



FROM THE GROWING KIDS' PARENTING RESOURCE LIBRARY

Play and Preschoolers

When it comes to fantasy play and children, no age excels at it more than the preschooler.

During the preschool years between three and five, children get really involved with fantasy play. Their tea set become the foundation for a party with imaginary friends, or the tea towel becomes the superhero's cape as your child battles evil.

Fantasy play is a normal healthy part of a child's development. In fact, fantasy play is at the very root of what makes us human says psychologist Dr. Sandra Shiner. "One of the distinctly human characteristics is the ability to fantasize, that is, the ability to bend, stretch and change the real world into another world that is perhaps more frightening or more delightful. We should encourage this in our children because creative thinkers must first fantasize about ideas before they can make these ideas reality."

Dr. Shiner adds that parents can learn a lot about themselves by tuning into their child's fantasy play. "If you want to find out what kind of parent you are, just eavesdrop and listen to how your child talks to her doll. Very often you can hear how she mimics the parenting role by how she plays with her toys."

Of course, if we're to encourage fantasy play, it's important to choose toys which don't overly direct a child's play. Child life specialist, Bindy Sweet thinks that "the best kind of toys or activities to have around are the really classic things that can grow with the child and the child can develop more skill in. For example, having paint and paper in the house; you can start when they're 18 months old and continue on for many years watching them develop more skills using them. Classic things like blocks and Lego are great and always useful, they never go out of style and kids always get a lot of enjoyment out of them."

Sweet adds that having a play area where a child can play undisturbed is just as important as the toys themselves. "It's really nice to have a place set aside for them to play at home, whether it's their room or a corner in the kitchen because they will get into games", says Sweet. "While we think they're bored it's not true. Kids love to play the same game day after day and just keep making adjustments to it. So if you can stand the mess, then I think it's great to have a little spot set aside like that."