

Raising a Well Rounded Child – support all areas of development

By Janelle Durham, MSW www.gooddayswithkids.com

In the world of nutrition, we talk about a well-balanced diet with items from all the different food groups. We say “all things in moderation” – a little of everything but not too much of anything. In fitness, we try to balance aerobic, strength, balance and flexibility exercises.

What’s the equivalent of a balanced diet for growing a child’s brain and body?

Novelty, Repetition and Down Time

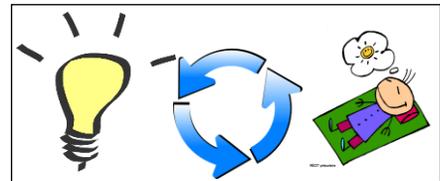
Novelty – experiencing something for the first time – builds connections in the brain. (And is fun and exciting.)

Repetition – doing something again and again – strengthens connections, building knowledge and mastery. (It’s also calming and confidence building to do familiar things you’re good at.)

Down Time – sleep, quiet time, solitude – is a chance to integrate all we’ve learned.

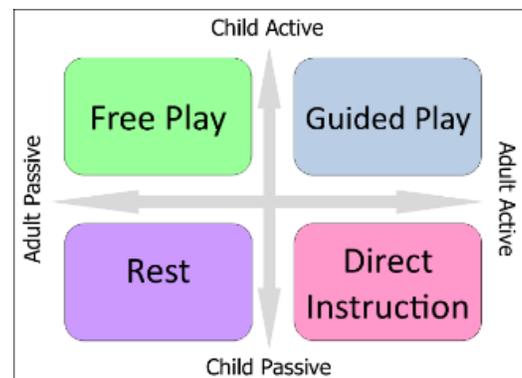
Some parents, in pursuing the best opportunities for their child, take an “All Novelty All The Time” approach. It is exhausting and over-stimulating for you and your child and can feel like a lot of pressure as you’re both always out of your comfort zone and trying to figure things out. On the other hand, All Repetition and Down Time would get really boring. The trick is to find the balance. Balance novelty, which gives a breadth of learning, and repetition for depth.

Choose some new activities each day or each week for your child. But also be sure they have lots of opportunities for their favorite activities, and times to “do nothing.”



Structured Learning vs. Free Time

When adults think about “learning,” they envision a classroom, where the students sit and listen to the teacher talk. ‘Direct instruction’ can be a great way to learn new information or new skills. But, young children will learn more about a topic and better strengthen those new skills if they are given the chance to explore them in guided play with a grown-up, or free play.



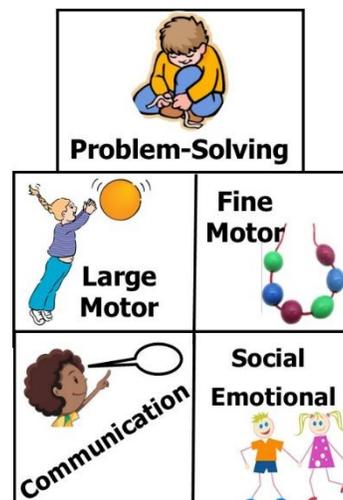
If kids are in structured classes all the time, they learn skills, but never have the chance to apply them. But if during one week they have gymnastics and an art class, and then they also have time for free play outdoors, you might see them practice balance beam skills on a slippery log or create art from twigs and leaves. Or at a playdate, they’ll teach a friend how to do a somersault or make a snail with playdough.

Building All Areas of Development

I keep in mind all areas of development and make sure we're having playful learning opportunities in all areas.

Do you ever worry that your child is behind in some area of development? One of the first questions to ask yourself is: Are they getting enough opportunities to *play* in that area. Note that I didn't say *work* at that area. If our kids notice that we are pushing them to work hard at something they're not yet good at, they may feel pressured, or lose confidence, or resist doing that work.

Instead, look for fun ways to build skills. If something gives them joy, they may be willing to stretch a little and build new skills.



Building Multiple Intelligences

You don't want to overwhelm your child with too many toys or too many structured activities, but you do want a breadth of experiences. Some parents focus only on school readiness skills (reading, math), but there are lots of other important skills. If I were to buy only 10 toys for a child, or choose only 10 activities to do over the course of a year, I'd balance these areas:

	Naturalist: plant a garden, visit a farm or a zoo, go for hikes, wade in a lake, notice the seasons...		Musical: listen to music, sing, dance, play an instrument, clap out a rhythm, take music classes...
	Artistic: draw, paint, scribble, play with playdough, build sculptures, take photos, notice beauty...		Cultural: Learn about religion, different cultures, explore imagination and fantasy
	Kinesthetic: Run, jump, swim, throw, dance, climb, play organized sports...		Linguistic. Read, read, read! And go to story times, and to plays. Learn nursery rhymes and songs.
	Mathematic: Count, notice amounts (more than, less than), play board games, give allowance		Spatial. Do puzzles. Build with blocks and Lego. Build blanket forts. Build ramps for toy cars...
	Interpersonal. Lots of time in unstructured play with friends! Dolls, puppets, pretend play.		Intrapersonal. Help your child develop emotional intelligence. Give them time for self-reflection.