**DEVELOPMENT OF PLAY**

Play is very important to a child's development.Young children can develop many skills through play. They develop their language skills, motor skills, emotions, creativity and social skills.

**Types of play –**

* **Solitary Play**: This is when a child plays alone. All children like solitary play at times. When engaged in solitary play, children don’t seem to notice others playing nearby.
* **Parallel Play:** This is when a child plays alongside another child without interacting. A child may observe the other children and imitate what they do.
* **Imitative Play:** This is when a child and another child copy each other. One child starts to jump and soon they are both jumping. Or you are building with blocks and a child tries to do the same.
* **Cooperative Play:** As a child gets older, he or she will start to play with other children. They may work together to build a tower or create a mud cake. Many children are not ready for this kind of play until they are 36 months of age or older.
* **Unoccupied play:** This starts from birth, baby will sometimes have some unexplained movements which can seem to be random movements with no clear purpose. This is the beginning of their play.
* **Associative play:** At 3-4 years of age children may start to become more interested in other children rather than toys. They may start asking questions and talking about toys and their play.

In a child centred environment, the child is the focus of all activities. Play is usually initiated by the child and can also be enhanced by the practitioner. Adults can facilitate child centred play by: taking children’s play seriously, being excited about their discoveries, praising their achievements, being patient and encouraging, valuing the process of their play and not always expecting a predictable end product.

Playing is a natural and enjoyable way for children to keep active, stay well and be happy. Freely chosen play helps children and young people’s healthy development. To have good physical and mental health and to learn life skills, they need various unstructured play opportunities from birth until they’re teenagers.

**Free Play -** Free play is when a child decides and controls their play following their own instincts, imagination and interests.  They play without being led by adults. There’s no right or wrong way to play. Free play improves children’s health, well-being and development. Try not to make the free play to chaotic and offer too many activities at the same time as some children may find this overwhelming and it may prevent them from exploring activities

**Why play is important -** Play improves the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and young people. Through play, children learn about the world and themselves. They also learn skills they need for study, work and relationships such as: confidence, self-esteem, resilience, interaction, social skills, independence, curiosity and coping with challenging situations

**Developing physical health through play -** Physical play such as running, skipping and riding a bike/scooter helps children develop: good physical fitness, agility, stamina, co-ordination and balance. Activities to develop fine motor skills such as picking up smaller items, holding a paintbrush or crayons/pencils, playdough with cutters/scissors and rolling pins.

**Developing social skills through play -** Playing can help children develop their social skills with others. By listening, sharing attention and sharing play experiences. This helps a child to explore their feelings, develop self-discipline, learn how to express themselves and work out emotional aspects of life.