

“Home Is Where the Heart Is”

by

Sally Goldberg, Ph.D.

Q. Sometimes I feel like life at home is like being on a treadmill. Any ideas for breaking that cycle?

A. While “home is where the heart is,” it is mom who is the “heart of the matter.”

Although the major part of your mom job is care of the children, it is care of you that is at the root of it all.

Mom Time

All work and no play make mom a dull girl. As you start off the New Year, the key is to strive for balance. As you plan your day, week, month, and year, be sure to include outings that *you* like for yourself like coffee with a friend, workouts of different types, hobby events, or a stroll in the park. Movies, theater, museums and unique restaurants are also great places to go. In addition, home endeavors are important. Make as much time as you can to put your feet up with a magazine, read a book in a favorite spot, watch a new and exciting DVD, work on your hobby, or create with a craft. A fun-filled mom is at the “heart” of a happy child.

Hands-on Interactive Play

In addition to planning time for the “new you,” there are things you can do to help life at home run more smoothly. One suggestion is to provide your child with as many

hands-on interactive play activities as possible. Clay, play dough, building sets, bubbles, simple dolls, pegs and pegboards, and the like all provide opportunities for your child to experience hands-on interactive play. Because of the free-form materials these all provide open-ended experiences. They allow you to participate, facilitate, or just observe. The least formed the toy, the most value it has, and conversely, the most formed the toy, the least value it has. This is because little form leaves the most room for creativity. As the old saying goes, “The more you put into it, the more you get out of it.”

“Play is a Child’s Work, and Toys are the Tools.”

First the child wants to play. Then the child or makes whatever toys he/she needs for playing. Finding or making the toys is part of the process.

* A child wants to play house... out comes the plastic dishes, cutlery, cups, and napkins.

- A child wants to play store... out comes the empty food boxes, a play cash register, and play money.
- A child wants to play doctor... out comes Dad’s big white shirt, cotton balls, and band aids.

Making Your Own Toys

Sometimes making the toys starts off the play process. Girls can spend hours making doll clothes out of material scraps and doll houses out of small cartons. They make carnations out of tissues. Boys make their own toy cars out of boxes and wheels

and all kinds of intricate structures out of toothpicks, dowels, and other household extras. Many children have hours of fun creating with Popsicle® sticks. Even though we are so used to buying toys to start play for our children, this is often a way of putting the cart before the horse.

Lead Paint and Other Poisons

Worried about lead paint or other chemicals in your child's toys? Easily accessible materials from around the house can help. Check out your recycle bin for safe plastic containers. Get index cards in all sizes and pastel colors. Collect markers, crayons, child-sized scissors, and chalk. Use these and other supplies like ribbon and yarn to make your own toys with and for your child.

Play

Here are some guidelines that will help you and your child enjoy the rewards of playtime balance:

- Play has no rules. It grows from the ideas and imagination of the players.
- Play is like a dance to be enjoyed. It is not like a race to be won.
- Play is best with toys that have these four characteristics:
 - Interesting to *see*
 - Fun to *touch*
 - Designed for *interaction*
 - Have *surprise!*

Happy New Year to you and your family! The better you take care of yourself, the better you will be able to care for your child. Meaningful mom-time plus purposeful child-time is the formula for a smooth-running family. As your child becomes more creative, self-directed, and independent the end result will keep you fun-filled.

.....
Sally Goldberg, Ph.D., is a professor of education at the University of Phoenix and parenting specialist. Through her books, articles, presentations, and one-on-one coaching she empowers parents to solve behavior and learning problems. She helps family life to run more smoothly. Dr. Sally gives weekly parenting classes in different locations in and around Phoenix, AZ. For further information call 480-766-6323 or e-mail drsally@drsallyparenting.com. Find out more at www.drsallyparenting.com.

.....