

Families Matter

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The Benefits of playdough and clay for child development

Kids love clay and playdough (affiliate links – brand name Play-Doh). You may have even played with these messy and versatile toys when you were a kid. But as a parent you are always looking for ways to boost your child's development.

Wouldn't it be great to find out that every time your children are shaping, pulling and manipulating playdough or clay they are benefiting in more ways than just having fun? The good news is, that is exactly what is happening.

Check out these wonderful benefits of playdough and clay your child receives every time she pops out the fun.

Boosts Fine Motor Skill Development

Fine motor skills are simply actions which are usually small and precise, generally involving the little muscles in fingers, hands, toes and wrists. As an adult, you use these skills hundreds of times a day. But they were first developed and improved upon when you were playing with clay as a child. The muscles which perform fine motor skills are also strengthened. This makes the transformation to writing, coloring and gripping easier as your child grows.

Supports Your Child's Independence

At a very young age, children need to believe in themselves. Every time you see your child acting independently, you are so proud. And the self-esteem which comes with independent play cannot be overrated. When your child grabs his can of Play-Doh and sets out to play on his own, he is believing in himself and his independence, which pays dividends for life.

Unleashes Creativity and Imaginative Play

Toddlers and older children should be encouraged to express themselves creatively. Everyone is different, and has different ideas.

When your child is free to express her thoughts by bringing them to life with Play-Doh or clay, she is doing so much more than just playing. The imaginative scenes, scenarios and objects she creates teach her the process from thought to action to creation. She realizes she can create anything that she can think of.

Improves Math and Communication

Playing with clay often means using shapes and symbols to press into the malleable substance. This is a great time to give your child an advantage learning the alphabet, memorizing numbers, how to spell his own name and how to "speak" by combining plastic or wooden letter blocks and Play-Doh.

When Kids Laugh, the Benefits Multiply

All kids love to laugh, and that is a great thing. And when they make silly faces, monsters or animals with their playdough, laughter is an ever present part of the process. Developmentally, "feel good" chemicals are released when she giggles. Your child's blood flow is improved, her immune system gets a healthy boost and physical tension or stress is relaxed for up to 45 minutes after a laughing fit.

by *The Jenny Evolution*



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With the rain, brings lots of mud... Let's Play with MUD!



Offer shovels, buckets, plastic animals and figures and water. Ask: what would happen if you did a deep hole and fill it with water? A shallow hole? Let your child explore and see what they discover. Read books about mud! Try: *Pigs in the Mud in the Middle of the Rud* by: Lynn Plourde; *Mud Pies and Other Recipes* by: Marjorie Winslow; *Stuck in the Mud* by: Shana Corey; *Harry the Dirty Dog* by: Gene Zion

Need Help Handling Angry Parents? Try These Tips!

By Jessica Johnsen www.childcare-marketing.com

Too often we hear about a parent who is angry. As an owner or director this is always challenging as you balance between supporting your teachers and keeping your parents happy. I first and foremost recommend preventative strategies but of course, you will undeniably get an angry parent or two in your office.

While I can't argue that sometimes there is just not a good "fit" with some clients, it is important to do all you can to keep parents happy. **Disgruntled parents can cause a lot of upheaval even if it isn't justified.**

Here are some tips to help turn "problems" into challenges to be overcome.

1. **Meet with the parent face to face, but summarize in writing.** You always want to meet with parents face to face, and include everyone involved. If the issue is between the parent and the teacher, have both parties present. People will be more honest and exaggerate less if all parties are present. After the meeting, summarize and email main points back to participants, have everyone respond that they agree that what is written reflects what was said.
2. **Repeat the problem back to the parent.** Make sure you are focusing on the actual problem and not symptoms of the problem.
3. **Ask them what they would like to see happen as a solution.** This has been hugely beneficial to me so many times, ask the parent "what do you feel is fair action for me to take on my part?" Believe it or not, parents do not take advantage of this question, they have never asked me to fire a teacher or give them money back. They typically want to be heard and see what steps are being taken to ensure the problem doesn't occur again. Sure, you could tell them the steps you are taking without asking them, but they feel more part of the solution if you ask.
4. **Explain your side in regards to legality, morals, ethics, etc.** Repeat after me: it is NOT personal, even when it is. If you can't reach a solution with the parent, explain to them the big picture. People are generally reasonable, if they understand your side, they are less likely to "poison the well" so to speak. Sometimes it is just not a good fit. Again, IT IS NOT PERSONAL, it may feel personal, but you have to run your business with integrity to children, families, staff, and yourself, within the boundaries of licensing, and other state mandates.
5. **Find the good.** It is so easy to feel defensive and that the parent is "crazy" (trust me I've been there), but keep in mind everyone's goal should be to provide the best for the child. Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, founder of

Touchpoints, recommends remembering the following when talking with parents.

