

Do We Have To Play With Our Children? Is It Needed?

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Abstract: No parent is born a parent rather parenting is a process wherein a parent grows from an individual state to being a parent. Parents shape a child's whole childhood and in the process of shaping 'play' occupies a major role and it fosters the parent child relationship. Play in childhood doesn't just reflect the current level of development in the child but rather it seems to take forward its effect throughout the life of the child and helps parents understand the child's perspective easily. For a child, play is not just a play but it is a way of self expression. Playing with the child gives child a sense of being important to the parent this later facilitates a sense of optimism in the child. Being a parent is never an easy role to go about, it calls for a lot of effort often parents are torn between the parenting roles and professional role. Especially in the Indian scenario parents playing with their kids are often valued less and it is not considered as an important element in child development. The advent of technology too has a very important role to contribute to the devaluing of play in today's world.

Keywords: Parenting, play, child development, positive parent, attachment, emotional expression, quality time.

INTRODUCTION

"There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots, the other, wings" [1].

Parenting is a process or state of being a parent. The process points to the idea that parenting involves providing a safe and secure environment for the child. Peace and prosperity is something that we all want to have in the world and the role of family, especially parenting, in this aspect is very vital. Parents should be flexible considering the uniqueness of each child than being rigid to the traditional parenting practices [2]. Parents have the ability to shape their children's development and this has been a topic of discussion to researchers, philosophers and parents themselves for a long time.

No parent is born with all the skills of parenting as such but some do have inborn temperaments of parent. Parents grow into their roles. It is mostly through trial and error that parents learn to parent. This process of development of knowledge and skills related to planning, creating, giving birth and providing care for the offspring is what is meant by parenting. Parenting starts with the planning to become a parent and it is not only focused on rearing the child but also on developing ways of growing with the child.

The role of the parent changes as the child grows because each age group demands specific

developmental tasks, which are to be met at that specific age. When a child is young the main role of parents are nurturance and care but as the child grow the role transforms to that of making the child into an independent individual. For a child the attention, care and availability of a parent is something that the child considers to be important because these acts as a basis for the development of trust in the child according to Vygotsky (1967) [3].

The quality of the parent child relationship is an important dimension of parenting irrespective of the age group of the child [2]. From a wide range of outcomes studies conducted in the field of psychology it was understood that this parent child relationship is associated with the skills for learning and academic achievement, social competence and child's development of self-concept. The secure attachment formed between parent and child is an indicator of the quality of the family relationships. The social and behavioural outcomes shown in adulthood are also a result of this relationship.

Learning to be a parent is a process which is continuously constructed and reconstructed by the culture [4]. Positive parent simply implies a parent who

is loving, understanding, and reasonable and a protective teacher and an effective role model. Being a loving parent indicates to the child that the parent loves the child unconditionally and attends to the child's needs and are able to listen to the child without judgement. Thus a loving parent provides the child a warm and nurturing environment which facilitates the growth of the child. An understanding parent is one who understands the temperament of the child and also the strengths of the child and one who doesn't enforce things upon the child. Flexibility is a major aspect of understanding the child. Reasonable aspect of positive parenting means that being consistent with the limits and expectations and making the child aware of the consequences for irresponsible behaviour.

Authoritative parenting style and warmth shown by these parents have shown to have considerable effects on the resilience development of the child. Parents who provide an environment within the family for open communication and focus on problem based approach and uses this within their families also, which teaches the family to follow the same. Resilience based approach in parenting focuses on the strengths and opportunities rather than on the problems. Parental resilience can improve a child's wellbeing and can help in assisting them to face adversity.

Each parent is a unique individual; this clearly implies the unique styles and methods that each parent uses with the child. Children are good imitators so a child would always be in a vigilance state looking onto how the parent deals with challenges in life. Positive parenting is opposite to authoritarian parenting. Researches have shown that positive parenting makes the child to learn consideration and responsibility [5].

