

## Parents, children learn about power of play

Arika Hherron/Winston-Salem Journal | Posted: Wednesday, May 14, 2014 9:30 pm

Noel Cosme, 2, had a blast climbing through the wavy maze at the Children's Museum of Winston-Salem on Wednesday morning.

What looked like all fun and games, though, was actually much more.

Noel was learning.

For young children, play time is an important part of development, said Laurie Brown, a child development specialist with Imprints.

Imprints, a nonprofit, provides services to families with young children. The group serves about 125 families each year.

The goal of Wednesday's program, and others like it that the organization puts on each month, is to help parents gain the skills to raise healthy, successful children, said Berta Andrade, director of Imprints' family support program. Imprints services are provided at no cost to participating families.

"The goal is to make them enjoy parenting,"

Andrade said. "We want them to be the first and the best teacher for their children."

Brown was talking to a group of Imprints parents at the museum Wednesday, teaching them about the importance of play for young children.

"Play is really essential to their development," she said.

Brown said that some parents think kids don't really learn until they're school-age. That's not the case, she said.

Children develop a lot in the first few years of life and the things they learn during play are an important part of that. Brown said play teaches kids thinking skills, social-emotional skills, motor skills and more.



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From left, Lisa Frense laughs as she plays with her daughter, Carmen Cosme, her son, Noel Cosme and her younger brother, DJ Sharp at the Children's Museum.

“It’s not about how to play, but it’s about giving them the opportunity to play,” Brown said. “Children will play on their own but you need to give them the opportunity.”

Children need opportunities to play on their own, with their peers and with adults, Brown said. They develop skills from each type of play.

Brown also encouraged parents to let their children play the “wrong” way.

“They don’t always have to play with (toys) the way the toymaker intended,” she said. “They’re learning from that too.”

Brown also warned parents that “screen time” is not the same as play time. It can be hard to remember in a digital world, but kids still need to get away from the television, computer and tablet for interactive, hands on play.

After a brief talk about the importance of play and how parents can facilitate that for their children, the Imprints families had free reign at the Children’s Museum.

“We love the Children’s Museum,” said Monica Douglas, who attended with her 13-month old daughter, Addison.

Douglas said she was glad to learn more about play time and its importance as Addison grows.

“I thought it would be a good thing for the kids,” said Crystal Robinson, who attended the event with her husband and two children. “The kids love to play and they need it.”

Robinson was helping her son, Sylvester, ring up pretend groceries in the Children’s Museums mock grocery-store.

“They have more stuff here than (we have) at home,” she said.

The Children’s Museum is a great place to bring kids for productive play, but it can happen at home, too, Brown said.

She said the most important thing is for parents to provide ample time for free play for their kids.

“It can be just playing in the backyard,” Brown said. “It doesn’t have to be expensive toys.”

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