

Toddler Visit #6

- PIPE: Playing is Learning

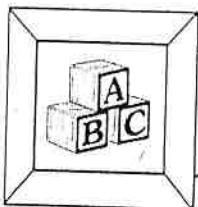


Topics for Next Visit:

- 15 Month Growth & Development
 - Seasonal Safety

Playing Is Learning





Conceptual Overview

PLAY
TOPIC 1

1. Play is a natural pathway for learning. Throughout the world children learn through play. Everything a child touches, hears, smells, or sees triggers a new brain connection. When these experiences are pleasurable and fun, learning will be memorable. Playing is engaging in an activity for interest and pleasure.

Play makes learning easy because fun motivates us to remain in an activity for a longer time. As adults, when we are playing, we share happy emotions. We seem open and collaborative. Patterns and rules are followed; decisions seem to be made easily. Fun leads us to try new skills or to practice what we know. Sharing fun often leads to meeting new friends who challenge our skill level and who share our joy in learning. These friendships are often deep, fulfilling relationships that started with having fun together.

2. Children begin learning at birth. Their eyes start searching their new world immediately, learning to focus and to understand what they are seeing. By 1 month of age, children begin to smile when they see a human face. There is recognition, which brings pleasure. There is also recognition of learning, or mastering a skill. It is like an inner voice saying, "I can do this. ... This is fun. ... I want to do more."

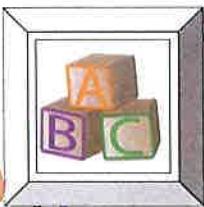
Much of a child's brain structure develops after birth. With each experience a nerve connection is made, and with each reoccurrence the connections become stronger and more permanent within the child's nervous system. These connections between the neurons are like a rope: each experience is a strand of learning that makes the rope stronger. Through play, parents can make repeating experiences interesting and enjoyable.

3. Curiosity triggers learning. It is curiosity that leads to exploration and begins the learning process. Curiosity is another internal voice pushing us to explore new things. This is one reason why humans keep learning and growing mentally throughout a lifetime. By exploring, children discover new things, meet new people, and learn new skills. It is important that children be given time to explore. The 1-year-old moves quickly from object to object, hardly stopping to focus on any toy or task. "W'zhat?" is often a first word. By joining this exploration, parents can share and expand their child's learning. Staring interest in a flower, a bug, or a book opens wonderful worlds in a child's mind. Exploration leads to discovery. But, the drive to explore can also lead a child toward danger. Parents need to plan ahead for what those dangers might be.

Play turns discovery into practice. Through play, children practice what they have discovered. When they discover something interesting, they try it over and over in many different ways until they understand it and are good at it. This practice helps them feel competent in their new knowledge.

PLAY TOPIC 1

4. Practice turns to mastery. When children feel confident in a new skill, they feel in control, they now own the skill, they know that they are competent. For example, a new walker may take one or two wobbly steps, arms outstretched, face furrowed with concentration. "How do I lift one foot and stay upright?" As adults, we rarely think about "how to walk." We are confident of our skill; it is unconscious; we own it. When children master a skill, they will show it off. Then, they will begin to explore the next new challenge.
5. Mastery leads to pride. Mastery is a feeling of being in control of yourself or your environment. Mastery is also an internal voice of motivation for most adults as well as children because it is a feeling of power. Mastery allows us to feel that we can influence the world around us and that we can meet the challenges in our lives. This feeling of mastery brings feelings of pride.
6. Parents can structure successful and safe learning experiences for children. Parents can create opportunities to play and find places that invite safe, successful exploration. Parents can find interesting tasks and find time to teach them. Parents also regulate behavior through play. Playing sets a structure for parents to teach patterns and define rules and limits. Playfulness, surprise, and interest are good tools for diverting a child and changing behavior. Parents who share their child's interest and their child's play will strengthen their relationships and awaken a love of learning.



Play Is a Pathway for Learning

Play is a natural way for babies to learn.

Throughout the world babies play. Play is a spontaneous activity that begins in infancy. It is the natural way humans learn social and survival skills.

Play makes learning easy.

Children enjoy pleasurable experiences. They continue doing what makes them happy. They also have fun exploring and trying new things. It is the happy emotions that push or motivate children to try new things and practice others.

Play leads to many different experiences.

At first, everything a baby touches, hears, smells, or sees triggers new brain connections. With each pleasurable experience, learning moves forward because children are challenged by their success. They want to know more and become competent.

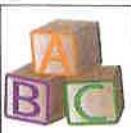
Play is a time when people cooperate and collaborate.

During a game or a happy time together, people share easily. Communication flows, rules are followed, decisions are made easily. Sharing fun often leads to meeting new friends who challenge us and increase our learning. Play is not just for children. When children share fun with parents, their world expands. They learn to communicate and cooperate. They learn to make friends.

Play makes learning exciting.

When children continue to learn through play, they often develop a love for learning. Because it is fun, they are motivated to expand their learning. Mastery becomes exciting. Play starts the pathway to knowledge, skill, confidence, and social acceptance.





