

The Importance of Play in Childhood Development

Developed by Aja Roley, MA, OTR/L



What is play?

Any spontaneous or organized activity that provides fun, enjoyment, entertainment, amusement, or diversion

Allows a child to learn about themselves and the world around them.

What is free or unstructured play?

Play a child carries out him- or her-self

Play that is self-directed and allows the child to do what interests them (examples: playing dress up or imaginary games; outdoor exploring)

No structured guidelines or rules



Why is it important?

Helps children develop important life skills and physical health for successful participation in needed and desired daily activities.

Allows a child to be creative and come up with original ideas and act on them

Skills developed through play include:

Problem solving

Knowing what to do when no one is directing you

Flexibility and adaptability

Building confidence

Understanding social situations

Interacting with others and negotiating

Processing emotions

Willingness to take risks and try new things

Resilience

Discovering Interests

Physical health and fitness through active play

Body awareness and coordination of body movements

Improved attention and behavior by releasing excess energy through physical movement



How Much Time Should Children Spend Playing?

According to The American Academy of Pediatrics:

Toddlers need at least 1 HOUR of unstructured play and 30 MINUTES of adult directed/interactive play PER DAY

Older children need at least 2-3 HOURS of unstructured play PER DAY

MEDIA USE AND SCREEN TIME:

***IMPORTANT:** Use of media and screen time should be a small portion of a child's daily playtime. The majority of playtime should be active (the child is moving their body) or take place outdoors.

Check out the following article:

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162593>



≠≠≠



RESOURCES:

1. The Healthy Children website has a place to ask questions!

<https://www.healthychildren.org/english/tips-tools/pages/default.aspx>

2. Check out this video from pediatrician and adolescent specialist Ken Ginsburg, MD, FAAP

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/The-Importance-of-Play-Video.aspx>

3. Pathways.org is a great non-profit organization that has many free educational resources for parents!

(This site also has resources in Spanish and other languages)

<https://pathways.org/topics-of-development/play/>



TIPS FOR PARENTS

Playing can be hard work for parents! Here are some ideas to help support play with your child



TIP for the COMMUNITY: Find local parks, libraries, and outdoor spaces to explore with your child

*Passport to Function offers many strategies on HOW to play with your child at the park and in the community!
<http://passporttofunction.com/2015/09/social-skills/>

TIP for HOME: Make places in your home that you spend a lot of time in SAFE PLAY AREAS with interactive safe materials

Examples: Toys, blocks, crayons, paint, cardboard boxes, plastic cups, spoons, pots and pans, and pillows.

TIP for Screen time and Media Use: Create a schedule or family media plan for media/screen time use and limit the amount of hours used per day!

Reference:
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>