- The parent is the expert on his/her child.
 - All parents have strengths.
 - All parents want to do well by their child.
 - All parents have something critical to share at each developmental stage.
 - All parents have ambivalent feelings.
 - Parenting is a process built on trial and error.
6. **Agree on a solution.** There is no winning and losing. Find a solution that best meets all parties involved. Make sure all parties agree to the solution and understand the process involved to get to the solution. Set a time line if necessary. Thank the parent for being willing to work with you to find a solution—not all parents are willing.

Remember for sensitive subjects it is always best to contact your lawyer sooner than later.

If you still need to part ways, make it as amicable as possible. The parent knows you did your best to meet their needs and it just wasn't going to work. Remain as positive as possible with the parent and even more so with the child. Always remember you have more happy parents than unhappy parents or our doors wouldn't be open—because you are a high-quality child care shaping lives every day!

What is stress?

Stress is your body's reaction to situations that challenge you. It's your body's way of getting prepared to deal with the pressures you experience at home and at school.

Most people think stress is all bad. However, there is bad stress and there is also good stress.

Good Stress	Bad Stress
Good stress can keep you focused and motivated to get things done. For example, being stressed about giving a presentation can motivate you to prepare and rehearse.	Bad stress is what you feel when you can't stop worrying about something and you feel overwhelmed all the time. This can cause stress overload .

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Child Care Business: Motivate Your Staff With These Four Tips!

By Kris Murray

www.childcare-marketing.com

How motivated are your teachers? Do they love to come to work each day? Do they feel supported and have the tools they need to do their job? The answer might surprise you.

Did you know that early education teachers experience the LEAST amount of personal freedom compared to almost ANY other job in our country?

This was an epiphany for me! Think about it...imagine a day in the life of a pre-school teacher! You are inside a room with one other adult and children ALL day. Compare that to another restrictive profession such as a representative at a call center. Which job has more personal freedom?

- Which person can stretch their legs when they want?
- Which person can take 5 minutes to go to the bathroom if they need to without asking?
- Which person can take an important personal call and not worry about their student/teacher ratio?
- Which person can take a break from their co-worker if they have conflict or need a little space?

Thinking about these things was a HUGE shift for me! And we wonder why this low paying job as a child care provider or early education teacher is a high turnover position. It is no surprise that the average industry turnover year-over-year for pre-school teachers is 35%.

Having personal freedom and managing conflict and having very little empowerment in your work environment is a BIG DEAL and pre-school teachers NEED your support in order to have the motivation to overcome these challenges and show up day after day.

So let's talk about four ways that we can give teachers a better experience, a better career, a motivational REASON to come to work every day.

1. **Empowerment**
Give teachers the ability to manage their classrooms the way they want. You can still hold them accountable to your school's standards, but let them do it their own way. Do NOT micromanage them. Give them empowerment.
2. **Opportunities for Leadership and Growth**
Provide opportunities for them to grow and expand even if it is not reflected in the organizational chart. Encourage them to become a resident expert about a certain topic or become a project leader or a mentor to fellow teachers. Then PAY them for their extra work!

3. **Support in the Classroom**
Walk through your teachers classrooms EVERY DAY. Plan to spend 5 minutes in each class and make sure the teachers have everything they need. ASK them if there is anything you can get them. Be available to them and let them know you will schedule one-on-one time to talk with them if they need it. Make sure they feel SUPPORTED in their classroom.
4. **Provide Classroom Supplies**
Teachers pay for approximately 87% of their classroom supplies. We all know teachers don't make a huge amount of money. Give them what they need for their classrooms. PLEASE don't make them buy their own supplies.

Consider these four tips for motivating your teachers and sit down and create a plan for incorporating these practices into your child care center's management.