Parental warmth and responsiveness has been the two major dimensions of parenting styles which has gained emphasis over time. Parental warmth is the support or the degree of affection that is present in a parent-child relationship. And demandingness is the degree of control or strictness or the behavioural standards set by parents for their children. High levels of responsiveness have an indication onto being more children centred and are more accepting of the child. Parental responsiveness also contributes to fostering the parent child relationship. Parents who set adept behavioural standards for their children and emphasises on following them gives the child better internalised aspects about morality [6].

For children being with their mother and being with their father are two different experiences. As a father he has a major role in teaching the child in expressing his feelings openly because this teaches the child that expressing him or herself is alright. Parenting sympathy, parental practices and parenting styles have

shown to have effects on developing prosocial behaviours in adolescents [6]. The relationship with parenting practice and prosocial behaviour is through sympathy. Parenting variables affecting the moral behaviours of the child has been an aspect of growing interest for researchers. Discouraging the child from engaging in aggressive play will do no good, rather carefully monitoring aggressive play so as to prevent the child from crossing the line between mocking and real aggression is rather more important. Adults make it clear to kids that aggression is not the only way to gain attention. Adults also help the child in differentiating between hostile and instrumental aggression [7]. Specific parenting practices rather than the interaction style has shown to be having more effect on predicting the social behaviours.

Many a time's parents are torn between their parental roles and their professional. They get to spend only less time with their children due to their profession. They will always have the questions within them about priorities. In the study conducted about the goodness and the badness and the neutral experiences of a child staying alone at home when the parents are away at work. This study also speaks about quality time with the parents needed for the growth of the child [8]. Being a parent, people sometimes fail to maintain their personal relationship with their spouse. In Indian culture, education has great importance and this has an influence on the parenting practices also. Play as a factor in fostering development of the child is often neglected in the Indian culture [9].

Play is divided based on development terms as motor/physical play, social play, constructive play, fantasy play and games with rules. Physical play involves movements and it fosters motor skills of the child. At the same time constructive play occurs when the child manipulates the environment during play and fantasy play is the play that purely involves imaginative skills of the child. Whereas Social play usually involves interaction between individuals. These divisions are mainly based on themes put forth by Piaget and Vygotsky. In Vygotskian terms the role of play is not just to reflect the current level of development of the child but rather it acts as a mechanism that propels child's development forward [3]. Play acts as a source of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This implies to Vygotsky's idea that mental skills of young children are at a higher level during play time than in during other activities representing the operations at ZPD. Play in preschool period and early childhood mostly makes use of the physical space in which play occurs, which generally include the resources available and presence of adults [10].

A child's play ranges from unoccupied play to cooperative play [11]. According to his findings, initially the toddler moves their body with no sole

purpose other than feeling good. This unoccupied play that the child engages in infancy is purely a self oriented activity. Slowly the child through the medium of play learns to work as a team and relate to others (cooperative play). Children express their emotions with great intensity, when they are happy then they are really happy. Children are not able to express their emotions completely verbally like adults so the language that they choose to communicate what they feel is through play [12]. Whatever the child does or whatever the child is or in future whatever the child becomes gets expressed through their play at one point of time. These types of play are very important to the child's development. The child learns different aspects of socialization and problem solving through these plays.

Through play a child also learns to connect with others thus helping in socialization. Play also helps a child to express and communicate their emotions and also helps in moulding their natural problem solving skills. Children who engaged in indoor activities had greater fine motor skills but were found to be lower in gross motor skills. Research has also found that parents who had positive attitude towards nature fostered child's outdoor play [13].

Play is an important aspect of childhood. A parent is the first teacher and first play mate of a child. Parents use play as a medium for developing bond with the child. Through play a child learns what is expected from him/ her. The child also gets a mental framework about following rules. Play need not necessarily be physical in nature. A parent starts playing with the infant when the infant smiles and the parent smiles back. Researchers have found that play helps improve the child's social skills, motor skills and cognitive skills [14, 15]. Play is not just an important aspect of childhood but rather it is important throughout the life of an individual. Researches also show that 75% of the brain development occurs after birth. Play has neurological implications too. Play helps in stimulating brain connections which indeed lead to formation of new neural connections which whereby increases the cognitive and motor skills.

