

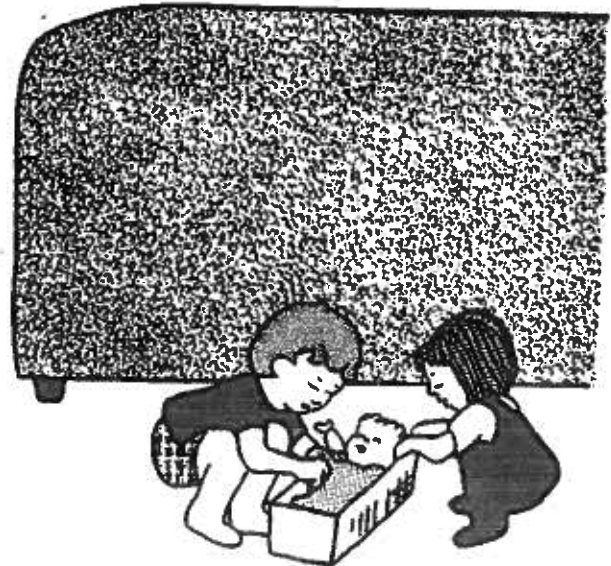


I. Why Dramatic Play is Important

Dramatic play, sometimes called “make-believe play,” is one of the most natural ways that young children learn about themselves and others. If you’ve ever taught an infant to play pat-a-cake, pretended to talk on the telephone with a toddler, provided two preschoolers with dress-up clothes so they could go to a “party,” or watched a group of school-age children put on a circus, you have helped children engage in dramatic play.

What children do in dramatic play will depend on their age, their stage of development, and the experiences they have had. Dramatic play has three stages through which children will grow: imitative role play, make-believe play where the imagination starts to blossom, and socio-dramatic play in which children interact verbally with each other.

Children don’t need a well-equipped doll house or a stage to make-believe: a shoe box can serve as a baby’s bed; a paper towel roll can be a firefighter’s hose. Dramatic play helps young children develop an understanding of the world around them, cope with fears and uncertainties, and learn to get along with others. In other words, dramatic play helps young children develop skills they need both now and in the future.





Here are some examples of how dramatic play supports development.

Children develop thinking skills by:

- imitating the actions of others (playing peek-a-boo or pretending to bark like a dog).
- solving problems in play (deciding they will take the sick baby to the doctor).
- using different objects to represent something they need in their play (a block as a bulldozer).
- sorting objects into categories (collecting the cups and saucers, sorting the dress-up clothes).
- remembering their own experiences and replaying them (being a baby or a mommy).

Children develop socially by:

- responding to what other children are doing (joining in a play episode that other children have started).
- sharing props and toys (telling another child, "You wear this hat and I'll take the suitcase").
- trying out different roles (pretending to be a doctor or a mail carrier).

Children develop emotionally by:

- assuming powerful roles (being a policeman or a large animal).
- replaying experiences that scare them so they begin to gain a sense of control (acting out scenes of going to the hospital or getting punished).

Children develop physically by:

- using large muscles (crawling on the floor pretending to be an animal).
- using small muscles (zipping and buttoning dress-up clothes).
- coordinating their hand movements (placing objects in a cooking pot).

These are a few of the many ways in which young children develop and grow through dramatic play. You can encourage this learning and growth by setting the stage for dramatic play in your home.