

Playtime is crucial for a child's development

BY SAUDA NABATANZI

We have all been there. The screams as we sped off to go to play on the patch or on the sand patches. That would be game time, or break time.

Making uniforms dirty and losing shoes or socks would always be the norm.

To some children, playing is a moment of freedom, to recreate the worlds they have had in class. It is also an opportunity for learning, the more reason every nursery school and parent must have time, toys, and a safe playing environment for the children.

In 2012, a review of more than 40 studies around the world highlighted the relationship between play and creative problem-solving, co-operation and logical thinking.

A 2015 research by Edward Fisher in the UK also found that play can enhance early development by anything from 33% to 67% by increasing adjustment, improving language skills and reducing social and emotional problems. This has positive implications for both educational development and everyday intellectual life.

Play keeps children fit, too. Another study by Nicola D Ridgers at Deakin University in Australia found that longer playtimes were associated with higher levels of physical activity. And as the number of primary school children leaving school increases, cutting playtime could deprive them of a valuable opportunity to get the physical exercise they need.

Children are said to also develop social skills by taking time to play together.

In fact, playtime may be the only opportunity some children get to interact with other young people in a safe environment. Studies show that children and young people following their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons; get to learn better.

According to the studies, it is the same reason children should have "Do it yourself" games, such as building blocks, construction and tidying.

"There is need to have games that invoke thinking and intellectual growth in children," Michael Mugisa, a child psychologist, says.

Choose good toys

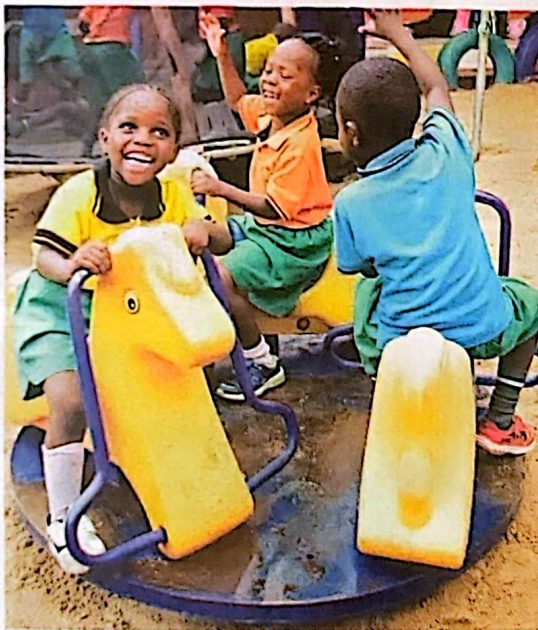
Since studies show that children learn best through play and games, one of the key contents of a perfect play environment is toys.

Suleiman Mubanda, an early childhood learning and education consultant, says there is more to toys than just the bright colours. Toys contribute a lot to a child's growth and development.

"When children use toys in a group, it creates interaction among them.



To ensure child safety, adult supervision is important where children are playing



Children play time opens children emotionally

They also develop a positive attitude towards studying and how to take care of property," he says.

Norah Namakula, the principal of Scooby-Doo Daycare and Nursery School in Kampala, says nursery children's toys should be big enough.

"They should not be tiny, too easy to get swallowed or broken."

Namakula adds: "This is for safety reasons. More so, toys always have labels of age boundaries, to avoid

accidents during playing, such as children swallowing small parts off them."

She says children at this age, have underdeveloped finger muscles and need toys that they can manipulate, as they develop their muscles.

"Children need big toys that give them wider coverage, considering their eye-to-hand co-ordination is low at this level," she adds.

The colour of the toys also matters.

"You must have a variety of colours. Not all children love the same colours. Colours should be vibrant and bright. Children are curious by nature, a character that makes bright colours a great choice since they stand out," Namakula explains.

"This is why most toys, such as animal toys, are given unnatural colours. For instance, a yellow monkey."

Namakula says whatever the choice of the toys one makes, children's safety and monitoring as they play "ought to be the priority".

Safety of environment

How safe are children's play areas, right from the sophisticated play areas to the simplest ones?

For the child's safety, it is always advised that you scan your home or school's playing area from a child's point of view.

"Crawl, take a walk around and search all entries and exits of the play area to look for possible hazards," Namakula advises.

Children play from anywhere as long as something captures their interest or attention. It can be indoor or outdoor. With indoor, they are mostly engaged with toys, for example, kitchen toys for girls and toy cars for boys.

The outdoor play areas are the most preferred ones by children. Such areas include bouncing castles, swimming pools, football fields and racing tracks.

Every parent should ensure that their child is safe during play time.

"Children should never be left around swimming pools or any water body without any adult supervision," Mubanda cautions.

Children should also be taught about these safety cautions. They should read and understand them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Keep small household items, such as small or broken crayons, coins, paper clips, pen caps, jewellery, hair clips and screws out of the reach of children. Such items are common causes of choking.

2 Keep decorations and collectibles out of children's reach. They are not toys and could have small, loose or sharp parts that could choke or cut.

3 Keep small children away from buckets, diaper pails, toilets and other large household containers that are filled with liquid. Toddlers have been known to fall into such products and drown.

4 Keep plastic bags out of the reach of children. These items can lead to suffocation.

5 Keep lighters and matches out of reach of children.

6 Keep burning candles out of the reach of children and pets. Do not place burning candles on or near anything that can catch fire.

7 When visiting family and friends, be aware that not everyone will take the same precautions you do to ensure an area is free of hazards and is safe for children. Supervise children closely.

If they can interpret the cautions, it will be equally easy for them to follow.

"There should be a timetable for playing and where to play from in any modern play area," Claire Agaba, the principal of Happy Hands Nursery and Daycare, says.

Parents should endeavour to know their children's health by taking them for medical checkups regularly. This helps to ease the work of the caretakers in play areas.

Agaba advises parents and guardians to ensure the play area is designed to support adult supervision. For instance, a good play area needs to have chairs or benches under a shade, stationed where parents, teachers and other caretakers have a good and clear view of what the children are doing.

Safety first

Namakula says all playgrounds should have at least a first aid kit and trained personnel in case of accidents.

Older children should be taught and advised to care for the young ones at all places, playgrounds inclusive. "Sharing is caring," Namakula says.

Before sending children out to areas, Mubanda says parents and guardians should ensure play areas are free from dangerous objects as nails and screws. This also applies to their toys; they should be free of any of those objects.