



The Best Things in Life Really are Free

As the downturn of our economy continues, our children are very likely to notice our growing concerns. They may be listening to our conversations and noticing differences in their routines and environments. It is especially important during these times of uncertainty, to spend quality time with our children. The time we spend with our children can provide comfort, familiarity and fun- and relieve stress for everyone in the family. Time spent with those we love is priceless and those memories will last continue to shine long after the long after the interest in a particular object or toys wears off. Also- an added bonus- good, old-fashioned, free play activities grow healthy kids.

We are so fortunate to live in a place of beauty and solitude. We can watch the snowfall and enjoy all the fun activities it offers: building a snowperson, making snow angels, coloring the snow with food dye in spray bottles, making snow forts, having a snowball fight, and looking for animal tracks. Snow can be brought inside in bins or placed in the bathtub as an extended activity.

Family game nights are also a great time to connect with each other, problem-solve and learn to take turns, count spaces, count money, add numbers, etc. Our local library has a number of games available in their collection- free of charge, of course. There are also hundreds of games that can be played with a simple set of playing cards. Check out a book at the library or visit www.pagat.com to learn some new games.

Cooking meals or snacks together is also a great way to connect with your children. Children learn skills they will need later in life, in addition to math and science skills. This activity lends itself to conversation, especially if the recipe your are making has been in the family for some time. It is best to start with easy recipes to begin with, or give you child select jobs (i.e. cracking eggs).

Science experiments are also great, inexpensive activities to share with your children. Who doesn't love seeing their cup runneth over with vinegar after adding baking soda?

Visit www.kids-science-experiments.com for some fantastic, free or low-cost ideas.

Imagination is something we cannot put a price on. We want our children to be creative, innovative and have vision. Plan a dream trip around the world. Ask your child where they would go first, what other places they would stop along the way? What would they do at each place? What would they eat? This activity if perfect for enhancing language, learning about geography, and different cultures.

The last idea....a game of charades. All this takes is creating some cards with words on them and acting them out. A fantastic idea to keep the whole family involved and moving.

Our mission is to enrich children's lives through innovative support, education and enhanced family and provider services. Our programs put families at the center of a community of support services.

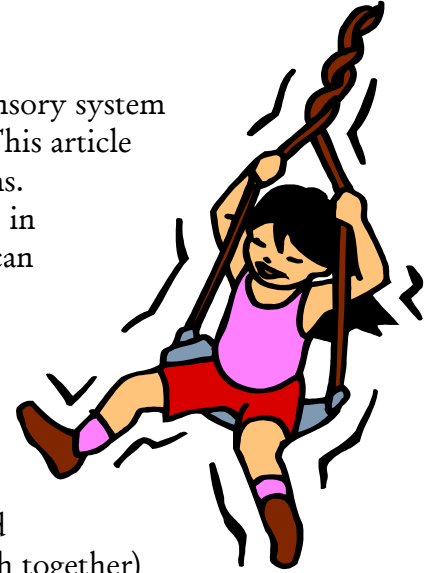
The Biology of Good, Old-Fashioned Play

Today we call it sensory input, decades ago we just called it “play”. Our sensory system is broken up into three main areas: tactile, vestibular, and proprioceptive. This article will focus on activities that strengthen vestibular and proprioceptive systems.

The vestibular system is responsible for movement and the body’s position in space. Vestibular input (the sense of movement, centered in the inner ear) can be obtained by spinning and swinging, and to a lesser extent, any type of movement.

The proprioceptive system receives input and feedback that tells us about movement and our body position. It’s “receptors” are located within our muscles, joints, ligaments, tendons, and connective tissues.

Proprioceptive input (sensations from joints, muscles and connective tissues that lead to body awareness) can be obtained by lifting, pushing, and pulling heavy objects as well as by engaging in activities that compress (push together) or distract (pull apart) the joints like playing tug-of-war.



So let’s look at activities that strengthen these two sensory systems.....

