjoyment and contribute immensely to your preschooler's fine-motor development.

Sandboxes and tubs of water are very educational for children this age. Sand and water provide an excellent setting for measuring and discovering scientific principles such as buoyancy. For sand and water play, include plastic measuring cups and spoons, plastic buckets and shovels, seashells, stones, sponges and so on.

Another opportunity preschoolers have for practising fine-motor skills is helping with household chores. If your child wants to help you with small jobs around the house, show them how to do it and then let them find their own satisfaction. Most youngsters take great pride in being able to contribute to the needs of the family. Never redo a task your child has worked hard performing. Praise all their attempts to be of help.

