



Play Day

Understanding Play

Play is how children learn about the world. Children are constantly learning through play, and at every age children will play in ways that challenge and teach—developing motor skills, creating intellectual concepts, and feeding an expanding joy and curiosity about everything.

Unfortunately, many parents don't understand that children are working as hard as they can at very important tasks. Adults mistakenly have learned that play is trivial and work is important. Along with this assumption comes condemnation of many of the aspects of play—noise, process-orientation, repetition, and changing activities at will. Parents assume educational activities must be like the school activities they remember—quiet, product-oriented, linear, and controlled by time periods.

The result is that well-meaning parents try to provide educational toys and experiences for children who aren't ready for those activities—and who would do fairly well preparing

themselves for those learning experiences if they were allowed to play. This unfortunate clashing of children's needs with parents' expectations can frustrate an entire family.

Play Day

A play day addresses this unfortunate clash by offering play activities for children and helping parents understand why and how children play. It encourages the family to enjoy play together and helps parents learn about activities and environments that provide rewarding play.

Organizing

A play day requires play experts and heavy-duty play equipment. In other words, a club should work with early childhood educators from preschools, child-care centers, and Head Start programs. Supplement this core group with some parents, a psychologist, and a pediatrician or pediatric nurse.

Encourage the group to plan activities, assign coaches and supervisors to each activity area, and contribute equipment. Plan discussion times during which parents can learn about the needs of children in specific

developmental stages.

Establish the club's function as logistical support. Club members can help publicize the event, transport and set up equipment, act as safety monitors, provide refreshments, and clean up.

A play day can be staged at any time during the year, but two particularly good occasions are the Week of the Young Child, sponsored by the US National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) each April, and Kiwanis Kids' Day, the fourth Saturday in September.

Activities

Activities for play day depend on season and location. Outdoor settings are conducive to large muscle activities, exploration, and more involvement with water, sand, dirt, plants, and animals. Indoor settings allow block play, puzzle play, and more controlled activities. Circle songs, dress-up and imaginative dramas, art and crafts, and many other activities work indoors or out.

No matter what the setting, activities should meet the needs of every stage of development from infancy through age five. Parents should leave the event

knowing specific activities that their children currently enjoy. As the play day takes shape, the planners can create a list of ages (birth to four months, four to eight months, eight to 12 months, 12 to 18 months, and years two, three, four, and five), noting the specific activities available for each age group and the play leaders or advisers for this group. This ensures attention is given to each group.

A second checklist—or a cross list for a matrix—will ensure variety in the play activities. Try to provide different kinds of play activities:

- ☐ Large muscle or motor
- ☐ Construction
- ☐ Creative and craft
- ☐ Drama or make-believe
- ☐ Manipulative
- ☐ Games and songs
- ☐ Water and sand
- ☐ Quiet

Activity areas and age groups should be separated by boundaries that direct children toward appropriate play.

Special activities for parents can educate them about toy making at home (such as making building blocks out of milk cartons), safety during play (dangers on playgrounds), and health concerns (coping with cuts and bumps).

Themed Play Days

An interesting variation on a play day is a messy fun day. It provides young children with an opportunity to do all the things their parents don't want them to do at home. Parents bring their children in their oldest clothes and let them play in mud, finger paint, and body

paint; put on make-up; build dams in a creek; participate in a cake-eating contest; and enjoy whatever other messy activities the sponsors create. Then, all the kids rinse off in sprinklers and hoses.

Other variations could introduce children to farm animals and pets, explore nature, focus on winter activities, or encourage dressing up in costumes for the entire event.

Setting

A neighborhood play day may work well at a child-care center, preschool, or church. This puts the event where most of the equipment is. A community event may require a larger setting, such as a park or a school. If businesses provide financial sponsorship, they may push to stage the event in their parking lot or a blocked-off street.

If a proposed setting is outdoors, the club should ensure availability of drinking water, rest rooms, shady areas, and tables and chairs. Additional faucets, convenient parking, and a playground are helpful.

Sponsorship

The costs for a play day should be minimal. Equipment can be loaned by child-care providers and toy stores (with a follow-up sale on pre-tested toys). Some toys can be created by volunteers, such as:

- ☐ Blocks made from milk cartons
- ☐ Bubble makers made from coat hangers
- ☐ Volcanoes made from two-liter soft-drink

bottles, vinegar, and baking soda

- ☐ Drums made from coffee cans, paper or cloth, and tape
- ☐ Paper boats and hats

Refreshments are optional, but a restaurant or food store probably can be persuaded to donate soft drinks, ice, and paper cups. If food is served, it should appeal to young children and not present choking hazards.

Publicity

A flier about play day can go home with all the children in child-care programs and preschools. It can be posted in churches, food stores, pharmacies, toy stores, children's clothing stores, and offices of pediatricians.

Ask the local newspaper to become a sponsor of the event by running a free advertisement about play day. Offer the same opportunity to a radio station.

Encourage the newspaper to send a photographer to the play day—cute pictures of kids are likely to make the next edition. Be sure the Kiwanis logo is prominently displayed.

Evaluation

Work with the play day committee to create a short evaluation form that parents can complete before they leave. This will tell the group what parts of the play day were most successful and what needs to be changed for the following year.

Information

The NAEYC can provide a wide range of books, brochures, and videotapes about child play, supervision, safety, and activity ideas.

National Association for the
Education of Young Children
1509 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
202/232-8777

Visit the NAEYC website at
www.naeyc.org and click on
“resources” to use their on-line
catalogue.

Membership Potential

In every service project
your club develops, watch for
opportunities to recruit new
members.

- ☐ As you develop
partnerships and
coalitions with other
organizations, invite
representatives to your

meetings and urge them
to join your club.

- ☐ As you seek additional
resources from
companies to support a
project, invite
representatives to a
meeting for the club to
formally thank them.
Then, follow-up with an
invitation to join.
- ☐ When club members
bring spouses or friends
to assist at events, ask if
they’ve considered
joining the club.
- ☐ When people talk to you
during service projects,
invite them to come to a
club meeting.
- ☐ When you send news
releases about your
projects to local papers

and radio stations, be
sure to include the club’s
meeting time and
location.

Remember that everyone
who helps you with a project or
tells you it’s a good idea is a
potential member for your club.
Point out that they would have
many more opportunities to
serve the community and to
influence the direction of club
service projects if they became
members. And, tell them how
rewarding you find the club.

Sample Flier

Play Day

Learn what your children know!

Play isn’t just fun; it’s educational!

Bring your children ages five and under to:

- ☐ Learn why children play
- ☐ Discover the way your children think
- ☐ Find out how you can help them learn and . . .
- ☐ Have fun playing

10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday, April 23
Tiny Tots Preschool and Lincoln Park
1923 Lincoln Drive

- ☐ Free Brochures
- ☐ Free Refreshments
- ☐ Free Fun!

*Sponsored by the Bedford Journal, Radio Station WCCB, Bedford
Child Care Association, Ohio Association for Education of
Young Children, and the Kiwanis Club of Bedford*

Sample Evaluation Form

Name (Optional) _____
Phone (Optional) _____

Yes No

___ ___ Did you and your child enjoy the play day?
___ ___ Did you learn something about your child today?
___ ___ Has this event changed your attitude or understanding of play?
___ ___ Will you respond to your child differently?
___ ___ Did you learn activities for you and your child to play?
___ ___ Would you recommend a play day to other families?
___ ___ Would you come to another play day?

What did you like most about the play day? _____

What should be changed in future play days? _____



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