

TWELVE KEY TYPES OF PLAY

THERE ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PLAY, and they often overlap in rich play scenarios. Knowing and watching for the broad types helps sensitize teachers and parents to the shifting landscapes children create. It also provides a tool for assessing whether a playful kindergarten is providing adequate opportunity and materials for all types of play.

Large-motor play

Children love to climb, run, slide, swing, jump, and engage in every type of movement possible. Such play develops coordination, balance, and a sense of one's body in the space around it.

Small-motor play

Play with small toys and activities like stringing beads, playing with puzzles, and sorting objects into types develops dexterity.

Mastery play

Children often repeat an action in play and persevere until they master it, such as making dozens of "birthday packages" to learn to tie bows, or playing on a balance beam to become a "circus performer."

Rules-based play

Kindergartners and grade-school children enjoy the challenge of making up their own rules and the social negotiation involved in adapting the rules for each play situation.

Construction play

Building houses, ships, forts, and other structures is a basic form of play that requires skill and imagination.

Make-believe play

This broad category incorporates many other play types and is rich with language, problem-solving, and imagination. It frequently begins with "Let's pretend" and goes on to include anything children might have experienced or imagined.

Symbolic play

Children take an object at hand and convert it into the toy or prop they need through a fluid process of fantasy or imagination.

Language play

Children develop mastery by playing with words, rhymes, verses, and songs they make up or change. They tell stories and dramatize them. They are fascinated by foreign languages, especially when they are presented playfully in story, verse, or song.

Playing with the arts

Children integrate all forms of art into their play, using whatever materials are at hand to draw, model, create music, perform puppet shows, and so on. They explore the arts and use them to express their feelings and ideas.

Sensory play

Most children enjoy playing with dirt, sand, mud, water, and other materials with different textures, sounds, and smells. Such play develops the senses.

Rough-and-tumble play

This fundamental form of play is found in animals as well as human children. Animals know how to play roughly without injury by rounding their body gestures and not aiming for dominance. Children can be helped to do the same if their play becomes too aggressive.

Risk-taking play

Children extend their abilities through risky play and learn to master challenging environments. They generally know how far they can go without actually hurting themselves. Regrettably, most current play spaces are designed to be as risk-free as possible, giving children little chance to assess risks and set their own boundaries.