Study among Taiwanese Parents showed that Taiwanese parents give more value to play and they foster play among their children. This study also showed that the parent's gender, monthly income and educational qualification were the factors that influenced their perception towards play [14]. When a child engages in sociodramatic play, the child actively uses the imaginative and creative skills to recreate events that the child has seen or experienced. Sociodramatic play has also an implication on improving a child's fine motor skills. This benefits the cognitive skills also. Parent usually involves with the child in sociodramatic play by providing the child the

space and time to play and also by providing the toys and props needed for the play [15]. The triadic play represents the interaction between caregiver, child and toy. Triadic play and maternal interaction was studied by [16]. Results of the study indicated a gender difference in the amount of time mothers and infants spent in dyadic play. It was found to be twice more for female infants than for male children. It was also found that functional play decreased with age. Results also pointed to idea that infants receive less support from mothers when they started triadic play. Child's creative play can be enhanced through good enough mothering and a holding environment. This can help the child in self experience and finding meaning out of the play [17]. A research speaks about the influences of peer on adolescence growth. This study also gives an understanding onto the importance of the quality time spent by parents with their children [18].

Pretend play is another type of play that children usually engage in. this pretend play is a medium for the parent to get into and see things through a child's perspective. This is in relation with the fact during a parent is the first play mate of the child. Research reveals that that parent's and child who were mutually responsive during the pretence play and physical play has an increased effect on the child's social competence. They also found that this social competence was positively correlated with children's emotional knowledge [13]. The context of play has an importance in providing meaning for the play and that this context comes usually from the mother child interactions [19].

Parental attitude about gender roles have an influence on the parental perceptions of play. It was found that fathers who followed traditional gender role attitudes and permissive parenting styles were found to give less value to play. For both fathers and mothers authoritative parenting style was correlated with increased play behaviours whereas authoritarian parenting style was correlated with decreased play behaviours. The findings of the study clearly indicate that parent gender and their gender role attitudes clearly affect their attitude towards play [20]. This relationship is fostered by the kind of parenting style followed by the parents.

Studies have been carried out to analyse the effect of child's gender on the parental play behaviour and attitude but studies found out that child's gender affect child more than parents regarding the play behaviour. Girls were understood to be more established on the content of play and they were found to remain within play frame and they were also understood to have used more symbol transformation during play than boys [21].

Parental attitude towards play often influences the child's attitude also. And this attitude of the parents towards play is formed from their own home cultures. Research has found that mothers who lacked communication abilities during play failed to create their own play culture in their children. The children of the mothers who gave too many instructions during play became less responsive to play. Another finding that came out in the path of the research was that children responded well with mothers who had a consistency in the play strategies and variety in responses to play [19].

Many researchers have studied the importance of play in the parent child relationship. The results of the study pointed to that fact that maternal behaviour and maternal level of differentiation were closely linked to each other. And it was also found that maternal interaction and play with kids improve the parent child relationships [20].

In today's world when it is hard to find time to spend with children, but still the child needs time to play and relax with the parent. Playing with the child helps parents in identifying and accepting the uniqueness of the child. Family involvement with the child helps in strengthening the parent child bond. Playing with the child fosters child's self esteem and they understand what their place is in the world. Traditional roles of families have had a drastic change with passing time. Women also have started to provide financial assistance by working outside the families. This has affected the quality time spent between the parent and the child. Because of this very small kids of even three months are sent to the crèche where they are taken care by the caregivers who are unaware of the child's family values that parents, specifically, mothers create in the child. Thus the role that a parent holds in the child's development is very crucial and this role can be facilitated by play.

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