The Importance of play

Play is one of the foundation skills which underlie the development of language.

Play is important because:

- It is the way your child begins to attend and focus on objects in their surroundings.
- It is the way they learn to make sense of their environment.
- It is the way they learn to explore and discover things for themselves.

Skills learnt through play

Play helps to develop
- thinking and learning skills
- communication and language.

Types of Play

Play develops in different stages according to a child's age and stage of development.

1. **Sensory play** - early reactions a child makes to what they experience through their senses:

   auditory (hearing) e.g. music, singing, sounds, instruments etc
   visual (looking) e.g. mirrors, lights, shiny objects, glitter toys, bright toys.
   tactile (touch) e.g. vibration toys, textures, feely toys.

2. **Cause and effect toys** A child makes a response (e.g. touching a toy) and there is an effect (e.g. toys pop up, a sound is produced).
   Cause and effect is important for language development, as communication is itself a cause and effect process i.e. a child makes a communication (e.g. vocalisation, gesture) and there is an effect (e.g. adult comes).

3. **Exploratory Play** (touching, feeling, holding, shaking, banging).
Exploring types of toys could be: shakers, bricks, rings, beakers, beads on a frame.
A child learns how objects work and what you can do with them.

4. **Social Play:** such as: Peek a boo, singing, taking turns in play, tickling, rough and tumble.

5. **Symbolic Play** Using objects and toys in a meaningful way e.g. turning pages of a book, tea sets, doll play, car play, ball play.

Tips

- Play with your child as often as possible
- Give your child a variety of toys to play with
- Help your child to explore and discover how toys work.
- Talk to your child while you play and use Makaton signs if you wish.

Choose an activity that your child enjoys and that they can do, even with full adult support.

Some ideas : taking turns to roll a ball to each other sitting on the floor.
taking turns to put a brick in a container
taking turns to make sounds.

3. **Singing songs**

Sing familiar songs with your child, facing them. Help them join in the actions (e.g. If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands).

4. **Developing awareness of other people**

- Help your child to pay attention and look at other people (e.g. family members).
- Encourage other people to talk to and play with your child.
- Help your child reach out and touch a familiar person while you say their name.

5. **Hello/Bye**

'Hello' and 'bye' are social words that introduce a child to the idea of people arriving (hello) and leaving (bye). Try to encourage people who are familiar with your child to say 'hello' and 'bye' at appropriate times.
Using the touch signs for 'hello' and 'bye' can also help your child's understanding.

Tips

- Talk to your child face to face
- Sing songs with your child
- Share games with your child in play