

## Chapter 39: Play and Recreation

As breathing is necessary for the child, so is some exercise and play. At the preliminary and middle levels at the school the predominant activities of the children are sports, games and recreation. As they progress in their curricula, these activities are reduced.

Despite increasing load of scholastic work, the children have to take out some time for sports. Participating in outdoor games is an important physical activity that is essential for the good health of a child. Those children who don't take part in some outdoor games are generally not healthy. Islam is conscious of this natural prerequisite and therefore advises to keep the children physically free.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq says:

“Leave the child free to play till it is seven years old.”<sup>[1](#)</sup>

The Prophet of Islam says:

“Let them play; the earth is the pasture of the children!”<sup>[2](#)</sup>

Playing is a natural exercise for the child. This will make its limbs strong. The mental capabilities will sharpen and it will grow in strength. At the ground of play the child will be exposed to community living and sharing responsibilities with others.

The psychologists differ in their assessment of the importance of sports. We need not go into the details of their findings. For us it is sufficient that play and physical exercise is an important aspect of the upbringing of a child.

The mentor therefore should not consider this only as an extra-curricular-activity. to be treated lightly. The child gets acquainted with the outside world while at play. He learns about performing tasks. He practices avoiding risks and also co-operating and co-ordinating with the members of his team. In team games he learns to respect the rights of others and learns about the rules of the games.

William Astern writes:

“Games are a source of developing the natural capabilities in the child. They are like an exercise for the future discipline and activities of the person.”<sup>3</sup>

Alexi Maxim writes:

“Games provide to the child comprehension of life and a means of exercise to the body. Games help the child acquaint himself with the social norms. Play strengthens the child’s feelings. The child in his play makes a house, builds a factory, takes an expedition to the North Pole, flies in the space and guards the borders of his country.”

Anton Semonowich Makarno, a famous Russian expert on the subject of child–upbringing, says:

“If a person is smart in games and play in his childhood, he will reflect the same quality in his life as he grows up. Good play is like doing good work. Every game requires the use of mental and physical capabilities. Observe a child at play and find how he has formulated his strategy to succeed in that event. At play the feelings and sentiments of the child will be authentic. The elders should. Be observant of these.”<sup>4</sup>

William Mc Dougal writes:

“Before nature manifests in the field of activity, play reflects the bent of the persons mind.”<sup>5</sup>

Although, at play, the child is not performing any specific work, it is not less than performing a physical and mental work. During play the inclinations of the natural and personal capabilities will manifest themselves. While playing the character of the child takes shape for the bright future.

The guardians of children can be categorized in several ways:

There are those who consider playing with toys and games an unnecessary pastime and try their best to dissuade their children from taking part in any such activity.

There are others who are not against the children playing games and give them total freedom to select the toys and games of their choice to play.

The third category of guardians is those who don’t attach any importance to game other than keeping the children occupied. They purchase toys and games without any other objective in view than providing some tools to the child to be fully occupied. The child plays with the toys, breaks them and throws them away when it is tired of them. The child also shows off his pretty toys and games to other children.

The fourth type of guardians are those who not only provide the means of play to the children but they keep a watch on the use of the material given to them. If the children come across any difficulty in using the newly acquired toys, they volunteer their assistance to solve the problem. Such guardians curb the problem solving instinct of the children and they get used to depending on the assistance of the elders in

all matters.

Of the four categories of guardians, none completely measures up to the requirement of providing good learning experience to the child through play.

The best attitude that a guardian could adopt is that first of all he should leave the child free that it plays in tune with its own nature and choice. Secondly he should provide a range of educational toys to the child. He should take care to select such toys and games that sharpen the thinking and creative capabilities of the child.

Another technical aspect the guardian has to keep in mind while selecting the toys and games is that the child should find interest in constructive activities for self, the family and the society. It is a pity that most of the toys in the market have little educational value. For example, if one buys an electrically operated train or a car, the child will be busy looking at it all the day. But he will not learn anything that could be useful for him in the future.

The most useful toys are those which come in knocked-down condition and the child has to assemble them through trial and error method. For example, a collection of blocks which can be assembled into a building, incomplete paintings, jig-saw puzzles, stitching and embroidery material, carpentry tools etc

The mentor has to keep a watchful eye on the child at play that he can provide guidance to him at the right time. Watching children at play in itself is a very important aspect of training and upbringing.

