



THE VALUE OF CHILDREN'S

play



FOR DEVELOPING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF DEMOCRACY

A FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS



Introduction:

Play is an essential component of healthy human development that extends beyond mere enjoyment or physical development. Through play, children first practice independently fostering social relationships and experience the application of democratic values.

Encouraging play can help children build strong social relationships and develop important democratic skills such as cooperation, negotiation, consensus building and empathy.

How does play support development of social relationships and an understanding of democratic values?

Play provides opportunities for children to interact, collaborate, and form meaningful relationships with their peers.

- Engaging in play allows children to practice important social skills like sharing, taking turns, and resolving conflicts.

Play fosters and develops empathy and conflict resolution skills.

- Cooperative play, where children work together to achieve common goals, helps foster empathy and understanding.
- Role-playing activities allow children to take on different perspectives and develop empathy towards others.
- When children engage in socio-dramatic play, they can act out different scenarios and practice resolving conflicts.
- Play offers a safe space for children to learn conflict resolution skills.

Play provides real life experience in collective decision making, cooperation, and consensus-building, voting and majority rules, as well as negotiating rules.

- Children, when given opportunities to play without adult intervention, have opportunities to experience leadership, group think and challenging the status quo.
- Through managing their own conflicts during play, children develop an understanding of equality, inclusivity and fairness.
- Games and activities that involve decision-making as a group are learning experiences.
- When children modify their play for each other to suit their individual needs, abilities and differences, they are learning to practice inclusivity, tolerance and empathy.
- Play with children from different age groups, cultural backgrounds and abilities supports the development of understanding and tolerance.
- Through the games and rituals for turn taking and deciding who goes first in a game, children are practicing democracy.
- When children experience cheating, exclusion or bias within a game, children are exposed to new ways to resolve conflict and negotiate with their peers, whilst also learning to navigate difficult emotions.



How can I support the development of my child's understanding of social relationship and democratic values?

1. Provide ample time and space for unstructured, imaginative play where children can explore and interact freely without adult intervention.
2. Do not intervene when children are arguing or experiencing conflict unless it is a safety risk.
3. Allow children to negotiate their own decisions around turn taking and rules in their play.
4. Offer a variety of play materials and toys that promote cooperation and collaboration. Do not aim to have equal amounts of identical sets of play materials for each child, allow them to practice sharing and co-operation. Loose parts materials allow children to plan



and negotiate how they will use the materials and for what purpose. Loose Parts are wonderful for providing more opportunities for children's independent decision making and negotiation skills.

5. Arrange playdates or group activities to encourage independent social interactions and cooperation with peers.
6. Encourage children to play or engage in activities with a broad range of children across different community settings to allow them opportunity to learn different perspectives.
7. Be a positive role model by demonstrating empathy, tolerance, fairness, and respect in your interactions with others and with your child.

An important message for you to share...

Play is a natural and enjoyable way for children to develop social relationships and understand democratic values.

By encouraging and supporting play, parents can contribute to their child's healthy social and emotional development while nurturing important democratic skills.

If you need further assistance or have any questions, feel free to seek guidance from educators, child development experts, or your child's school. Where you notice children are experiencing difficulty with social relationships specialist support may be required.



make time today for outside play



PlayAustralia.org.au