Let your teachers KNOW you know how hard the job is, how little personal freedom they have and that you want to SUPPORT them.

Empower them. Provide opportunities for leadership and growth. Be available. Give them the supplies they need. Then watch how your teacher's job satisfaction and motivation improves.



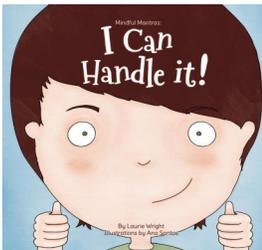
**October
National
Anti-Bullying
Awareness
Month**



8 Books To Help Children Understand Natural Disasters And Cope With Anxiety

One way to start a conversation about your family's and child's experiences is reading a book together. If and when your family has an opportunity to do so, below are some of the best books out there for helping your child understand this natural disaster in particular and how to cope with the feelings they may have now and later on. You can also use this brief guide on how to use books to help your child understand a natural disaster.

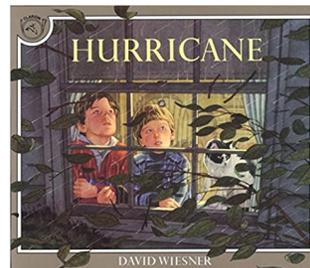
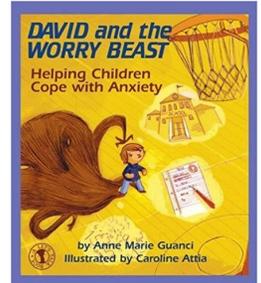
- The absolute must-“read” book on this list for this particular disaster is *Flood*, by Alvaro F. Villa, a beautiful workless book appropriate for every member of the family, literate or not. Told only in images, a family prepares for a storm, boards up their home and evacuates. The waters rush into and fill their home, destroying it. When the family returns, it's barely standing, but they rebuild and make it a home once again. It's a perfect book for giving children, particularly those too young to read, both something to relate directly and immediately to and giving them hope for the future.
- *Once I Was Very Scared*, by Chandra Ghosh Ippen, uses animals to convey the fact that feeling frightened is common and, more importantly, that people respond to that stress and anxiety in different ways— and that's okay. This is especially a great book for large families where different children or other family members might be responding to the trauma in different ways. A Spanish version, *Una Vez Tuve Mucho Mucho Miedo*, also exists, which is especially important for the large Latino population in Texas.



- *I Can Handle It*, by Laurie Wright, empowers children to deal with day-to-day frustration by recognizing what they can do to address it and simply telling themselves they have the ability to “handle it.”
- The genius of *A Terrible Thing Happened*, by Margaret M. Holmes and Sasha J. Mudlaff, is that it never specifies the specific event the protagonist observed or experienced, but it describes all the

effects than any traumatic event could cause, such as stomach upset, lack of appetite, difficulty sleeping, acting out, etc. one reviewer at Amazon has very helpfully provided the book's full text so you can decide if it's right for your child.

- *David and the Worry Beast: Helping Children Cope with Anxiety*, by Anne Marie Guanci, is a cute story that helps children realize they're not alone in their worries and anxiety.
- *Jenny Is Scared: When Sad Things Happen in the World*, by Carol Shuman, does a good job of depicting what children often experience before they even know what awful thing is happening: scary news reports, disruptions in routine, forgetfulness of parents, etc. It focuses on the big fears children have and gives parents tips on how to make their children feel safe and cope with their anxiety. This book is recommended by the American Psychological Association.
- *Clifford And The Big Storm*, by Norman Bridwell, is especially good for families who are already Clifford fans, but even if you're not, this book explains storms without being too scary. One caution: your child must realize that Clifford is not real and that they cannot rely on Clifford to “save” them. It may also be less relatable for children who lost their homes since it's a “happy” ending book. It will depend on your child.



- Like the Clifford book, the value of *Hurricane* by David Wiesner, will depend on your child. It portrays two brothers experiencing a hurricane from inside their home, but afterward, they go outside and play imaginatively on the debris. It may not be wise to give your child the idea of going out to play right now, or the book may downplay the seriousness of the trauma your child has experienced.

Adapted from Tara Haelle, a contributor for forbes.com.

