

Kids Need to Play

All work and no play makes for unhappy kids.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, play time is crucial to a child's development and contributes to their cognitive, physical, emotional, and social well-being.^[1] Unfortunately, most kids are missing out on valuable play time, and this trend may be leading to increased rates of stress, anxiety, and depression as well as compromising optimal development.

Why Play is Important

Play is critical to healthy brain development. Play stimulates the imagination and helps kids to develop creativity, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Kids use play to interact and engage with the world around them. Play builds self-esteem, social skills, and competency. Self-directed play allows kids the opportunity to be “in charge”, something they rarely get to experience. Furthermore, while playing, kids learn how to share, negotiate, resolve conflicts, and make decisions.

Why Kids Are Not Getting Enough Play Time

Sadly, despite the importance of play time, most kids don't get enough. Sometimes this is a result of poverty; however, lack of play time is prevalent in more affluent settings also, as parents forego play time in favor of enrichment activities such as sports or academic clubs or even tutoring. In fact, there is a growing trend of overscheduled kids who are dragged from one activity to the next with no free time to just be kids. This joyless endeavor actually robs children of the opportunity to figure out what they want to do—it has already been decided for them.

Many adults perceive play time as wasted time, but nothing could be further from the truth. Play time is valuable learning time during which kids explore and master their environment. Self-directed play time is likely to provide your child with more learning opportunities than another half hour with flash cards.

Make Play a Priority

Your child gets one—and only one—childhood. Let it be a childhood filled with unstructured play time. Kids have the rest of their lives to be responsible, hard-working citizens. Now is the time for freedom and exploration.

The best forms of play time are those that foster imagination. Forego “passive” toys (as well as TV and computer games) in favor of toys that require kids to get creative and use their imagination.

Reference:

[1] American Academy of Pediatrics: Ginsburg KR and the Committee on Communications and the Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Family and Health. Clinical Report: The importance of play in promoting health child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. *Pediatrics*. 2007; 119: 182-191.

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