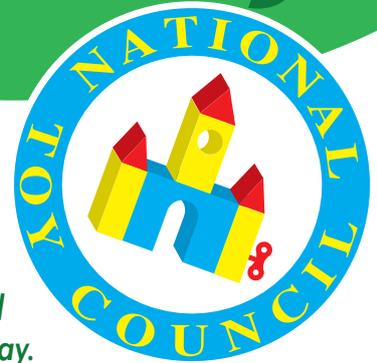


# Intergenerational Play



*In the past, three and sometimes four generations lived and played together under one roof. But today's child has an average fewer brothers and sisters, more working mothers, more single-parent households and grandparents may live miles away.*



Parents more and more want their children to play at home, thus limiting their play with others. So playing games together with parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters is even more important.

Children learn from all types of play - playing alone as well as playing with others. Solitary play teaches patience and imagination, while playing with others develops social skills, such as how to make friends and how to communicate clearly with playmates. Children thrive when they experience variety in their play.

The infant's first play experiences are intergenerational, when adults smile at, tickle and talk to the baby in an effort to elicit a sustained and pleasurable response. Psychologist Jerome Bruner referred to infant social games as "action dialogues", since many properties of a verbal conversation are found in games: the players focus on the same topic and co-ordinate their actions. They learn to initiate and eventually terminate the game. Rolling a ball back and forth is a simple example of play as action dialogue.

The richest play occurs when adults take an active role. The most creative children are those who have had adults involved in their play. When children play with adults, they display higher levels of language and problem solving skills than when playing with their peers. It is not only children who profit from playing with grandparents. Grandparents benefit too.

## BENEFITS OF PLAY FOR THE ELDERLY

One of the joys of being a parent or a grandparent is the opportunity it offers to play with children. For grandparents and grandchildren, play provides the ideal setting for getting to know one another while sharing the joys of play. Parents and grandparents provide the foundation for the child's future, raise the child's self-esteem,

happiness, achievements and outlook for the future. Shared playtime is an opportunity for mutual enjoyment and discovery. While playing, adults are both teachers and learners. At all times, they are role models.

According to studies, play is especially good for the elderly. Play has psychological and health benefits - it promotes relaxation, keeping the serious demands of life in perspective, thereby reducing stress. Play is not only fun and relaxing, it helps to maintain cognitive skills, like memory and problem solving, at a high level. Active games increase muscle tone, co-ordination and reaction time.

Make-believe is one form of play where adults can, if they wish, harmlessly and effortlessly influence the development of the child's social and moral values, giving lessons in co-operation, honesty and being a good loser as well as a good winner.

## TOYS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL PLAY

Suitable toys for intergenerational play are those that appeal to both children and adults, though perhaps for different reasons. Following are a few toys suitable for intergenerational play.

There are **board games** for every age and every ability. Man or woman, boy or girl, board games - especially those that use dice, spinners or cards - usually give a player, regardless of age or experience, a fair chance to win.



This offers children a rare opportunity to experience equality with grandparents, parents, and older brothers and sisters. Board games help problem-solving skills in both children and adults and teach children to be patient and take turns.

To encourage creativity and imagination, use **arts and crafts materials, puzzles and construction sets.**

Many toys encourage **reading, writing, drawing and problem-solving.**

**Dolls, puppets and soft toys** will promote fantasy, language and role-play.

**Computer and video games** can enhance reaction time, memory and promote a sense of well-being among both children and elderly players.

Indeed children may have the rare pleasure of teaching adults how to use these games.

**Model toys, vehicles and trains** can develop physical skills and co-ordination. Toys with moving parts teach how things work and fit together. For the elderly, they keep fine muscles working smoothly.

**Musical toys** can always be enjoyed together.

**Science kits** develop imagination, creativity, attention to detail and appreciation of nature.

**Shape sorters** are appropriate for infant and toddler play and help fine motor control and cognitive/perceptual processes, and in children, abstract thinking.

## GUIDELINES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL PLAY

Adults can learn to become play partners by trying to regain the playful attitude of a child. Let go of the adult notion that play is only for children. It is the fortunate adult who has never completely abandoned childish things.



- Don't worry if you don't know how to use some toys. Let your imagination be your guide. Using toys in novel ways will help a child's creativity.

- Let older children teach you how to use the latest toy or computer game. They will take great pleasure in teaching you what they know.

- Play at the child's level. You can add to the complexity of the play, but let the child determine the direction of play.

- Have fun! Don't use playtime to stretch your child's skills. They will develop anyway. Just have fun together.

- Encourage and congratulate children when a difficult task is completed. This will build self-confidence.

- Do not solve every task for the child, but encourage her to solve the problem for herself. Doing something for a child is not playing.

- Do not choose toys or games that are too complex for the child's capabilities. Something too difficult can be frustrating. And something too easy is no fun.

- Safety is the first requirement of all play. Ensure that toys and games are suitable to the child's age and abilities. Read the safety information on the package.



*The National Toy Council is concerned with child welfare and promoting a sensible attitude towards toys and play. Its members include representatives of the Child Accident Prevention Trust, British Toy & Hobby Association, National Association of Toy and Leisure Libraries, The Trading Standards Institute, BBC Children's Television, Kidscape, national press, academics, retailers and toy safety experts.*

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

BTHA, 80 Camberwell Road, London SE5 0EG

See all of the National Toy Council's leaflets on the internet at [www.btha.co.uk](http://www.btha.co.uk)

