

## The Importance of Play



Play is “the work of childhood;” it is just as important to a child’s well-being as work is for an adult. Play is crucial for healthy brain development. It helps children learn new skills; teaches them how to share with others, make decisions, and express their feelings; learn about the world; and work through scary and confusing experiences. But did you know that nearly 40 percent of elementary schools have eliminated recess or are considering it, and kindergartners in full-day programs often have no break for recess? Even early learning facilities are sometimes so highly structured that children don’t have much opportunity for real play.

### What is real play?

Play workers in the United Kingdom define real play as “socially interactive, first-hand, loosely supervised.” The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all children should have lots of “unscheduled, independent, nonscreen [away from TV,

tablets and videos] time ... Play should be child-driven rather than adult-directed.” They emphasize that “active child-centered play is a time-tested way of producing healthy, fit young bodies.”

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### Why is play so important?

- Children who have lots of time for free, open-ended play score higher in reading and math tests.
- Studies show that lack of real play results in more childhood obesity; higher levels of frustration, stress, and aggression in young children; and less creativity and imagination.
- There is also some evidence that children who attend preschools with little time for unstructured play have higher rates of later arrests and incarceration.

### What are some types of play parents and early learning facilities can encourage?

- Large and small-motor play
- Language play (telling stories, making up silly songs)
- Construction play (building forts)
- Sensory play (playing in mud, water)
- Make-believe play (let's pretend)
- Rough-and-tumble and risk-taking play
- Symbolic play (turning a stick into a magic wand)
- Mastery play (learning to do new things)

## R E S O U R C E S

*The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds.* Kenneth R. Ginsburg. Pediatrics.  
<http://bit.ly/2m47eIb>

*Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School,* Alliance for Childhood, 2009. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED504839.pdf>

*Play ideas for young children.* ZERO TO THREE.  
[www.zerotothree.org/espanol/play](http://www.zerotothree.org/espanol/play)

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