

Target Keyword: Why the Playground Is about More Than Playing
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Too often, parents forget that childhood is one of the most important times of a person's life and that it is a period of constant learning. The adult that you've become was formed from the child that you were -- and part of that childhood probably consisted of playing with other children. What you might not realize, however, is that what you thought was just "playing" was actually a very valuable learning experience that you shared with the other children on the playground.

Play is Essential

Children want to play. It's a natural instinct. When a child is bored, he or she will usually find something to do to pass the time. This is vital to healthy future growth. After all, there are going to be times when adults are going to be bored -- and it's important to find ways to pass the time, as well. The better a child is at being able to entertain and be entertained, the more likely that child will grow into an adult who isn't afraid of being alone.

At the same time, the better a child is at playing with others, the more skills that child is learning when it comes to dealing with others. The child who is master at "follow the leader" has learned some incredibly important skills -- how to follow, how to cooperate, how to mimic. What seems like just a simple little game of children following one person takes on a whole new meaning when approached from a learning perspective.

Brain Growth

When children are on playgrounds, not only are they developing behavioral skills, they are also helping their brains to grow. In a study conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, a program that studied children who were exposed to enriched, play-oriented childhood programs and social interaction with others found those children had higher IQs at the age of five, as opposed to children who were not given the same play-oriented opportunities.

Recess is Vital

In 2009, the journal *Pediatrics* found that students who were given more than 15 minutes of recess time on a daily basis were better behaved than those who had no recess period. When children in school take a break from learning lessons

and are given the chance to play with one another, they appear to develop better social skills -- and they appear to be better able to focus on the subjects they are studying. Rather than looking at "play" as something that will take away from "study," you might consider that the two are actually mutually beneficial.

Social Skills

If you spent time on the playground, you probably learned a great deal of social skills that have served you well in later years. For instance, if you've ever seen a group of children playing, while one child stays off to the side, you've seen social exclusion at work. The child on the fringe will usually sit there, watching the others, until he or she has built up enough courage to slowly approach the group. Sometimes, it is an unsuccessful attempt, but other times, the outsider is brought into the folds of the playing group. The skills being learned will become very important when that child becomes an adult who has entered a new environment and wants to be accepted.

Imagination

Children on the playground are filled with levels of imagination that are incredible. A child swinging across the monkey bars knows that falling from those bars means dropping into a pit of lava. The little boy climbing the slide from the slippery side, ignoring the steps, knows he is actually scaling the side of a mountain. Children playing tag know that the little girl chasing them really isn't their best friend -- it's the person who is "it," and who needs to be avoided...until such time as someone else is "it."

Parental Involvement

When parents take their children to the playground, they need to take the role of observers. Their role is to make sure the children are safe, but at the same time, they also need to let children make mistakes. If your child tries to approach a group and is rebuffed, rather than step in and make the other kids play with your child, you can take the opportunity to explain to your child that there are going to be times when others aren't going to want to work or play with them, and go about suggesting ways that your child can resolve the situation.

Remember -- the children aren't just playing. They're actually learning.