



THE REAL BENEFITS OF PRETEND PLAY

Supporting and encouraging imaginative play at Family Day

When children's television host Mr. Rogers said: "Play is the work of childhood," he was right on the money. Play, in all of its forms, is a critical part of a child's development.

When we think about children playing, we might imagine a game of soccer, tag or basketball. But there is another kind of play called pretend play (or imaginative play or sociodramatic play) that all children take part in – and sometimes adults may not even recognize when it's happening.

Pretend play is play that involves both imitation and imagination. According to Ann Epstein, in *The HighScope Preschool Curriculum*, when young children imitate, they use gestures, sounds, words and props to represent the world they know. As they represent what they see, hear, think and feel, they make sense of the people and the events in their lives.

If you've ever seen children flying an airplane made of paper, whipping up a plate of plastic spaghetti, or fixing a doll's "sore" arm, you've seen pretend play being carried out. And at Family Day, we encourage and support pretend play in our programs.

"Children's imaginations are truly magical," says Issa Marie Mendoza, Centre Supervisor at the Divine Infant program. "A piece of bread could be used as a telephone for a toddler pretending to call Mom, or a wooden block could be a hammer being used by a preschooler to fix the shelves in the classroom. The possibilities are endless."

PRETEND PLAY AND DEVELOPMENT

At first glance, pretend play might seem simple. But as pretend play is all about discovery and exploration, children are actually growing and developing.¹

"Pretend play is very fluid at Family Day" notes Lisa Shortall, Manager of Training. "Our curriculum is very responsive to all

children, and there are no start or finish times. The opportunities are always there."

Pretend play begins at about 18 months, notes Epstein, as children imitate the actions and sounds of familiar people, animals, objects and situations. Parallel play

(playing alongside others) arises in the second year, and this becomes social (playing *with* others) at around age three. During the preschool years, pretend play also becomes more imaginative and imitative.

By age six, pretend play often declines, says Epstein, as imagination becomes more internalized. This is why the early years are so critical for pretend play – and why it is a big part of Family Day's programs.

According to Michelle AuDuong, an R.E.C.E. at Family Day, children of all ages and stages are involved in pretend play every single day – whether spontaneously or as a group activity. "Pretend play happens everywhere – in the home area, indoors, outdoors, in all program areas," she says.

NUMEROUS BENEFITS

There are so many paybacks to pretend play it is hard to list them all. But experts agree on some major benefits:

Encouraging Creativity: Early pretend play enhances a child's capacity for creativity. By absorbing themselves in an inventive game, children can practice using their imagination.² Julianne Torio, an R.E.C.E. at Family Day, says through pretend play "children are able to express themselves, explore different roles, and think outside the box. It's a great way to show how creative they are and how they can problem-solve."

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Supporting Social Development: When children pretend to be different characters, or control objects in their own way, they are experimenting with life roles. It's about learning who they are as individuals and how they fit into the world around them.³

Developing Language Skills: Pretend play allows children to experiment with language, and to be heard and understood. Children will be exposed to new vocabulary, and the more scenarios they involve themselves in (e.g., hospitals, restaurants, airports), the more their vocabulary will improve.⁴

Working Through Problems: When children pretend, they are able to work through common childhood feelings or fears. Linda Saad, Program Consultant at Family Day, says it "helps relieve stress, helps them work through their likes and dislikes, and lets them act out their emotions." Research suggests make-believe games can ultimately help with self-regulation, including reduced aggression, respect, and empathy.⁵

ENCOURAGING PRETEND PLAY

While pretend play is a great learning opportunity, it is also a good way for children and educators to build positive relationships.

"At Family Day, we follow the children's lead and play *alongside* and *with* them," says Saad. "Educators are involved but do not take over." Our educators participate as partners in children's play and help to further the play and incorporate important elements like cultural diversity and inclusion.

"We encourage imaginative play by providing a variety of open-ended materials that inspire children's creativity and curiosity," says Mendoza. "As educators, we do not limit children with what we think things are supposed to be, rather we continue to be open to their suggestions and sensitive to their non-verbal cues."

Developmental benefits aside, pretend play is also just a whole lot of fun. At Family Day, children are free to really push the boundaries of their imagination – and, ultimately, their learning. Notes Shortall: "Pretend play is really a dress rehearsal for life."

1, 5 *The Need for Pretend Play in Child Development*, Scientific American, By Scott Barry Kaufman, Jerome L. Singer and Dorothy G. Singer

2, 3, 4 *Imagination and Creativity: Why Pretend Play Is Important to Child Development*, Pentagon Play Co. UK



WHY WE LOVE PRETEND PLAY

Pretend play allows children to develop several cognitive, social and emotional skills. Here's a look:

Enhances Language Children learn to verbally express their ideas and opinions through pretend play.

Sparks Creativity As soon as children put on a chef's hat or doctor's coat, they begin imagining themselves as these characters; they create their own worlds full of excitement and fun.

