Adults tend to look at play as the opposite of work. You may have heard yourself say, “Stop playing and get to work!” However, children need play in their daily lives to learn better, grow stronger, and develop positive social skills. Through play, children learn many things about themselves and others. They learn about the properties of matter and motion, feelings and relationships, language and communication.

How can you, as an adult, help your children learn through and enjoy play? The first step is to provide a safe environment where your child is free to explore. Make sure that things that might break are put away. Toys are enriching for children, but they don’t need to be expensive or complicated. A child’s imagination is a powerful force that can be energized with a few simple items, such as a few dress-up clothes that transform a youngster into a dancer, a ball player, a teacher, a superhero, or mom or dad at work. Other items that are especially interesting to children are play dough, crayons, beads for stringing, picture books, and sand and water. Let them play with boxes for hiding in, pots and pans for banging, balls for throwing or rolling, or a doll for nurturing.

Don’t be afraid of unstructured time for quiet play or other activities that spark the child’s interest. Children need time where nothing is planned so they can use their imagination. Also, be sure to turn off the TV so children can learn to entertain themselves.

Remember that play is fun! Encourage your child’s play and join in!
Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life. “Family Album” is a co-production of University of Florida IFAS Extension, the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, and of WUFT-FM. If you'd like to learn more, please visit our website at http://www.familyalbumradio.org.

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