



**Work  
Together  
Wednesday**

## 5 Essentials to Meaningful Play

Here are five elements essential to meaningful play that create those rich memories we treasure:

### **Children make their own decisions.**

When children choose how to play for themselves, they experience freedom in making those choices. They also begin to see connections between choice and the consequences or results of that choice. Open-ended materials can be used in many ways so children can decide for themselves how to use them. For example, a child can imagine a block to be a fire truck or any number of things. A toy fire truck, on the other hand, is usually used as a fire truck.

### **Children are intrinsically motivated.**

The impulse to play comes from a natural desire to understand the world. This play impulse is as strong as your child's desire for food or sleep. It is this intrinsic motivation that allows a child to regulate her own feelings and desires in order to keep playing. Because children eventually find it more important to be part of play with their friends than to satisfy their own wants and needs at that moment, children learn self-control. And self-control has been shown to lead to success in later years, especially in today's information age, where distractions are part of daily life.

### **Children become immersed in the moment.**

In true play, children are so fully engaged that they lose awareness of their surroundings, time, and space. In this risk-free atmosphere where reality is suspended, children have the security and safety they need to experiment, try new ideas, and investigate the laws of nature.

### **Play is spontaneous, not scripted.**

Often, play is totally unplanned. Other times, play is planned but a child impulsively makes a change. One child changes his mind, or perhaps a toy does not cooperate. This sense of the unknown provides children with opportunities to develop flexibility in their thinking and decision making, which is a vital life skill.

### **Play is enjoyable.**

Play always has an emotional response attached to it. Without this emotional connection, the experience is simply an activity; it is not PLAY. Enjoyment is the direct result of engaging in play. It is FUN!