Helping Children Cope with Natural Disasters

- 1 Give accurate and age appropriate information.
- 2 Be available.
- 3 Identify safe ways to express emotions.
- 4 Maintain consistent routines.
- 5 Be aware of behavioral, physical or emotional changes.
- 6 Care for yourself.

www.TheSilverPen.com

Helping Your Child Cope After a Disaster

Children can cope more effectively with a disaster when they feel they understand what is happening and what they can do. Providing basic information may help them cope. However, programs should be careful not to provide unnecessary details that may only alarm them.

For preschool-aged children, it may be comforting to provide a simple explanation of what happened and how it will affect them (e.g., a tree branch fell on electrical wires and that is why the lights don't work). Let children know there are many people who are working to help them and their community to recover after a disaster (such as repair crews for the electric company, or firefighters, police, paramedics, or other emergency personnel). Share steps that are being taken to keep them safe; children will often worry that a disaster will occur again.

Older children will likely want, and benefit from, additional information about the disaster and recovery efforts. No matter what age, start by asking children what they already know and what questions they have and use that as a guide for the conversation.

Help Children Cope

After a disaster or crisis, children benefit from adults who can help them learn how to cope effectively. Although it is not useful for adults to appear overwhelmed by the event, it is helpful to share some of their feelings and what they are doing to deal with those feelings. Allow children to "own" their feelings. Let your child know that it is all right to be upset about something bad that happened. Use the conversation to talk about other troubling feelings your child may have. A child who feels afraid is afraid, even if adults think the reason for the fear is unnecessary. If you feel overwhelmed and/or hopeless, look for some support from other adults before reaching out to your child.

Signs of a Child/Adolescent Affected By Disaster:

- Increased irritability, anger, outbursts, tantrums
- Clinging to family members, worry of separation
- Reduced interest in usual activities
- Poor concentration
- Decrease in sleep/appetite
- Increased sense of fear, worry, sadness
- Self-harm behaviors

For additional information please visit:

Adjustersinternational.com/helping-children-cope/

Children, just like adults, often feel helpless after a disaster. Help them figure out what they can do—that is meaningful to them—to help others in their community who are affected by the disaster.

You can take the following actions to help your child after a disaster or crisis. They are useful tips even if your child was not directly affected by an event.

Help your child feel safe: One of the most important things parents or caregivers can do is to help their child feel safe.

Provide reassurance: Reassure children that steps are being taken to keep them safe. This can be done by pointing out things that are in place to keep them safe.

Restore the child's normal routine: As soon as you can, go back to a normal routine. This means doing things like singing songs if you always sing songs with your child. Or read stories at the time you usually do. Bedtime and mealtime at familiar times are very helpful to children. Children function better when they know what to expect. Keep in mind that you do not want to force children to return to all routines if they are unable to do so because of their distress. Helping children understand and process events is also important.

Express feelings: Infants and toddlers may express themselves differently. They may cry more. They may be harder to soothe. They may become more fussy. Holding and cuddling may soothe your child. Soft music may soothe infants. Toddlers may have more temper tantrums. They may want to cling to you. Preschool and older children may like to draw or tell stories to express their feelings.

Ask questions: Parents and caregivers should ask children if they have questions or concerns. This helps children know that it is ok to talk. If your child asks questions, do not push. He or she may be more willing to talk later.

Share information: Explain events as simply and directly as possible. Because every child is different, take cues from your child as to how much information to share. Remember that even young children will hear about major events and that it is best to hear about them from a parent or caregiver and not the media.

Acknowledge losses: Children are not only trying to deal with the disaster, but everything else that follows. They may have to relocate, at least temporarily, and could be separated from friends or unable to attend the same school. Parents may have less income and the change in finances may change daily activities. Allow children to express their regrets over these "secondary losses."

Have fun: Find ways to have fun with your child or to be silly together. If your child likes to play peek-a-boo or play a favorite game, do those things. Laughter can be healing.

Reconnect with community: Take care of yourself. This will help you take care of your child. Find ways to get support. Talking with others can be helpful. If you notice changes in yourself, seek help from your Head Start/Early Head Start program.

Be flexible and patient: Getting back to "normal" can take a while. Take care of yourself.

Limit exposure to media coverage of the event: Images of the disaster or crisis on the TV, internet, radio, newspaper, and other social media may frighten or stress children more. Avoid or limit children's exposure to distressing pictures in the media.

