



Building Relationships with Children Thorough Play

Objectives

After this lesson participants will:

- To discover ways that play is a powerful tool in building relationships with children
- To realize that relationships are strengthened when we play with children
- To practice a variety of possible play scenarios with children

Lesson Overview

Welcome and Warm-Up	10 min
Why Play is so Important	10 min
Building Relationships as we Play With Children	10 min
Types of Play	20 min
Game Idea Exchange	30 min
Wrap Up & Prayer	5 min

Approximate Total Time: 85 min

Materials

Illustration option:

- Erasable board and writing supplies
- Stones, twigs, a few leaves (optional)

Media option:

PowerPoint slides for this lesson

Scripture passages:

- 1 Corinthians 9:22-23



Welcome and Warm-Up

10 min



Game: Noah's Ark

Number participants from one to six and tell them to remember their number. Move everyone into an open space. Explain that each number corresponds with an animal (i.e. one-cow, two-rooster, three-cat, four-dog, etc. Choose any animals you wish). The objective of the game is to find others who are the same animal by only making the sound of that animal.

Once participants find their group, give a few minutes for people to introduce themselves to one another before they return to their seats.



1-2



How are you feeling after playing the game? What did you notice about what happened in the group as we played? (laughter, cooperation, friendliness, silliness, etc.)

Playing a game helped us build relationships with one another. Play is even more important in building relationships with children. In this lesson we will explore ways to build relationships with children through play. **THE 1for50 HAND: This lesson helps us consider important skills to help us "Nurture the Whole Child."**

Why Play is So Important

10 min

CULTURE NOTE: In some languages the word for "play" and "game" are the same word. It will make it more difficult for participants to understand that games are only one type of play.

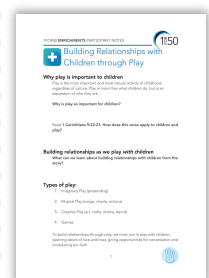
Play is the most important and most natural activity of childhood. Children in every culture play. For children play is not simply what they do, but an expression of who they are.



Why is play so important for children? (Discuss in groups of four or five for a few minutes and then share answers with the entire group.) Answers may follow some of these points:

- Children establish relationships with others and develop socially
- Children develop physical skills
- Children practice roles for later in life through pretending
- Children express their need to explore and learn about their world
- Play helps develop imagination, intelligence
- Play helps children express emotions and make sense of their experiences

Someone once said, "Play is the language of children." It is the world through which they communicate with others.



Since play is so important to children, we need to find ways to join with them in play. Let's take a few moments and explore why it is so important to play with children.

Building Relationships as we Play *With* Children 10 min



In this culture, what are the attitudes about adults playing with children? (NOTE: This is a significant question for cultures that typically do not play with their children.)

Drama/Story:

(In advance, have four volunteers prepared to dramatize the following story as you read it.) One of the most common ways younger children play is by pretending or using their imagination.

Rosie and Sarah are best friends and both are five years old. They like to play "house" under the trees beside the footpath and they take turns being the mom and dad. One day Rosie made some "coffee" for Sarah and handed her a stone and a twig for stirring. As they drank, Rosie had an idea. "Let's make a gate!" They drew a line across the footpath and decided to stop anyone who wanted to pass.

First came Mr. Matthew, who was a Sunday school teacher at Rosie's church. Boldly little Rosie called out, "Stop! You cannot go past the line." Mr. Matthew loved children and he stopped to greet the girls. "Hello. What are you doing?" "This is our gate and you cannot pass!" Rosie said. "Oh, I see. Well enjoy your game." And Mr. Matthew stepped over the line and continued. He had a busy day and could not waste any more time.

After a while Mr. Peter came past. He also loved children. Rosie called out, "Stop!" and she held her hand out like a policeman. Mr. Peter pretended to step on the brakes of a car. "This is our gate," said Rosie. "You have to pay to get through." "How much will it cost?" asked Mr. Peter. "Two bananas," said Rosie. Mr. Peter pretended to take something out of his pocket and gave it to Rosie. "Here are the bananas. Say, would you have any coffee for me? I am very thirsty." "Yes," replied Rosie. "We have some coffee but I also have some nice cake for you. Would you like some, Uncle Peter?" Mr. Peter squatted down and allowed Rosie and Sarah to serve him with some leaves and a stone. After a few minutes of conversation with them, he said, "It's time for me to go," and waving goodbye, he continued on his way.

The following Sunday after church, Mr. Peter and Mr. Matthew were talking together. Rosie and Sarah ran up to them and stopped right in front of Mr. Peter. "Please come and visit us again! It was fun!" They touched his hand and ran off, waving goodbye. They didn't even notice Mr. Matthew, who felt bad and wondered why the children did not like him.



