

## Why Play Matters: Supporting Your Child's Growth Through Play



### Highlights

Play supports children's emotional, physical, social, and intellectual development.

Different types of play - both structured and unstructured - offer unique learning opportunities.

Rough-and-tumble play can help build confidence, boundaries, and coordination when supervised safely.

Outdoor play encourages risk-taking and environmental appreciation.

Toys don't have to be expensive to be valuable.

Screen time should be age-appropriate and limited.

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## **Why Play Matters**

Play is important for children's development and learning. Supporting your child's play, including helping them identify and manage risks, contributes to their growth and well-being.

Through play, children imagine, discover, create, test ideas, and develop social skills.

Play helps children:

build confidence and learn social skills

feel loved, happy, and safe

improve physical skills

develop language and communication

Play provides a supportive environment where children can ask questions, solve problems, and better understand the world around them. It is also crucial for brain development.

## **Types of Play**

### **Unstructured, Free Play**

This type of play happens spontaneously, driven by whatever captures a child's interest. Examples include making cubby houses, playing dress-up, or exploring new spaces.

### **Structured Play**

Organized play that happens at specific times, such as dance or swimming classes, library reading groups, or sports activities.

Children's play evolves as they grow, becoming longer, more creative, and increasingly social.

At different ages, children enjoy different types of play:

Babies enjoy talking, singing, smiling, and spending time with caregivers. Toddlers like boxes, balls, music, and activities that encourage movement and exploration.

Pre-schoolers engage with puzzles, drawing, playdough, dress-ups, and activities that stimulate creativity and thinking.

School-age children enjoy rhymes, riddles, cooking, obstacle courses, and building games.

### **Rough-and-Tumble Play**

Rough-and-tumble play, such as wrestling, rolling, and climbing, is fun and helps children develop physical skills. It allows them to test their strength, move in new ways, and learn about personal boundaries and turn-taking.

Children usually smile, laugh, or show excitement during rough play. However, if you notice fear, anger, or crying, it may have gone too far. Setting basic rules can help ensure safe play.

### **Rough-and-Tumble Play Ideas**

Babies and toddlers - tummy time, bouncing on a knee, or lifting into the air.

Toddlers - dancing, chasing, and spinning around.

Primary school children - wrestling and play fighting.

### **Risks in Play**

Risks are a natural part of play and help children understand their limits. Learning to assess and manage risks teaches problem-solving and confidence.

There is a difference between a hazard and a risk:

A hazard is something a child does not see, like a hidden hole in the ground.

A risk is something they recognize and learn to navigate, like a visible hole they step around.

By allowing children to take risks in play, they learn what their bodies are capable of and how to make safe choices. Encouraging them and discussing challenges helps them develop these skills.

### **Benefits of Outdoor Play**

Playing outdoors encourages risk-taking, exploration, and discovery. It allows children to engage with nature and develop an appreciation for their environment.

### **Choosing Toys**

Toys help children play and understand the world. They don't need to be expensive but should be appropriate for the child's age and developmental stage.

### **Screen Time**

Screen time recommendations vary based on a child's age:

Up to 2 hours per day for children aged 5 to 17 years (recreational screen time).

No screen time for children under 2 years old, except for video chatting.

Up to 1 hour per day for children aged 2 to 5 years.

### **Tools And Assistance**

Use age-based guides to choose safe toys and age-appropriate screen content. Talk with your child's educator or carer about how they support different types of play.

Consult a child health nurse or early childhood specialist if you're unsure how to encourage development through play.

Look for local playgroups or community centres that offer free or low-cost structured play activities.