Materials adapted from:

American Academy of Pediatrics. Talking to Children about Disasters. <http://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-healthinitiatives/Children-and-Disasters/Pages/Talking-to-Children-About-Disasters.aspx> News You Can Use: Disaster Readiness and Response for Families with Young Children Office of Head Start American Academy of Pediatrics [healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org). [Responding to Children's Emotional Needs During Times of Crisis Promoting Adjustment and Helping Children Cope at](http://www.aap.org/disasters/adjustment) <http://www.aap.org/disasters/adjustment>

Smooth Transitions In Child Care

By Cathy Abraham

As you know, transition times are usually the most difficult and stressful parts of the day in child care. A group of children are being asked to shift from one activity to another, and move from one task to another in a relatively short period of time. This lends itself to much movement— and for some children— opportunity! Some children have a particularly difficult time and react to any kind of confusion, lack of structure &/or chaos. You should plan on transition times requiring all of your attention and focus— this would not be the appropriate time to gather the materials necessary for the next art or cooking project.

Smooth Transitions...

- Establish much better “discipline” in your classroom, preventing many behavior problems.
- Allow for more time for educational activities, due to less waiting time.
- Help children to respect you and feel secure, knowing that you capable and competent, and the classroom is not out of control.

Here are some general thoughts on how to make transition times easier:

- **View transition times as opportunities for learning-** Transitions hold many opportunities for skill-building, problem-solving, listening, following directions, and cooperation.
- **Make transitions fun-** A good teacher can make wearing two mismatched mittens sound like the most fun and exciting thing in the world just by facial expressions and tone of voice. Utilize your face and voice as teaching tools.
- **One adult should stay with the majority of the children who are ready (or not ready) and the other staff member should be facilitating the rest of the group.**— Strategically positioning yourself is an invaluable tool during transitions. Do not penalize the children who are ready and doing what they should be doing. Don't let one child hold up the rest of the class because he won't put on his coat— that's giving that child a great deal of power.
- **Eliminate 'Lining Up' and minimize waiting-** Lining up lends itself to children being in each others' body space. This often leads to pushing, shoving, kicking and whining. Movement in small groups is preferable— and much more manageable. Stagger small groups of children. If you must line-up, or there is an unexpected wait for the next activity (example: lunch is

late), use fingerplays, songs and games that require no props are essential.

Thing about how difficult it is for us (as adults) to wait in a grocery store line for more than a few minutes. Multiply that by ten! A good teacher has a repertoire of fun little games and activities they can 'pull out of a hat' at any given moment, and also utilizes teachable moments to talk and process the child's experiences of the day, while encouraging cognitive development.

- **Give children adequate time to prepare for transitions.**—You like to know what is coming next in your day, don't you? Do you like it when you're right in the middle of something and someone demands that you stop right now and do something else? We need to be respectful of children and their choices. They need to mentally prepare for changes, and feel that they have some control within their environment and their day. Predictable cues can also be an effective and helpful tool. Children respond to structure and routines, and consistency enables them to feel safe, secure, and more in control and competent.
- **Choose children first who are not engaged in any activity, (or who need some redirection), to start moving into that next phase of the day.**
- **Utilize positive reinforcement as a tool.**—Children generally strive to please. Reward appropriate behavior with recognition, praise and positive reinforcement. Don't fall into the “Good Job” pitfall—the more specific and concrete your comments are, the more it indicates that you are really looking and paying attention, and are sincere.
- **Try to stay away from always relying on external rewards like stickers.**—This can often backfire, and you may have children who will only do what is expected if they get something in return.
- **Know upon whom you need to keep an extra close eye.**—Certain children predictably 'lose it' during transition times, or take advantage of the fact that your focus is fragmented. You will want to shadow these children closely— again using positive reinforcement when they display appropriate behaviors.
- **Since we know transition times are hectic, plan ahead and have all necessary materials at hand.**—You

know the room 'goes up for grabs' during a transition time if someone has to leave to go get another spoon or a box of Kleenex!

