

Play opportunities from 5 up to 8 years

From 5 to 8 years children are able to play for long periods without needing adult help. Their play also becomes more complicated and often involves rules. Children have clear play preferences, but adults try to provide a variety of play opportunities so that children develop a wide range of skills.

Physical play

Physical play often involves games for this age range. It helps children's social skills as well as their problem-solving abilities, but also helps with coordination and specific gross motor skills such as hitting or batting. Popular play opportunities include football, short tennis or using equipment such as scooters, climbing frames and skipping ropes.

Heuristic play

In this age range discovering objects often takes the form of **loose part play**. This type of play is where children 'discover' all sorts of objects that have been left outdoors for them to find. These objects may be made from natural or manmade materials, for example, cardboard tubes, drain gutters, ribbons or blankets. Children use these objects to play with and this encourages high levels of problem-solving and imagination. Finding objects also encourages children's speech and communication as they talk about what they have found and what they might do with it.

Games including board games

Card games and board games with simple rules help children to develop further their social skills. Through this type of play, children also learn mathematical skills, including logic, counting and problem solving. These games are also a way of helping children develop their memory. Some games help children's early literacy and communication skills. Table 2.3 gives some examples of these.

Table 2.3 Mathematical games and early literacy and communication games.

Mathematical games	Early literacy and communication games
<p>Games include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> noughts and crosses happy families Beetle Ludo. 	<p>Games include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I spy' 20 questions games with written instructions on cards such as charades or Pictionary® Scrabble®.

Sensory play

While younger children mostly play with water and dough, older children now use paint, crayons, glue and staplers to make things and to express themselves through drawing and modelling. These sensory activities support children's imagination and their fine motor movements, as well as giving them pleasure and confidence.



Figure 2.3 Children's drawings become more detailed as they become older.

Imaginative play

This older age group needs more challenges in their imaginative play. They like dressing up and practising for performances, and are influenced by films and television shows. Imaginative play helps children to explore ideas and emotions, be imaginative and work collaboratively with others. This is a great way for children to be creative. It can also be used to support children's literacy skills, for example, reading or writing a script.

Construction play

As with other play opportunities for this age group, construction play needs to be more challenging and complex. Children like to have 'projects' such as building dens or completing a model kit or putting together a gadget. Construction play helps children to problem-solve, use their fine and gross motor skills and also to be creative. Children often combine construction play with imaginative play, for example, making a den for pirates or creating a model ship for small-world play. This allows them to develop imagination alongside creativity.

Do you remember taking part in school plays or productions? What skills could children learn from these?

Discussion point



This child is combining imaginative and construction play.

Remember

Many games that children play between the ages of 5 and 8 involve rules. How does this link to their stage of development?

Key term

Loose part play – play in which children can explore objects that have been deliberately left outdoors for them to find.

Take it further

Are there any games in the table that you haven't heard of?

Try to find out what the rules are and play them with a friend or adult who knows the games.