

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PARENTS -

MAKING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH PRACTICAL FOR FAMILIES



BENEFITS OF PLAY

Unstructured play provides many benefits for children. These benefits include, but are not limited to, the opportunity for children to create and explore their world, to develop new competencies that lead to improved confidence, to determine rules and develop social skills, to practice decision making, and to engage in physical activity while improving coordination and movement planning strategies.

In addition, play allows parents to engage with their children in a unique way, giving parents the opportunity to view the world from the child's vantage point while demonstrating interest in the child's perspective.

Unfortunately, many of the pressures of today's society and life styles have combined to decrease the amount of time children have available for unstructured play. The focus on educational achievement and team sports leaves children with little unstructured playtime, and thus little opportunity to develop their creativity and problem-solving skills.

Albert Einstein said, "Play is the highest form of research." **Please let your child play!**

"We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing" George Bernard Shaw

SO - also take time to play with your child!



PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF PLAY

Improved motor development

Unstructured play, especially outdoor play, allows children the opportunity to develop and improve their skills in using their large muscle groups as they run, jump, climb trees, kick and throw balls.

Play also allows children to strategize and plan their muscle movements, as well as improve their fine motor coordination.

Higher activity level

Outdoor play encourages physical activity, helping children develop healthy habits. These healthy habits may provide a lifetime of benefits.

IMPROVED LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Play helps children develop their language skills. A review of 46 studies showed children's language development was enhanced when they participated in pretend play.

Fisher, Edward P. (1992). The impact of play on development: A meta-analysis. Play and Culture, 5(2), 159-181.

IMPROVED ACADEMIC



SOCIAL BENEFITS OF PLAY

Play allows a child to be "in charge" and determine the strategies and rules of the game.

Children can learn about the world around them as they investigate and discover cause and effect.

During play children develop social skills as they interact, work through disagreements, negotiate roles and rules.

Play with others requires that children share and take turns, develop leadership and cooperative skills, and navigate difficult situations that promote problem solving.

EMOTIONAL BENEFITS OF PLAY

Children can work out their emotions during play. Children who are afraid of dogs, for instance, may work out their fears through playing with stuffed animals.

Play helps children develop self-confidence as they attempt new skills, or demonstrate areas of competence.



EPIDEMIOLOGY - what is happening to children and play in America?

A recent study of young children in day care centers and preschools in Seattle found the preschoolers were spending just half an hour playing outside and were playing inside for less than an hour each day. *Pediatrics* May 18, 2015 on line

In 1989 a survey of elementary school principals found that 96% of school systems had at least one recess period. However, 10 years later, a similar survey found that only 70% of kindergarten classes allowed one recess. (Schools state this is a response to the federal regulations requiring schools to focus on academic subjects.)

Pellegrini AD, Bohn CM. The role of recess in children's cognitive performance and school adjustment. Educ Res. 2005;34:13-19.

The amount of time children spent playing decreased 16% in the same time frame, while the amount of unstructured time spent outdoors decreased by approximately 50% between 1981 and 1997.

More media time



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

FIRST - you must be convinced that unstructured play time is beneficial! Even more beneficial than tutoring or academic pursuits!

Then - once again - turn off the screens!

Spend part of a day observing your child and electronic devices. Not how completely absorbed your child may be in games, texting, social media - often to the exclusion of external stimuli. A child who would rather spend time on an electronic device instead of real social interaction with other children is at risk for negative consequences.

Encourage unstructured play time

Discuss with your family how you can "schedule" unstructured play time into your children's day. It may be as simple as turning off the television or video games and allowing children time to be creative.

Ask your child what else he/she would like to do. Giving your child reasonable choices and personal investment can increase cooperation and teach better decision-making.

PERFORMANCE

There is **new research that is demonstrating improved academic performance, especially in boys**, when they have more opportunities for outdoor play.

One study showed that unstructured recess time of 10 - 30 minutes improved all children's ability to learn following the recess. Structured sports did not provide the same benefit.

Pelligrini AD and Holmes RM. 2006. The role of recess in primary school. In D.Singer, R. Golinkoff, & K. Hirsh-Pasek (Eds.).

Use of construction toys, such as blocks, contributed to: language development, motor skills, hand-eye coordination, spatial skills and divergent problem solving (when a problem has more than one answer)

A longitudinal study found the complexity of a child's block play at age 4 predicted mathematics ability in high school.

Wolfgang, Charles H.; Stannard, Laura L.; & Jones, Ithel. (2001). Block play performance among preschoolers as a predictor of later school achievement in mathematics. Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 15(2), 173-180.

Children replaced their time outdoors with indoor activities, especially time involved with media, television and computers.

Only 12% of 6 - 8 year olds spent time outdoors in 2003, and only 8% of 9 - 12 year olds did so.

The average weekly time spent outdoors by 6 - 12 year olds was 4 hours.

The Media Family: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers, Preschoolers, and Their Parents. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006.

Reinforce good decisions with compliments.

Encouraged "construction" toys for children of all ages - Legos, K'Nex.

"Play dates" should mainly be unstructured!

Parents benefit from "unstructured" time, too!

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