



Radio Stations : **All Community Radio Stations**  
Subject : **Early Childhood Development**  
Audience : **Parents, caregivers and educators**  
Program Topic : **Playing is learning (LOVE)**

#### **Guidelines to the presenter**

- Presenter – please familiarize yourself with the brief and the use the facts effectively by referring to them from time to time during the show.
- You should be seen as a peer, rather than an authority.
- Offer guidance or opinion, rather than telling people what to do.
- Encourage people to seek further information – including referring to the Ilifa website: [www.ilifalabantwana.co.za](http://www.ilifalabantwana.co.za).
- Always keep the objectives and outcomes in mind and drive these.

#### **Topic**

Playing is learning

#### **Objectives**

- To promote understanding of play as important for children’s learning
- To motivate parents/caregivers to play with their children regularly
- To understand some useful ways to stimulate children’s learning through play
- To promote children’s right to play

#### **Introduction**

We all know that little children love nothing more than to spend hours playing. But did you know that this is not just fun for them, but a critical part of their learning and holistic development? And, moreover, that it’s really important for parents and caregivers to stimulate their child’s development through play? Research shows that children who don’t have enough opportunities to play are likely to have various developmental issues, so we need to understand why all children must have plenty of time to play. Today we’re going to consider the serious business of play, without forgetting the fun!

Questions	Facts/Information
<p>1. <i>I'm sure many parents believe that play is something that little children just do for fun and that, for older children, it's what you do in between focusing on serious learning and other responsibilities. Is that true?</i></p>	<p>No, far from it! All children and young people need to play. The instinct to play is innate and it must be encouraged and supported. It's a biological, psychological and social necessity and is fundamental to healthy development and wellbeing of children. It's not just important for their physical development, but their social and cognitive development too. Play is important to healthy brain development. It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them. Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers.</p>
<p>2. <i>Wow! It sounds like it's incredibly important for children to have lots of time to play.</i></p>	<p>Yes, in fact, it's so critical that play has been recognized as a fundamental right in both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Both these documents (to which the government of South Africa subscribes) emphasise children's right to play, recreation, leisure, art and cultural activities. For children to live to the full and grow up to realize the potential that they all have, they need every opportunity to play.</p>
<p>3. <i>Can you tell us in more detail about some of the benefits of play?</i></p>	<p>Here are 5 key outcomes of play:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Being healthy</b> – play supports children's physical, mental and emotional health, growth and development.</li> <li>2. <b>Staying safe</b> – through play, children are supported to explore physical and emotional risk and challenge safely.</li> </ol>

<p>4. <i>So it sounds like a very serious business. Should we stop thinking about it as fun?</i></p> <p>5. <i>You just mentioned that play should be directed by the child – why is that?</i></p>	<p>3. <b>Enjoying and achieving</b> – play fosters children’s self-esteem by extending their choice and control, which leads to a sense of satisfaction.</p> <p>4. <b>Making a positive contribution</b> – children’s play is naturally participative and inclusive. It fosters respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction.</p> <p>5. <b>Economic well-being</b> – through play, healthy, confident children and young adults will have a greater capacity to engage with life-long learning and development.</p> <p>All of these things involve children learning constantly, while also developing the capacities needed to keep learning, particularly when they go to school.</p> <p>No. Play can be described as fun or serious, but the best way to think about it is as a fun method for achieving serious things for children. Through play, a child can explore social, real and imaginary worlds and her relationship with them. Through play, a child will use a whole range of different responses to the challenges they encounter during this exploration. By playing, children learn and develop as individuals, and as members of the community. It all sounds very serious, but we should always remember that play should be enjoyable and directed by the child herself.</p> <p>Play provides children with opportunities to enjoy freedom and to exercise choice and control over their actions. It offers children opportunities for testing boundaries and exploring risk, as well as offering a very wide range of physical, social and intellectual experiences. Over time, it fosters independence and self-esteem. It develops</p>
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6. *How do children develop the ability to play when they're very young?*

children's respect for others and ability to interact socially. By giving children the chance to choose what and how they play (as long as it's not too dangerous!), we are opening doors to a myriad of ways of learning these important ways of behaving, problem-solving, trouble shooting and critical thinking. Play really is the ultimate skill to enable children to learn!

Play develops from very early in a child's life. Initially, babies play as part of their early interactions with their carers. Everyday routines, such as feeding, bathing, changing nappies, are opportunities for play through interaction such as making noises at each other, eye contact and facial expressions. This type of play starts from birth and develops rapidly. Babies play using all their senses of sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste. These are the baby's tools for learning and finding out about what's around him, including his significant adults, and for learning about himself. You'll see babies beginning to touch their fingers and toes repetitively, to make faces and to start to engage with other people – these are all playful ways of learning about themselves and their world.