The Mastery Cycle

... an internal feeling of control and confidence
... a motivation which drives learning

CURIOSITY - EXPLORATION

“What's in there?” “What is it?” “How does it work?”

DISCOVERY - CHALLENGE

“Let's see if I can do it.”

LEARNING

“I'll find help ... a model ... a coach.”

PRACTICE

“Over and over and over again.”

COMPETENCE/MASTERY

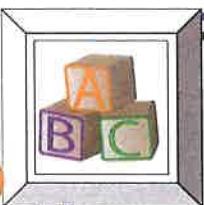
“I've got it!” “I'm in control.” “I'm good at it.”

CONFIDENCE

“I can join the team, get the job.”

PRIDE

“I'm OK.” “I like me.” “I can do it.”

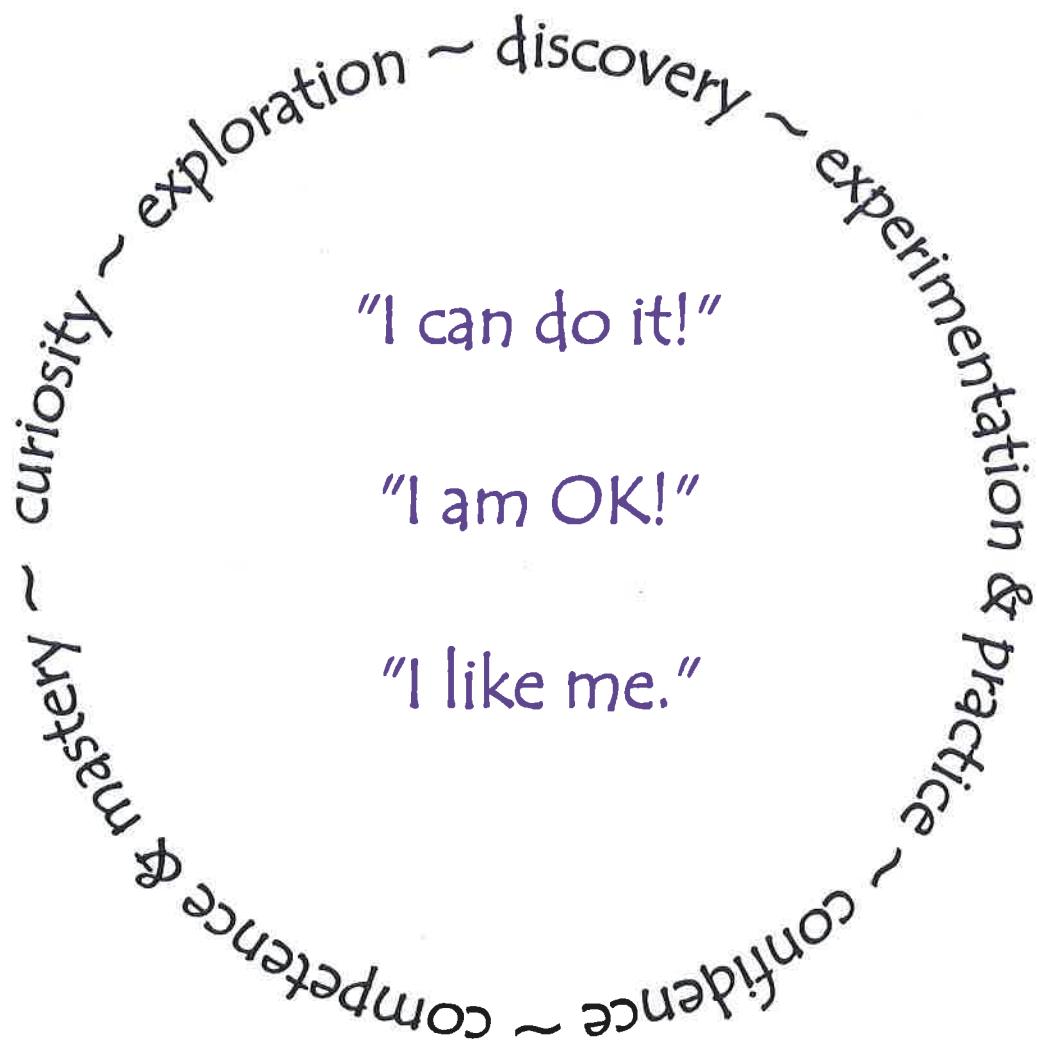


Mastery Matters!

Mastery is feeling in control of yourself or your environment. Mastery involves learning a new skill, training a muscle, expanding a brain connection. It is about becoming good at something. Once we master a task, we own it. It belongs to us; we can use it at will.

Mastery gives us a sense of power and confidence. This feeling urges us forward to find something new to learn and to master. We look for the next challenge in order to have that powerful, pride filled feeling again.

Mastery is an inborn motivator. This means that it is like a voice inside our heads that urges us on for a lifetime of learning, of meeting challenges, and feeling pride.