What was the difference between the two men?

What does the story teach us about building relationships with children?

Read **1 Corinthians 9:22-23**.

How does this verse apply to children and play? Paul described the necessity of entering the world of the people he wanted to reach. If we want to build relationships with children, we also need to enter their world, and one of the best ways to do that is through play. Paul had to set aside some of his own cultural practices to reach out with the gospel, and we may need to do the same.

When we enter the world of children at play, we accept them and build relationships of love and trust. It gives us an open door to talk about their lives, and also provides opportunities to talk about faith and God. In our story, the children were using imaginary play. But there are many other kinds of play that children engage in.

Types of Play

20 min

Let us look at three other ways (in addition to imaginary play) we can play with children in order to build relationships with them. (NOTE: Instructors have freedom to substitute their own games and songs for this activity as long as they fit the appropriate category of play. If someone locally can provide an example in the local language instead, that would be excellent!)

Musical Play:

Children love music, and many games have songs, chants and actions that children must do. Let's sing one together. (Do a song like "Hokey Pokey" or "Father Abraham.")

You put your right arm in,
You take your right arm out,
You put your right arm in,
And you shake it all about,
You do the hokey pokey
And you turn yourself around,
And that's what it's all about. HEY!

Creative Play:

When we do things like arts and crafts, dance and drama with our children, we have opportunity to talk with them as they create, learning about their lives and using teachable moments to help bring faith into their activity.

(Share an example of a time when you had a significant conversation with a child while playing with them.)

Games:

Games are usually what we think of when we think of playing with children. But to build relationships with the children using games, we need to play *with* them, joining them in their play. Let's play a few games together. (Depending on time, you may play any or all of the games below, usually just briefly to demonstrate them to participants.)

Catch: (low energy game)

Have participants stand in a row beside one another. They must put their left hand out beside them with the palm up. Then they must take their right index/pointer finger and point it in the palm of the person beside them. The leader will call out "CATCH!" They must try to pull away their pointer finger from their neighbor's palm before he grabs it. At the same time they must try to grab the finger of the person on the other side of them who is pointing into their hand.

Cross and Crowd: (medium energy game)

Draw a line down center of room with chalk or a string. The left side of the line is the "cross", the right side is the "crowd." Have all participants stand on one side of the line. The leader will call out the words "cross" or "crowd" and people must jump to the side of the line represented by the word. If they get caught on the wrong side or if they move when they should not, they are out of the game.

Fire on the Mountain (circle game)

Participants form a circle with leader in the center. The children begin to run around in the circular formation while doing the following chant with the leader:

Leader: Fire on the mountain

Participants: Run, Run, Run,

Leader: Fire on the mountain

Participants: Run, Run, Run,

Leader: Fire on the mountain

Participants: Run, Run, Run,

Leader: In groups of _____ (and calls out a number)

Participants quickly gather into groups according to the number that was called. Any participants left are out of the game.

Swim Jonah Swim (high energy game):

This game needs a large space for running. One person is the 'fish' and stands in the center of the play area. All other participants line up at one end of play area. When the fish yells, "Swim, Jonah, Swim!" all participants run to the opposite end of the play area, avoiding the fish. To capture someone, the 'fish' must tag the person, who then becomes a fish and stays in the center of the play area. The fish calls out again and all the participants run across the field. All new fish help to catch the others. The game continues until everyone is caught. The last player caught is the fish for the next round.



How did you feel after playing these games? What might be a spiritual lesson we could talk about with children after playing one of these games?

Playing is fun. It shows children we care about the things that are important to them. It tells them we love and understand them and that they can trust us. And as relationships are built it opens doors for communicating the truth of God in a meaningful way to the children.

We all have great game ideas, so we're going to take time to share some of our own game ideas with one another.

Game Idea Exchange

30 min

Have participants get into groups of 8-10 and share games, songs, and play ideas within their group. This activity also could be done with the entire group if the group is not too large. Take as much or as little time as you have for this activity.

People are eager to learn new games. Often this activity will spill over to a break and they will want to learn the games. Use break times to play more games with participants or sprinkle them as breaks between lessons.

Wrap Up & Prayer

5 min



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Our faith is shared through relationships, and we have seen how powerfully play can be used to build relationships with children. We have given you many ideas of ways to play with children. But the only way it will happen is if you *play with children!*

Do you want to build relationships with children? Then I challenge you this week to take the time and say to a child or group of children, "Would you like to play a game?" Then see what happens.

(Close in prayer together.)