Play: A Hidden Gift

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Play

• Spontaneous pleasurable action on self, other and object
• Play skills-the mechanics of play
• Play themes-the content and meaning of play
• The social continuum of play-the relational dimension of play
Functions of play

- Expression, tension-reduction and pleasure (the self-curtative power of play)
- Exploration, discovery, stimulation and mastery
- Arousal and regulation-novelty, uncertainty, complexity
- Pleasure and imagery which compensates for felt limitations, anxieties and deprivations-wish fulfillment
- Problem solving, rehearsal and adaptation
Functions of play

- Anticipation
- Surprise
- Pleasure
- Understanding
- Strength
- Poise
Play Skills

Sensorimotor Play (Birth-12M)

• Mouth, fingers, vision and the surface of the skin-self and parent: reaching, tasting, touching
• Exploration, discovery and differentiation of the property of objects
• Mini-experimentation- grasping, mouthing, banging, clapping, dropping, inspecting
Play Skills

Functional Play (12-24M)

- Combination: filling-dumping, opening-shutting, fitting-in, messing
- Movable toys in correspondence to locomotion
- Constructive play: building and destruction in correspondence to ambivalent trends
- Repetition, imitation and ritual
Play Skills

Symbolic Play (24-60M)

- Imaginative-novel combination-pretense beyond personal experience and break with convention on object use, scene or role
- Object substitution
- Socio-dramatic- story line with props, ideas and deepening plot
Play Themes

• Sensory pleasure and tension reduction
• Getting and taking in
• Alertness and “ableness”
• Resolution of ambivalence
• Mastery and autonomy
• Reality and fantasy
• Consolidation of sexual identity and social roles
• Experimentation, problem solving, trying –on new possibilities–an “intermediate space”
Social Continuum of Play

- Solitary
- Onlooker
- Parallel
- Associative
- Cooperative
Play Materials

Basic materials

- Blocks
- Water
- Art materials
- Resistive materials
- Simple toys
  (balls, bubbles, cars/trains, dolls/figures, house, kitchen, doctor kit, puppets)
Caregiver Roles

- Set designer
- Expander/challenger
- Narrator
- Reflector
- Clarifier
- Interpreter
References


Frankel, J. B. (1998). The play’s the thing: How the essential processes of therapy are seen most clearly in child therapy. Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 8(1), 149-182.