Vestibular: Swinging on playground swings, swinging on your belly, twisting a swing around and around and letting go to unwind. Spinning on a Sit n’ Spin, Dizzy Disc Jr., or office chair. Running in circles, riding a carousel, riding a horse, holding your child’s arm and legs and spinning him around like an airplane. Hanging upside down from the monkey bars, rolling down a grassy or snowy hill (good proprioceptive input as well), riding a roller coaster, swinging on a hammock, doing cartwheels and dancing (also provides proprioceptive input).

Proprioception: Making a “sandwich” by firmly pressing on your child’s arms legs and back with pillows or making a “burrito” by rolling her up in a blanket. Have your child pretend to be a gingerbread cookie and gently roll a ball over them to flatten the “dough”. Swinging in a net swing. (also provides vestibular input). She can push her own stroller, and a stronger child can push a stroller or cart filled with weighted objects such as groceries. Push a filled laundry basket. Your child can wear a backpack or fanny pack filled with toys. Jumping on a mini-trampoline, playing hopscotch, vacuuming, carrying books from one room to another, helping wash windows or a tabletop. Jumping on a mat, bed or couch (maybe get a used twin from a yard sale or thrift store for just this reason). Set up a safe “crash pad” area. Jumping rope or jumping on a pogo stick. Wheel-barrow walking (hold your child’s legs or feet while they walk with their hands). For older children- shoveling snow, raking leaves, pushing heavy objects like firewood in a wheelbarrow, doing push-ups against the wall, wearing a heavy backpack or pulling it on a luggage cart, mowing the lawn with a push mower.

By now you are certainly reminiscing back to your own childhood. These activities certainly look familiar- they are timeless. Our children *need* these experiences. Give them plenty of opportunities to really work their body. Adequate vestibular and proprioception input will give your child better focus and increased self-regulation, among other things...like being really tired at bed time.



Alpine Events

December

4- Play & Learn: Cooking With Kids Learn how to include your child, at any age, in the custom of preparing meals.

12- Choices for Children Annual Winter Party. In the Diamond Valley School Gym from 2:15 pm -4:15 pm. Come for the food, friends, crafts and pictures with Santa. This is a FREE event.

14- Alpine Kids Event: Holiday Ice Spectacular in Reno. Call Edie at 694-2934 to reserve your spot.

January

20- Play & Learn: I like to Move It, Move It! Safe indoor play ideas, seasonal suggestions, and ideas for non-competitive games.

25- Alpine Kids Event: Bowling at Silver Strike and Spaghetti dinner.

Call Edie at 694-2934 to reserve your spot.

February

3- Play & Learn: Let me Create Learn how to help your child express herself through art.

“Art is not a *thing*, it is a *way*”- Elbert Hubbard American Artist

17- Play & Learn: Nurturing Creative Play

Join the discussion on how to promote hands-on, imaginative play.

22- Alpine Kids Event: Pizza Barn and swimming at the Carson Valley Swim Center.

Call Edie at 694-2934 to reserve your spot.

March

3- Play & Learn: Be their “Coach” not the “Cop” –

Help your children develop skills to resolve their conflicts.

17- Play & Learn: The Joys & Challenges – Looking at the two sides of raising children.

Child-Centered Art Idea

Collages

Provide your child with a heavy piece of paper or cardboard measuring 8 x 10 inches or smaller.

With your child’s input decide on a theme. It can be a color, a shape, or a theme (animals, cars, food).

Provide your child with a number of magazines, catalogs, etc for the collage.

Also think about providing materials that are three dimensional and add texture and interest (i.e. buttons, fabric).

For younger children it may helpful to help them look through the magazines to decide which objects or areas they want to add to their board and help if they are in the pre-scissor stage.

Let them arrange the pieces and glue them on. They decide when they are done.

Child-centered art activities are creative, unique, and original. They are diverse and individual like the children who create them. They are open-ended and unstructured. They involve self-expression. They are process-oriented. They please the child. They foster autonomy. They require open blocks of time.



ANNUAL CHOICES FOR CHILDREN WINTER PARTY

DECEMBER 12

2:15 PM — 4:15 PM
IN THE DVS GYM

FREE!

Come for pictures with Santa, crafts,
food, gifts, and fun with friends

*All children must be accompanied
by a supervising adult.*



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Visit us at www.choices4children-alpine.org