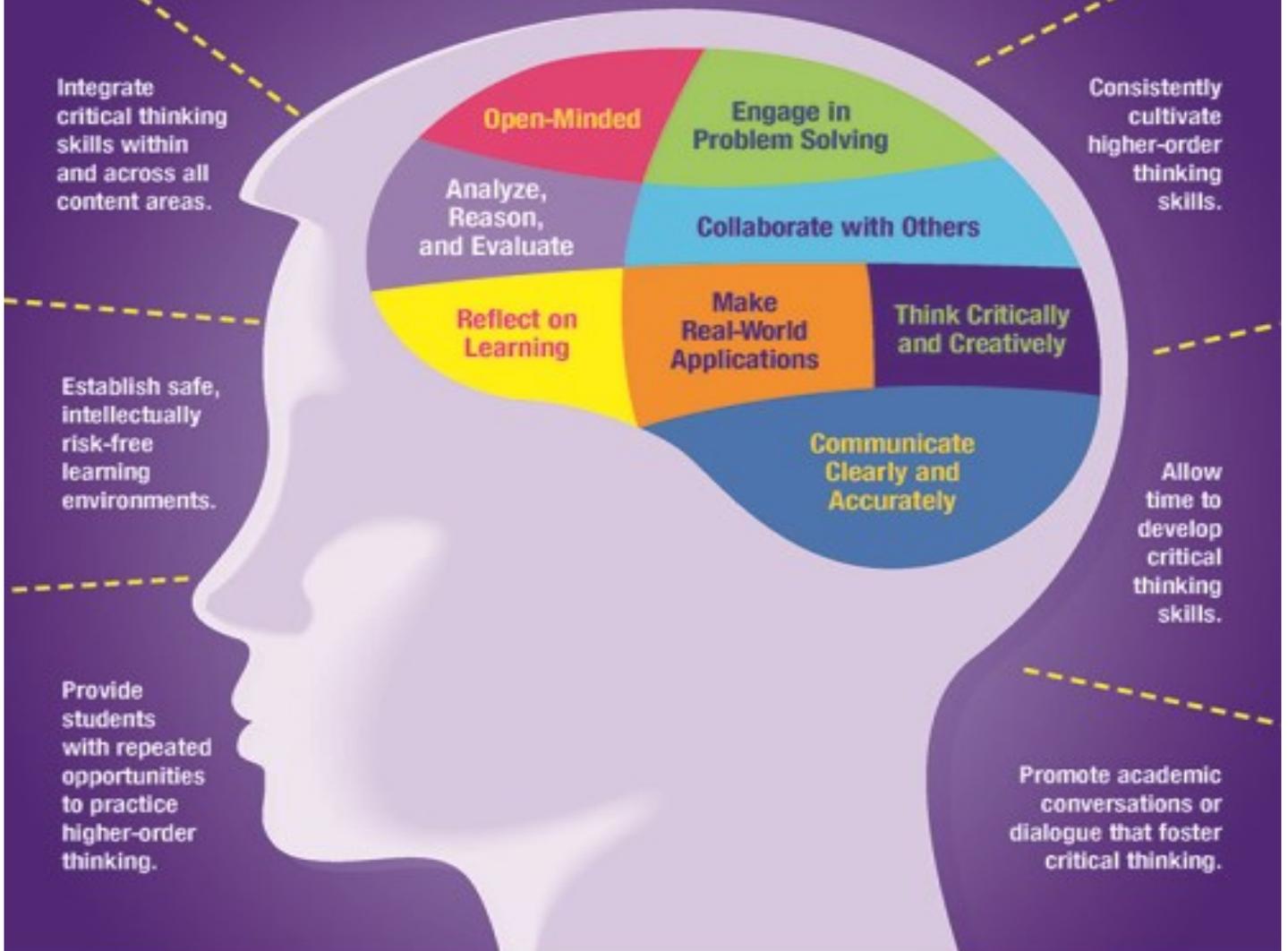
- **Some children need specific directions comprised of only one or two commands at a time.**—Some children cannot comprehend or process multiple directions given all at one time. Think about this the next time you get that child who just stares at you, whom you think is just being disobedient.
- **Model and demonstrate appropriate behaviors.**—Do not assume the children truly know what is expected. Be patient with children new to child care—they probably know nothing about 'snack time', 'group time', etc. and/or many of the expectations
- **Know your children.**—Know what they like and what they respond to, what works, and what doesn't.

