

# Parent's Page

## Today's Topic is PLAY



Play is the natural language of children, which is why the United Nations and World Health Organization both recognize play as a fundamental right of childhood. Here's how pediatric hospitals use play to support their patients psychosocial development.

### 2 GENDER

There are significant gender differences in play and other occupational interests (Karson T.F. Kung, 2021). Girls tend to engage in more verbal and nurturing styles of play in games like house, while boys are more active and physical during play (Kung, 2021). Child life specialists recognize these differences and develop a personalized plan for your child to nurture their interests and foster social and emotional growth. Gender typed play assists children in exploring their occupational interests as well as strengthens their sense of identity that will carry well into adolescence. Kung (2021) states, "childhood gender-typed play may contribute to self-identification and self-socialization mechanisms involved in gender development, creating certain levels of continuity and stability." Additionally, his study suggests that gender-typed play in childhood can have occupational implications that transcend developmental stages (Kung, 2021).

### 5 RESEARCH

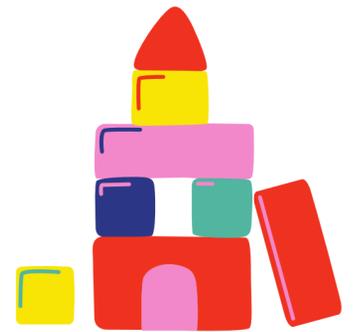
In conclusion Graber (2024), states, "play is meaningful to children, regardless of where they experience their childhood. **Play is a way for patients to be children.**" While conducting interviews during her research, one child said:

Playing in the hospital makes you feel like there's something else you can do other than looking at four walls every second of the day. Playing in the hospital makes you feel like you do not have to stare at the ceiling contemplating life. Playing in the hospital makes you feel happier (Eli, age 12) (Graber, 2024, p.7).

Play has been linked to feelings of confidence and self-awareness and gives kids a sense of control over themselves and their environment providing stability. Hospitals take this into consideration and utilize play as a tool to inform and relieve anxiety about procedures and treatments through tools such as blank medical dolls where children are allowed to familiarize themselves with the equipment around them using it on the doll.

### 1 CULTURE

In Johan Huizinga's work *Homo Ludens: A study of the play element in culture* (1938), he identified play as, "one of the most central activities in flourishing societies." Cultivating an environment where children freely express themselves is crucial to their development and establishes a sense of normalcy during their hospitalization. When admitted, a certified child life specialist will be assigned to work with your child one-on-one ensuring that their psychosocial needs are met during their stay. Research shows young children understand hospitalization is centered around feeling better and getting well (Graber et al., 2024). However, pediatric patients have expressed participating in play while hospitalized feels "wrong," or "different" (Graber et al., 2024). Providing environments where play is the main focus has a positive impact on self-esteem due to giving children the independence to make their own decisions in a setting where feeling a loss of autonomy is the norm (Graber et al., 2024). Graber et al., (2024) states, "children feel welcome as *children*, rather than feeling predominately recognized as a young patient in need of care." Child life specialists support children during their hospitalization providing them with appropriate coping skills and techniques to reduce the trauma and stress that comes with their stay.



### 3 DEVELOPMENT

Play behaviors have long been used to assess children in terms of brain development, social communication skills, and physical functioning (Graber et al., 2024). Play is crucial for development as it allows for an outlet where children can test their boundaries, problem solve creatively, develop motor skills, and address the positive and negative consequences of their behavior in a safe environment (Nijhof et al., 2018). During hospitalization, children face many challenges impeding their development. While doctors and nurses focus primarily on the biological factors of treatment, child life specialists are there to provide the extra psychosocial support to assist development using early interventions such as play therapy, gaming and interactive technology aimed at improving the quality of life (Nijhof et al., 2018).

### 4 PLAY ENVIRONMENT

Fortunately, today pediatric hospital environments are more child-oriented than ever (Graber, 2024). Hospitals provide playrooms and outdoor gardens with endless resources to ensure a child's stay is as enjoyable as possible. Also, with technology today, virtual reality and iPads can be utilized while undergoing treatment and procedures to provide a healthy distraction from discomfort or pain. However, hospitals do their best to extend play into areas where it would not be expected to provide comfort in general use spaces like hallways and corridors (Graber, 2024). Children have also stated they associate specific people such as child life specialists or nurses with play which also helps provide comfort and gives them something to look forward to. Play environments and interactions are an invaluable resource provided by hospitals that can not be over utilized.



#### References

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