A good teacher will provide the toys and games to the child and leave him alone to independently use them but will keep a subtle eye on the activity that the child is guided when he makes any mistake in the right use of the material.

For instance, when a toy car or toy train is given to the child, he is asked about the function of these machines. If the child replies that they are for moving men and materials from one place to another, then he is left alone to play with the toy. If the toy develops any defect during the use, leave it to the child to fix it as far as possible.

The child may be guided in this regard that he develops self-confidence in accomplishing the task. If you buy a doll for your daughter, it should not be in complete form. But you must guide her to prepare dresses for the doll. She will dress the doll, keep it clean, and play-act as if she is giving it a bath, changing the dress and giving it food. The child will sing a lullaby to make the doll sleep and wake it up to take it along. Emulating her elders, the child will teach good manners to the doll.

You will notice that the child puts into practice with the doll what she has heard from the elders. The child does most of the things in emulation of the acts of the parents and the elder siblings. The toys are useful when the child learns useful things of day-to-day life playing with them. The child must be encouraged to play with the toys rather than preserving them in a showcase and showing off to their

playmates. There must be a proper place where the child should keep the toys after playing with them. The child must be encouraged to keep the place orderly and clean.

There should not be too many toys with the child at a time. This can tend to confuse the child and make it difficult to make a choice. The toys need not be expensive and very attractive.

The games for children can be categorized as:

Games which a child can play individually.

Games which two or more children can play together.

Educational games which give a fillip to mental capability of the children.

Outdoor games which provide growth to the physique of the children.

Games which promote in the children the capability of defense and attack.

Games that promote the spirit of co-operation amongst the children.

In the beginning a child plays alone. It must be left alone to play, but an eye has to be kept on the child. The parents must make the right choice of the toys for the child. Sometimes the child wants to break the toy and assemble it again. The child must be allowed to do these experiments. Only when the child faces a difficulty in these tasks, the elders should intervene.

After sometime the child starts liking the company of other children. Now he must be introduced to games where more than one child will play. The parents must encourage the child to play with other children.

At this stage too the parent should take care that the child is exposed to useful team games. The team games generally in vogue are football, volley-ball, basket-ball etc. Generally children play these games during their spare time at school and in their neighborhood. These games help development of the physique of the children, but they are highly competitive and make them temperamentally aggressive.

Children playing such games always have the thought of defeating their opponents. More aggressive than these games are boxing and wrestling. These games are a reminder of the primitive days of the human race. It is a pity that such games continue to be played.

Russel writes:

“Today’s humanity, when compared with earlier epochs, has its biggest adversary in materialism, and therefore begs for more thoughtfulness and mutual co-operation in its ranks. Man doesn’t need antagonism, resistance and hatred because these are things that sometimes overwhelm him and at other times he subdues them.”[6](#)

It is of some concern that no thought is given to the matter and such games that promote aggressive tendencies in the children are getting continuous patronage and encouragement. It would be better if the management of schools and colleges give a serious thought to this matter and consult experts to introduce useful games for children.

The concluding point in this discussion is that although play is essential for the growth of the children, the timing of the games must be restricted. A capable mentor schedules for play in such a manner that the child automatically reverts to constructive activities immediately thereafter. Such mentors don't allow the child to excessively involve in play.

'Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

“One addicted to play will not be successful.”<sup>7</sup>

Russel writes about this:

“It is a sign of the decline of social values when we judge a person on his proficiency at games. We have not understood that to live in the modern and complicated world there is need for thoughtfulness and knowledge.”<sup>8</sup>

One drawback of team games is that they might create in the children the feelings of jealousy and conflict. In such situations the mentor must intervene and sort out the dispute to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Sometimes parents get involved in the conflicts between children. Without going into the causes of the conflict they take sides with their own child and the matter goes out of hands. Such thoughtless attitude gives the child the feeling that he can get away with any misdemeanor on his part.

<sup>1</sup>. Wasail al-shiah, v 15, p. 193

<sup>2</sup>. Majma az zawaid, v 8, p. 159

<sup>3</sup>. Ruwan shinashi kudak, p. 331

<sup>4</sup>. Ruwan shinashi kudak, p. 130

<sup>5</sup>. Ruwan shinashi kudak, p. 332

<sup>6</sup>. Dar Tarbiat, p. 121

<sup>7</sup>. Gharar al hukm, p. 854

<sup>8</sup>. Dar Tarbiat, p. 142

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