Ideas for Waiting Times

- Songs and Fingerplays
- Visualization scenarios/listening games. Try relaxation techniques.
- Review of the morning or previous day; Talk about things together.
- Have children wiggle specific body parts
- Have children move like, or pretend to be specific animals or things
- Read or tell a story, or have children look at books
- Identify things in the room that start with certain letters; Look for shapes, colors, numbers, etc. within the environment
- Guessing Games
- Memory games or clapping games
- “Simon Says”
- Exercising or Stretching Activities
- Play the “Telephone” game
- Use puppets to give directions, reinforce concepts, or just be silly
- “Freeze!” - no one can move- “We're all frozen!”
- “Quiet Bubbles” - challenge children to be quiet (or sit) before bubbles pop
- “Get your wiggles out!” Have children wiggle different parts of their bodies

Remember to tie in your curriculum theme whenever possible to expand upon and enhance the children's learning experiences. Keep it fun and exciting and you'll eliminate many behavior problems.

Developing 21st-Century Critical Thinkers



Your Students' Path to Critical Thinking

1. Think deeply to make relevant connections
2. Ask quality and clarification questions
3. Use evidence and reasoning to support thinking
4. Analyze, reason, and evaluate
5. Interpret information beyond surface learning
6. Synthesize diverse ideas
7. Solve relevant and complex problems
8. Make reasoned decisions
9. Generate and evaluate options prior to making decisions
10. Focus on details to derive meaning
11. Apply higher levels of thought to real-world situations
12. Think critically on a daily basis
13. Use criteria to judge the value of ideas and solutions
14. Engage in reflective thinking
15. Follow problem-solving steps
16. Question the credibility, accuracy, and relevancy of information and sources
17. Well-informed
18. Willing to consider multiple perspectives
19. Seek new and better solutions
20. Explore alternatives
21. Examine diverse points of view
22. Value and respect ideas of others
23. Question what is read, heard, or seen
24. Assess consequences of actions or ideas
25. Think independently and in concert with others

10 Things Every Parent Should Know about Play

By Laurel Bongiorno



Photo: © iStock.com / galdzer

1. Children learn through their play.

Don't underestimate the value of play. Children learn and develop:

- cognitive skills – like math and problem solving in a pretend grocery store
- physical abilities – like balancing blocks and running on the playground
- new vocabulary – like the words they need to play with toy dinosaurs
- social skills – like playing together in a pretend car wash
- literacy skills – like creating a menu for a pretend restaurant

2. Play is healthy.

Play helps children grow strong and healthy. It also counteracts obesity issues facing many children today.

3. Play reduces stress.

Play helps your children grow emotionally. It is joyful and provides an outlet for anxiety and stress.

4. Play is more than meets the eye.

Play is simple and complex. There are many types of play: symbolic, sociodramatic, functional, and games with rules—to name just a few. Researchers study play's many aspects: how children learn through play, how outdoor play impacts children's health, the effects of screen time on play, to the need for recess in the school day.

5. Make time for play.

As parents, you are the biggest supporters of your children's learning. You can make sure they have as much time to play as possible during the day to promote cognitive, language, physical, social, and emotional development.

6. Play and learning go hand-in-hand.

They are not separate activities. They are intertwined. Think about them as a science lecture with a lab. Play is the child's lab.

SKILLS DEVELOPED THROUGH PLAY



www.goopybrains.com

Adapted from "Curiosity, Pleasure and Play: A Neurodevelopmental Perspective" written by Perry, Hogan and Marlin (2000)

7. Play outside.

Remember your own outdoor experiences of building forts, playing on the beach, sledding in the winter, or playing with other children in the neighborhood. Make sure your children create outdoor memories too.

8. There's a lot to learn about play.

There's a lot written on children and play. You can find some NAEYC articles and books about play at naeyc.org/play. David Elkind's *The Power of Play* (Da Capo, 2007 reprint) is also a great resource.

9. Trust your own playful instincts.

Remember as a child how play just came naturally? Give your children time for play and see all that they are capable of when given the opportunity.

10. Play is a child's context for learning.

Children practice and reinforce their learning in multiple areas during play. It gives them a place and a time for learning that cannot be achieved through completing a worksheet. For example, in playing restaurant, children write and draw menus, set prices, take orders, and make out checks. Play provides rich learning opportunities and leads to children's success and self-esteem.

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