

Sharing Thoughts About Imitation and Pretend Play

Dear Families:

Imitation and pretend play are among the most important ways that children learn about the world and relationships with people. The foundation for this type of play begins when young infants form secure attachments with the important people in their lives and explore their surroundings. They imitate other people, in order to understand how objects are used and as a way to get and keep the attention of others. Before long, they make believe with realistic items. For example, a toddler might feed a doll with a spoon or rock a doll to sleep. Two-year-olds learn to use objects to stand for other things, for example, to use a block as a car by pushing it along the floor.

As social pretend play begins, children explore social roles such as being a mother, a father, a doctor, and a baby. Being able to pretend also helps children cope with fears and anxieties. This is why children pretend to go to the doctor or to be a monster. Children who have good pretend play skills are more likely to be ready for school than those who lack these skills, because pretend play benefits every aspect of a young child's development. Children who have good pretend play skills are also often good at making friends.

What You Can Do at Home

Because imitation and pretend play are so important to every child's development and eventual success in school, we hope you will pretend with your child at home.

- **Encourage your child to explore.** The more children learn about objects and people, the more information they have on which to base their pretend play.
- **Talk about real life experiences as they take place.** When you take your child to various places—to the grocery store, post office, or a clinic—talk about what is happening. Explain what people are doing, their jobs, and the names of tools and other objects they use. This helps your child understand and recall experiences.
- **Provide props that inspire pretend play.** Dolls, doll blankets, a cradle, telephones (toy or real), pots, pans, and plastic dishes will inspire your child to explore social roles. Other useful props include plastic people and animals; transportation toys such as cars, trucks, and boats; and various ride-on toys.
- **Let your child dress up.** You can encourage your child's interest in pretending by providing dress-up clothes and work-related props such as firefighter hats, work gloves, and a toy stethoscope.
- **Play make-believe with your child.** This is one of the best ways to encourage your child to pretend. You can also encourage pretend play by asking questions; offering a new prop; and taking on a role, yourself.

Together we can help your child use imitation and pretend play as important ways to learn.

Sincerely,