As the baby grows and develops into a toddler and child, her physical activity increases and she explores the environment through touching and feeling, as well as developing language to express feelings and make further meaning of her world. She does this by using these developing skills to play and by playing to develop the skills further. And it's important to understand that children develop holistically, so playing allows them to use all their senses, physical skills, mental capacity, social skills and emotions .

<p>7. <i>What kind of learning can we see happening when children are playing?</i></p>	<p>Play may look simple, but there's a lot going on. When you watch a young child playing with a ball or rolling a wheel, you're seeing her developing motor skills and hand-eye coordination. When you see her playing with her friends, you're observing her developing language and communication skills, the ability to interact, share and work in teams and to make choices. If you watch your little boy playing with groups of stones or putting building blocks or toy cars in order, you're witnessing him learning about basic concepts, such as sizes and shapes and same and different and developing the foundations of numeracy. Children get deeply involved in their play, repeat the same things over and over again and are difficult to distract. This is all brilliant for developing concentration and focus that they'll need later on for learning and studying at school. Repetition, in particular, is their way of practicing what they've learned and, through practice, they develop their skills further.</p>
<p>8. <i>What role does pretending and make-believe have in children's learning?</i></p>	<p>Pretend play or fantasy play is a wonderful thing. This is the way that children develop their imagination, independence and creativity – all of which are essential for learning at school and, later on, in the world of work. A well-developed imagination is necessary not only for people in creative jobs, but for basic things, like planning and solving problems. By pretending to be different kinds of people or creating imaginary worlds, children are trying out different ways of being and making meaning of their expanding environment. They're coordinating ideas and feelings and making sense of relationships with families, friends and cultures. This kind of play should never be seen as wasted time –</p>

<p>9. <i>What can parents do to best support their child's play?</i></p>	<p>it's a safe way to explore and celebrate all sorts of possible or improbable scenarios.</p> <p>Make sure your child has plenty of time to play every day. As a parent, you can be one of your child's best playmates, so try to spend some time every day playing together. Everyone needs to play - even adults! Most children from 2 to 6 years of age do not care about who wins, the final score, or even the rules for the game. As a parent or caregiver, understanding the simplicity of early childhood play and facilitating the joy of playing are important for child development. Remember that for children to play freely is important, so you don't need to be trying to teach them something while they are playing.</p> <p>Playing with your child every day is also important for her emotional development. Research has shown that children whose mums played with them experienced more secure attachment to their mums, and enjoyed more positive development, compared with children whose mums were unavailable for play.</p>
<p>10. <i>Do parents and caregivers need to have lots of toys at home to stimulate their child's learning through play?</i></p>	<p>Stimulating play is not about having lots of toys and resources. Research has shown that the most effective toys are the basic ones – like wooden blocks for building, balls, crayons and paper for drawing and a soft toy. Encourage your child to build things, using whatever's around (e.g. pebbles or cooking pots), to play with other children, and to pretend (playing at house or being super-heroes). However the most important thing a parent can do to encourage play is to play and be playful themselves! Show your little one the kinds of games you played as a child. Make time to explore your child's world with</p>

<p>11. <i>Should I be concerned about the role of play when my child goes to preschool?</i></p>	<p>her and to play and learn together, but let your child set the play agenda, rather than you telling her what to do.</p> <p>It's good to understand the kind of environment your child will be spending his days in when he goes to preschool. Play is important at all ages, but particularly in the early years and it should be as much a part of your child's daily life in a formal setting as at home. More and more ECD centres and pre-schools are under pressure to do academic work with children, thereby limiting the time available for play. But when you select a pre-school for your child, make sure that there is a strong recognition of the importance of play – not just verbally but in the time spent during the day on this. For young children, learning through play (e.g. stimulating the beginnings of literacy and numeracy) can be far more constructive than trying to force them to do formal education, sitting at desks.</p>
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**Conclusion**

We've discovered today that play is both a child's right and an essential tool for learning all sorts of skills and making sense of the world for young children. Play is clearly a lifelong skill that builds and satisfies curiosity, broadens the way we think, gives children the opportunity to meet and socialise with their friends, keeps them physically active, and gives them freedom to choose what they want to do. Critically, it also develops the foundations on which children's formal learning at school will be built. As parents and caregivers, we need to encourage regular play and, even better, to join our children in playing and learning along with them!

- Learning outcomes**
- After listening to this show the audience should:
- Understand that play is an important way of learning for young children
  - Start spending time playing with their children every day
  - Encourage preschool teachers to provide lots of play opportunities every day

