

Learn to Play

Helping our children access the awesome powers of imaginative play



What is *'Learn To Play'*?

'Learn to Play' is a fun, non-threatening child-led therapy, aimed at helping further develop a child's self-initiated pretend play. It is designed for children up to 6 years of age. Some older children can also benefit from such a program if there are some shortfalls in their play skills (Stagnitti, 1998).

Children are invited to participate in a whole range of fun imaginative play activities designed by a trained therapist catering for the individual child and their current needs and struggles in play. The therapist on a weekly basis will design and tailor an individual program in order to progress a child's play skills up the developmental ladder.



Through increasing a child's ability to self-initiate pretend play, a range of developmental skills will be further supported. Children that can engage deeply in imaginative play are better able to engage in school with higher language skills, and increase their ability to play within social context. While, also being more aware of their emotions and the emotions of others (Stagnitti & Unsworth, 2000). In participating in *'Learn to Play'* and developing imaginative play skills of a child, families can expect a beneficial effect on their child's readiness to learn and an increased understanding of the social world (Stagnitti, 2009).

Imaginative play has many benefits....(Lillard et al, 2013)



Language



Narrative thinking



Divergent thinking



Social skills



Literacy competence



Problem solving



Fine motor skills



Emotional regulation



Gross motor skills



Visual-perceptual skills

Social skills

When a child enters the world of imaginative play, they are placing themselves into created pretend social scenarios where they begin to learn how to steer themselves through many different social interactions (Gleason, 2017). One child might pretend to be a doctor while the other a patient and such a play scenario will help children practice; turn taking, understanding different roles in life and positively communicating with others. When children pretend to be another person, they are beginning to think and experiment in what it might be like to be that 'other' person. This will help a child begin to think beyond their own concerns, an important stepping-stone in building empathy for others (Wait & Rees, 2013). Through imaginative play children play out conflicts and possible resolutions, a necessary life skill.



Emotional skills

Imaginative play allows children to develop coping skills for difficult situations (Lindsay & Colwell, 2003). This begins as they start to re-enact many different emotions in their play. For example a child that might have suffered some uncomfortable emotions from a visit to a hospital might create a play scene in which their teddy is sick and might need a hospital or doctor visit. This play will allow the child to re-visit their own emotions, but from a slightly less difficult and less direct emotional space. This helps a child achieve more emotional regulation (Lillard et al, 2013).



Language skills

A significant benefit from developing imaginative play skills is its many links to language development (Miller & Almon, 2009). Children observe adults and others around them and will often use words and phrases they have heard around them and incorporate these into their pretend play. Children engaged in imaginative play together allows for further language advancement, through interaction and communication (Lillard et al, 2013). Also links have also been established between pretend play and its role in developing stronger writing skills development in children (Pallegrini, 1980).



Creative skills

A child's ability to be creative will help build upon their problem solving skills. Through developing and engaging in imaginative play children naturally begin to become more innovative (Russ, 2003). Developing and increasing a creative side for adults and children alike, allows us to be able to cope well in a variety of differing situations (Russ, 2014).



Cognitive (thinking) skills

Pretend play is a very important part of a child's development into a more complex thinking being (Pierucci et al, 2014). Imaginative play involves numerous thinking skills. A child that is feeding a doll and then putting them to sleep will use a number of thinking skills. They will think about what toys they need, organise a set of play actions and hold this all together in their mind as they play. This is a fairly complex thinking process for a young child. Complex forms of imaginative play, such as, taking on the role of a character in play use more complex thinking skills and this in turn helps a child's overall cognitive development (Stagnitti, 2000).



Which children will enjoy and benefit from 'Learn to Play'?

Many children will enjoy and benefit from such a fun and active form of building play skills.

These children may be experiencing some difficulties in their ability to play and development of pretend play skills. They will show some difficulties in self-initiating pretend play. Children who are struggling socially with their peers often will benefit from extending their pretend play skills (Stagnitti, 1998). Some children that are struggling in their learning at school and other environments might also benefit from further development of these play skills.

It is designed for children up to 6 years of age with developmental delays. It is suitable for children with autistic spectrum disorders, language disorders and other disabilities that might have effected their play development (Stagnitti, 1998).

The program can be used by play therapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, special education teachers, developmental psychologists and pre-school and other early childhood workers, that have been fully trained in providing this intervention (Stagnitti, 1998).

What the process of 'Learn to Play' entails?

Each child will participate in 8 play therapy session (plus one initial assessment session) using 'Learn to Play' as the therapeutic intervention.

The child would be seen weekly over a nine-week period by a trained therapist, who would bring a long all their own toys and necessary materials.

Each session would be tailored to the child's specific needs. Allowing for the child to make significant developments in their imaginative play skills.

Children with significant delays in their play skills will benefit from a longer period using 'Learn to Play'.

(Stagnitti, 1998).

For more information on "Learn to Play"
please visit www.learnktoplayevents.com

Reference List

- Gleason, T. R. (2017). The psychological significance of play with imaginary companions in early childhood. *Learning and Behavior*, 45(4), 432–440.
- Lillard, A. S., Lerner, M. D., Hopkins, E. J., Dore, R. A., Smith, E. D., & Palmquist, C. M. (2013). The Impact of Pretend Play on Children's Development: A Review of the Evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 139(1), 1–34
- Lindsay, E. W. and Colwell, M. J. (2003) Preschoolers' emotional competence: Links to pretend and physical play. *Child Study Journal* 33, 39-52.
- Miller, E., & Almon, J. (2009). *Crisis in the kindergarten: Why children need to play in school*. College Park, MD: Alliance for Childhood.
- Pierucci, J. M., O'Brien, C. T., McInnis, M. A., Gilpin, A. T., & Barber, A. B. (2014). Fantasy orientation constructs and related executive function development in preschool: Developmental benefits to executive functions by being a fantasy-oriented child. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 38(1), 62–69.
- Pallegrini, A.D. (1980) The relationship between Kindergarten's play and achievement in pretending, language and writing. *Psychology in the Schools* 17, 530-535.
- Russ, S. W. (2003) Play and Creativity: Developmental Issues. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 47, 291-303
- Russ, S. W. (2014). Pretend play and creativity: An overview. In S. W. Russ, *Pretend play in childhood: Foundation of adult creativity* (pp. 7-28). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.
- Stagnitti, K. (1998) *Learn to play: A Program to Develop a Child's Imaginative Play Skills*. Melbourne: Co-ordinates Publications.
- Stagnitti, K. (2009) Children and Play. In K. Stagnitti & R. Cooper, (Eds), *Play As Therapy: Assessment and Therapeutic Interventions*. (pp59-69).
- Stagnitti, K. (2009) Pretend Play Assessment. In K. Stagnitti & R. Cooper, (Eds), *Play As Therapy: Assessment and Therapeutic Interventions*. (pp87-101).
- Stagnitti, K., & Unsworth, C. (2000). The importance of pretend play in child development: An occupational therapy perspective. *The British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 63(3), 121-127.
- Waite, S., & Rees, S. (2014). Practising empathy: enacting alternative perspectives through imaginative play. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 44(1), 1–18.

Images

Photo images taken from Pexels - www.pexels.com

