



## Why pretend play is important for school



### Being able to play before you go to school

By the time children are 5 years old they can:

- play with a group of friends. They are learning to negotiate, cooperate, argue and yes, fight from time to time.
- pretend to be someone else, for example, a doctor, a mechanic, or a teacher. This involves them understanding what that particular person would say, what they would do and how they would act.
- Children can use any object and pretend it is something else, for example, a chair could be a train or a box could be an oven.

So, why are these abilities important?

- To do these things you need to be able to think of an idea to play.
- You need to continue to think of more ideas to keep playing.

This usually results in a play story that has a beginning, with problems in the middle, with characters, and with an ending. This is story telling. Children don't know they have this ability - they just know they can play with their friends for a long time and they enjoy it!

Children who can play this type of play, enter school with lots of words, longer sentences and an ability to understand a social play context. Children also tend to be more aware of their emotions and emotions in others. They come to school with a lot of skills already in place and they are ready to learn and to build on their knowledge of the world.



### Why playing at school is important

Playing in the playground is not an easy thing to do. You need to decide if you want to play by yourself, play with others, or join in on a team game. Recess time, or lunch time, is unstructured time and children who come to school with the ability to play can usually organise themselves into some sort of activity during lunch.

In the first year of school, if children act out a story, they understand it in more depth than if they just listened to it. Pretend play ability is linked to language, narrative language, and story comprehension. These skills are important when children are learning to read.

