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The importance of play

It helps babies grow into **healthy** kids

EDITOR'S NOTE: This month's A Mother's View column is co-authored by Tricia King, early intervention specialist for the federally funded Help Me Grow Program and author of numerous articles about strategies and guidelines for raising healthy, happy kids.

When a child is born, mom and dad look adoringly at their beautiful infant.

They count the 10 little fingers and 10 tiny toes to ensure that each and every one is there, often the first step in monitoring their child's milestones and achievements. However, there are countless more roads to travel, mountains to climb and oceans to swim. The journey has just begun.

There are many aspects to a child's development.

■ **Intellect (cognitive)** This is how your child thinks and reacts to situations.

■ **Physical** concerns the development of gross and fine motor skills of the body.

■ **Social** is your child's relationship with others and how they react in social situations.

■ **Emotional** is your child's awareness and ability to control feelings.

■ **Sensory** is how children use their senses and ability to process gained information.

■ **Communication and language development** is the ability to use sound and visual surroundings to exchange thoughts and feelings.



Each milestone your child acquires builds on previous milestones.

In the first few years of life, children achieve most of these milestones through play. Learning through play is a child's job. By playing, children learn about their environment, people and themselves.

As a parent, you are your child's first playmate. It is important that you make play stimulating for your child. Encourage imagination; interact with your child. Read. Read. Read. Be creative and, most importantly, have fun and enjoy the journey.

The interactions between you and your baby can help you measure your child's development. For example, at

four months, a baby's laughing and cooing show her ability to communicate. Tummy time develops fine and gross motor skills.

My personal favorite was watching my children, Jude, Riley and Maggie, discover their hands and how to use their 10 tiny fingers. (I also enjoyed watching them try to eat their toes.)

Tricia King emphatically emphasizes the role of play in an infant's life. Spending 20 to 30 minutes a day engaged in "focused" play time may be better than spending the whole day just being "around" your child.

Your child will grow into a strong, intelligent child, and you'll both have fun in the process. **pc**