

# The Power of Play

*Enjoy. Join. Participate*

How many times have we told our children to “quit playing around!” or said to someone, “she’s just playing.” The truth is, play is very important for children. Time spent in unstructured play – stacking blocks, coloring a picture, or building a fort from couch cushions – is essential to optimal child development.

We all want the best for our children. One way to ensure that they are developing to their full potential is simply to encourage them to play. Scientific research has shown that playtime stimulates children’s brains and helps them develop essential skills. By allowing them to express their creativity and use their imaginations, we are helping them build healthy brain architecture.

## Play a Part in Play

It’s also important for you to play with your children! Get down on the floor and become a part of their world for a while. Playing helps build warm relationships and strong attachments among families.

Playtime with adults encourages vocabulary development and communication skills, so that your child can better express her thoughts and feelings. They learn social interaction like how to take turns and share. And your child feels important, which builds feelings of self-worth and confidence.

Most importantly, shared playtime can be fun! Find out how much you can learn from your child, take a break from the stress of everyday life, and know that you are investing in your child’s future.

## Playtime!

*Playing with your child doesn’t require fancy toys or equipment. Improvise and make use of items around the house to have free or inexpensive fun. Here are some ideas to get you started:*

- Infants and toddlers love ordinary objects. Turn some pots and pans and a wooden spoon into a drum set!
- Pretend play: Kids love dressing up in adult clothes. That pile of clothes you no longer wear can provide long afternoons of delight for a child.
- Save milk jugs, cereal boxes, and plastic jars, then create a grocery store. Your child will have a blast “shopping” for all their needs.
- An empty box can become a fort, a playhouse, a train, or a spaceship. Let your child decide, and then help them cut out windows and doors.
- Take your child on a scavenger hunt around the neighborhood. See who can find the prettiest leaf, the most crooked branch, or the biggest pothole.
- Enlist others and have a parade. Kids and adults can dress up.
- Listen to music together. Make up a song. Dance!
- Save old magazines, catalogs, even junk mail. Make a collage or cover a box with pictures. Cut out pictures of people and make up a story about them.
- Go on a camping trip! Set up a tent using an old sheet or blanket and some chairs. Read a book, play cards, or have a snack in the tent.
- Practice your best somersaults and cartwheels. Have a gymnastics competition. Create an obstacle course where the contestants have to hop on one foot, walk 9 steps backwards, etc.
- Set up a “restaurant” with plates, mugs, etc. Have your kids come up with a menu based on whatever you have in the cupboard, and help serve the meal.
- Build a model with toothpicks and marshmallows – let your child decide what to design.
- Turn out the lights and make shadow animals on the wall. Create a play or show starring your shadows.