A Good Place for Play Time

Play is important to a child's growth and development. Children will play wherever they are. Infants and toddlers are motivated to explore all interesting spaces, climb, jump, open doors and drawers, touch, taste, and test! As a parent, your first concern should be safety.

 **Safety** - Children need a safe environment to explore. Remember, children's curiosity is so strong that saying "no, no" will not always keep them safe. They will crawl off the step, eat the cleaning soap, or pound with the glass knickknack. You can make play time safe. Create a safe play space, or be there to provide safety.

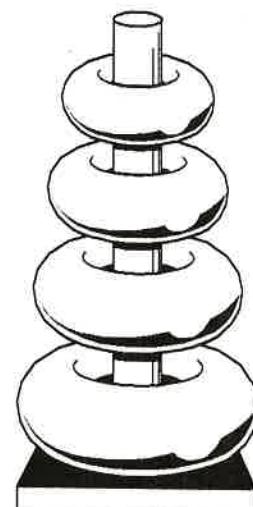
Think about:

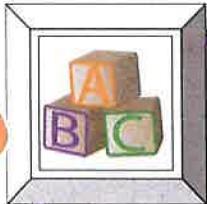
- A safe physical space (toy storage, cleanliness, furniture, stairs, doors, windows, plugs, cords, etc.).
- Your child's developmental learning stage (mouthing, grabbing, crawling, climbing, pounding, jumping, etc.).

 **Exploration** - Play areas that have a space to explore and a variety of objects to look at and use give children chances to learn. Children may move quickly from toy to toy. You can make play time exciting and interesting.

Think about:

- Having a variety of age-appropriate toys.
- Keeping toys within your child's reach.
- Changing the toys often.
- Keeping some old favorites out along with newer toys.
- Keeping special toys in special places.
- Joining in the play.





From Curiosity to Feelings of Pride

Curiosity begins the mastery cycle. Children are naturally curious. Their eyes are exploring from the minute they are born, wondering “What’s out there? Where am I?” The urge to explore is so strong for toddlers that they forget all else. They wander away, walk off stairs, forget about rules, and refuse food just to satisfy their curiosity. *Curiosity is a gateway to learning.*

Curiosity leads to exploration. As children explore, they discover new things. “What did I find? How does it work?” *Exploration is what triggers learning.*

Exploration leads to discovery. Discovery is exciting. For humans, new things seem challenging. “Can I do this? Can I have that? Can I understand what this is about?” This challenge to try something new this pushes us ... to climb mountains, to like using the computer, or even to go to the moon. *Discovery starts the challenge of learning.*

Learning happens with experimentation. When babies discover something, they will try it many different ways: They look it over, they shake it, they taste it, they pound it, and they throw it. If they learn that it tastes good, it is something to eat. *If they cannot figure out how to understand their discovery, they will ask for your help.*

Learning happens through relationships with other people. Asking questions, asking for help, watching, and modeling are key ways we all learn about something new. Other people are often the best resource to help us because they can demonstrate and explain. Adults also read for information or instruction in order to *understand what they are curious about.*

Practice strengthens learning. Learning excites a child; then the child repeats the action, and learning is strengthened. Most toddlers will practice a newly learned skill until they feel in charge of it. The new walker wants to do nothing but practice walking. For adults, walking does not take thought because the mental pathways are so strong. We have practiced it well. *Practice leads to competence.*

Mastery leads to a feeling of competence. When beginning walkers feel safe walking with hands outstretched, they try walking while carrying something. They practice and fall; they practice some more until they are good at it. *They feel a sense of control which is the feeling of competence.*

Confidence is that feeling of mastery. When we feel competent or good at something, we own the new skill. It becomes part of us, and we can use this knowledge selectively when we want or need it. We do not have to practice; we know we can walk when we want to. When a child feels confident in her ability to walk, she quits practicing walking and starts trying to climb or run instead.

Pride comes from mastery. This is what leads to self-esteem. When children know that they can explore, take the challenge, ask questions, practice a new skill, and become competent, they become strong from within. When you master a skill, you have become a new person.



BLOCKS OF PRIDE

Learning by Doing Is the Best Way to Learn



Approach

Assess the child's mood and attention span. Select appropriate toys or activities.



Get the child's attention.

Move close to the child. Establish eye contact. Introduce toys or activity. Start or model play.



Follow the child's lead.

Let the child respond to toys his or her own way. Follow the child's lead. Continue what the child seems to enjoy. Share interest, excitement, and joy.



Extend and expand the play.

Take turns; imitate the child. Let the child problem solve. Help when frustrated or stuck. Encourage the child with each step of the task. Change the play slightly or add something new. Ignore mistakes.



Wait for the child to show pride.

Let the child bring the activity to a close. If the child masters a task, wait for the child to look at you. Congratulate the child's action with joy and love. Let the child choose a new activity or repeat this one. Stop if the child is tired, hungry, or no longer interested.