

Pointers For Parents

Playing Helps Define Self

(NAPSA)—Parenting may not be all fun and games, but it should involve a lot of playing, say experts. Child psychologists say the process of play stimulates children's development and functions as a "rehearsal" for their future adult roles.

Parents can facilitate this process by providing a supportive context for play and toys that help spark young imaginations.

"The true essence of play is really in the story telling. It can serve as a sort of dress rehearsal for roles children will have later in life," says child psychiatrist Michael Brody, M.D. "Children can also act out their feelings through play, which can help them through difficult developmental stages."

Brody, a child psychiatrist and chair of The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, says it's "story telling" that helps children define themselves. He recommends parents fill a child's toy chest with open-ended, non-scripted toys that will help kids tell their tales. He suggests:

- **Play Friends**—Dolls and stuffed animals can become children's imaginary play partners. Children can use the toys to create and act out situations, while practicing their communication skills. In addition, "taking care" of dolls can help children learn to take care of themselves. For example, Zapf Creation makes a doll called Chou Chou. It looks and feels like a real baby. Children can learn to



Playing Up Play—Child psychologists say certain toys can help stimulate children's imaginations and help them develop a sense of self.

dress and care for it, just as they would have to do for themselves.

- **Role Play**—Brody says children love to play "parent," "sibling," and virtually every other role. He suggests giving kids realistic dolls to help their desires to nurture growth. For instance, BABY born is a realistic looking doll—complete with "baby fat," realistic clothing and a raised belly button. The doll has over 100 accessories, letting children create a variety of imaginative situations. It also has a number of life-like functions such as the ability to be fed, and the need to be "potty trained."

- **House Children's Imaginations**—According to Brody, doll houses and play forts serve as "cat-

alysts, allowing for the suspension of logical thinking." Children can use the toys to act out plays, or "live" in magical worlds. Kids can use BABY born® Miniworld as the entire dollhouse complex. It includes a miniature version of the BABY born® doll, as well as mini strollers, clothing and other accessories. Brody says the stories children create can help them become their "true selves"—and help promote self esteem.

"Watch a child at play, either alone or in a group," Brody says. "Parents will notice what role playing reveals about their child's feelings."

For more information, visit www.zapf-creation.com.