How to Encourage your Child to Play & Engage

Play is a developmental process. Each child will develop play skills according to his/her own developmental level. Encourage appropriate play according to your child’s developmental level. When your support your child at his/her developmental level, you will help them build a foundation for future skills to develop. When we think of children playing, we envision children together, sharing ideas, communicating and working together for a common play goal. We must remember there are many building blocks to attain this goal. When children are young they play with adult guidance. From there it evolves into solitary play/exploration. During this stage they are exploring their environment. Here are a few tips to encourage this type of play:

* Encourage physical movement experiences such as playing outside; climbing, visiting playgrounds, spraygorunds, swimming/water play, riding tricycles, push toys, blowing bubbles and scribbling with chalk.
* Get down on the floor and play! Crawl, roll, chase each other, play peek-a-boo, hide and seek in very simple areas. Other great play ideas are swinging your child in a sturdy blanket (need 2 people), rolling in a blanket and unrolling, playing peek-a-boo with a blanket.
* Encourage Tummy Time- especially if you child was not a fan of it when they were infants. Tummy Time is very important in a child’s development. Lying on their stomach promotes shoulder strength and stability. Try to maintain this position while playing a puzzle, playing with an iPod, and looking at books.
* Encourage independence. It is always hard to watch your child struggle though an activity. It is good to have them “help you” while you get them dressed. When they have a good idea on what to do, try to let them figure out how to dress or feed themselves. Don’t stress about the mess!
* Roughhouse with your child. Hold them up high and fly them like an airplane or turn them upside down, assist them in doing a flip or a summer sault, children also like big bear hugs from people, very big pillows or stuffed animals too.
* Music is a great motivator for movement. Dance and be silly then practice “freezing”!
* Have them wear supportive proper fitting sneakers. Comfortable shoes will prevent tripping and low them to be more active on the playground and in the classroom. Slip on shoes, sandal and crux are not recommended furring they school day. Comfortable clothing that they can move easily in and can get dirty is recommended.
* If you want to encourage play with siblings, it’s best to start with a familiar activity that your child already enjoys, include the sibling in the activity. Sharing space, an adult and the activity is a great start for parallel play.