Enhances Social Skills When children engage in pretend play with others, they develop important social skills such as taking turns, sharing, teamwork and cooperation.

Increases Independence Pretend play lets children create their own worlds that are separate from those in which they live. This helps to foster independence.

Allows for Self-Expression Through play, children can express how they feel about certain situations and circumstances in their lives.

Helps Develop Life Skills Engaging in pretend play, especially role-playing, helps children learn and develop life skills – from learning to care for others to tying their shoes.

Fosters Leadership Pretend play can help children become leaders; it also helps them follow directions when they listen to a child in charge.

Teaches Social Norms Pretend play is a great way to teach children about social norms and concepts. For many children, play can help them learn how to behave in the real world.

Information, in part, from: "10 Benefits of Pretend and Imaginary Play" by Jessica Lopa, mommyuniversitynj.com

CHILD CARE AND YOUR VOTE



I recently had a conversation with parents who are hoping to access licensed child care for their two young children. In order to pay rent, meet all of their bills, and remain employed, this family will most likely have to compromise on child care choices at a time when there should be no

compromise. During this chat, I was once again struck by the major dilemma facing so many families in Ontario: child care is beyond their reach.

Building a child care system relies on commitments from all three levels of government. The current federal and provincial governments have already made the commitment to continue to build a system that will expand and enhance the accessibility option for families. During the past five years, the early learning sector has seen improved legislation, funding and expansion, yet this is still not enough to solve the child care dilemma for all families.

Recently, the Ontario government commissioned Dr. Gordon Cleveland to write a report on child care affordability, which I would encourage you to read: <https://bit.ly/2vU25Xs>

The issues of accessibility and affordability in quality early learning environments are a cornerstone of the upcoming provincial election on June 7. I urge you to ask your candidates what their party will do to continue to build a system that expands and improves accessibility for children into a licensed child care system – one where parents feel their children are safe and are receiving learning opportunities that encourage development.

If you are reading this column, chances are you have already accessed the licensed child care system. Yet many of you have likely been up against uncertainty, waiting times, and compromises to have your children here.

What can we all do to ensure more families have access to affordable, accessible child care? Think about that when you go to vote in June.

SAVE THE DATE

Family Day is pleased to announce an outdoor learning event for families and staff on Saturday, October 13, 2018. The event will be held at the Kortright Centre for Conservation in Woodbridge – rain or shine. More details will follow; for now, just mark it in your calendar!



REGISTER FOR SUMMER CAMP

With summer just around the corner, it's time to sign up for Family Day camp. To register your child for an enriching summer at one of our extended-day or school-age camp programs, visit familydaycare.com. Spots are available on a first-come, first-served basis, so register early!

I'M A **Happy** CAMPER



STAFF TRAINING PROMOTES OUTDOOR LEARNING



Fifty staff members took place in an 'Outdoor Training' workshop on April 2, 2018. The training was divided into two parts. The first part, called "Nature and Me," saw staff discussing the benefits of nature and activities that could be incorporated into programming. The second part, "Loose Parts," was a hands-on session that focused on the ways loose parts can unleash children's imaginations and motivate their learning.



PLEASE COMPLETE OUR PARENT SURVEY

It's almost time for our annual parent survey. Emails will be sent out on June 11, and you will have until June 22 to fill out the survey online. Your feedback will enable us to serve you better, help drive innovation at Family Day, and assist us in providing your child with the best care available.



WE ROCKED, WE ROLLED...

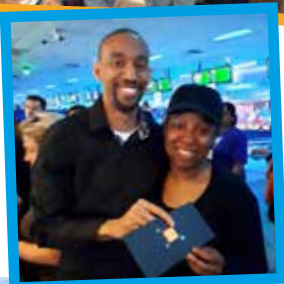
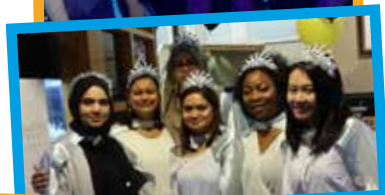
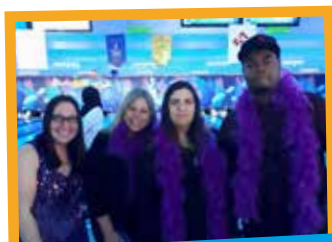
More than 200 Family Day staff, parents and agency partners took part in our seventh annual Bowling for Family Day fundraiser on April 21, 2018. And they helped to raise \$26,000 (and counting).

Held at Markham Bowl and Brunswick Zone Bramalea Lanes, guests were treated to great music,

terrific prizes and delicious pizza – and they got to show off their fancy footwork in the lanes.

We would like to thank everyone involved, including our generous sponsors, the bowling alleys, and all of our terrific volunteers.

Photos: Makda Musa, Heather Ryan, Janine Druery



We are bowled over by your support

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FOCUS Newsletter

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For countless families, Family Day is the only way!