

Bruce's 12 Features Of Play

Children Use Experiences

They draw on firsthand experiences from their lives when creating play scenarios. For example, recreating a recent trip to grandma's house.

Children Create Rules

They impose rules on their play to maintain control and add structure. For example, "If you're pretending to be dead, you have to stick out your tongue."

Children Use Symbols

They populate the play setting with props that represent real-world items. A rectangular block becomes a smartphone, for example.

Children Choose To Play

Play is a choice. Children can not be forced to play.

Children Rehearse Their Future

They play at being versions of their future selves. Playing at being a parent, being able to drive, or being able to read, for example.

Children Play Alone Sometimes

They may choose to engage in solitary play. For example, disappearing into a fantasy world of their own making with a collection of stuffed animals.

Children Pretend

Play is not real. It is something set off from reality. For example, they are not really a Jedi, that stick is not a real lightsaber, and that cardboard box is not really a spaceship.

Children Play Cooperatively

They play cooperatively in pairs or groups with peers, children of different ages, and adults. Family board game night, for example.

Children Have A Play Agenda

They bring personal agendas to play that may or may not be shared. For example, when Child One declares, "I'm the Mom and you're the kid!" and Child Two counters with, "I'm an angry unicorn."

Children Are Deeply Engaged

They can become deeply engaged in play scenarios or characters they create and be hard to distract. The child who chooses to stay in character as Spiderman throughout a trip to the grocery store, for example.

Children Try Out New Skills

Play serves as a haven for mastering newly acquired skills. For example, the toddler who has recently learned to climb will find ample reasons to climb in their play.

Children Coordinate Ideas, Feeling, And Relationships

They holistically bring together what they know. For example, A toddler uses her accumulated physical skills and growing confidence to successfully scale a new climbing structure for the first time.



The information on this handout is based on the ideas of researcher and author Tina Bruce, highlighted in her works *Learning Through Play*, *Time to Play in Early Childhood Education*, and *Early Childhood: A Student Guide*.

