



Roundtable on the Importance of Play

Why Play Matters:

Play helps kids develop:

- cognitive skills – like math and problem solving in a pretend grocery store
- physical abilities – like balancing blocks and running on the playground
- new vocabulary – like the words used in imaginative play
- social skills – like playing together in a pretend car wash
- literacy skills – like creating a menu for a pretend restaurant
- Outlet for stress and anxiety
- Respect boundaries
- Follow rules
- Take turns
- Helps teens figure out identities, passions and interests
- Encourages independence
- Improves Literacy
- Emotional and behavioral benefits
- Protects Mental Health

How Play Promotes Mental Health

Research found that play can have a positive impact on kids' mental health by helping them to:

Develop interests and competencies
Learn to make decisions, solve problems, exhibit self-control, and follow rules
Learn to regulate emotions
Make friends and get along with others
Experience joy

What Play Looks Like at Different Ages: There are 6 stages of play:

Did you know there are 6 stages of play?

- Unoccupied Play: 0-3 Months
- Solitary Play: 0-2 Years
- Onlooker Play: 2 Years
- Parallel Play: 2+ Years
- Associate Play: 3-4 Years
- Cooperative Play: 4+ Years

Play During the Elementary Years Includes:

Unstructured Play:

- Outdoor play: your child can ride bikes and other wheeled toys (with trainer wheels, if needed, and a helmet), run around at the local park, or go for a walk with you and some friends.
- Art and craft: simple or natural materials can let your school-age child express their creativity. Try materials like feathers, leaves, bark, sticks, coloured papers, crayons, scraps of fabric, glue, paints, beads and so on. Your child could make a puppet, do a collage or just draw and paint.
- Dress-up games: these are great for pretend play. They let your child explore emotions and try out different roles like being a pilot or doctor. Your child just needs some old clothes and simple props like old hats or handbags.
- Sound and music play: activities like jumping and dancing to music, or making and playing simple homemade instruments, are good for expressing emotions and imagination.

Play During The Teen Years Includes:

- Fitness activities like yoga, running, or spin classes
- Adventure activities like skateboarding, mountain biking, tree climbing, and skiing
- Building things with wood or other materials
- Arts and Crafts
- Video Games
- Role-playing games, like D&D or larping
- Board games

- Designing a website
- Making a music video or TikTok
- Making a short film
- Gardening
- Baking
- Creating a new recipe
- Cosplay
- Creative Writing
- Dancing
- Hiking
- Camping
- Amusement or adventure parks
- Karaoke

Benefits of Play for Teens:

- ❖ Since adolescence is a time of rapid brain development and self-inquiry, play can help teens grow and discover things about themselves, which builds intelligence
- ❖ Play allows kids to mess up and recover and learn how to do better next time
- ❖ Mental health - one study showed as play declined, instances of depression, anxiety, suicide, helplessness, and narcissism increased

Undirected Play:

“Undirected play” allows kids to learn how to work in groups, share, negotiate, resolve conflict, and learn self-advocacy skills

How to Encourage Play:

- ❖ Create a safe space for play
- ❖ Ensure their schedule has time for free play
- ❖ Schedule free time into your day/week
- ❖ Gives prompts for play
- ❖ Be active in play yourself
- ❖ Praise and encourage their play
- ❖ Give your teens permission to play and be silly!

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