

# Technology vs Play

## Why Imagination Should Win



### How children learn and develop through play

Through play children use the physical concepts associated with the five senses; touching, tasting, smelling, seeing and hearing. They learn logical-mathematical concepts associated with classification, seriation, numeration, space (over, under, etc..) and time (before, after, etc..). They develop social skills such as sharing, taking turns, negotiating, compromising and leading.

Play is very beneficial in developing healthy bodies and minds. Physical activity develops skills such as using fine and large muscles, demonstrating accomplishments and abilities and building cardiovascular health.

### Why is play important?

Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development. It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them. Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers. As they master their world, play helps children develop new competencies that lead to enhanced confidence and resiliency they will need to face future challenges. Undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills. When play is allowed to be child driven, children practice decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest, and ultimately engage fully in passions they wish to pursue.

Ideally, much of play involves adults, but when play is controlled by adults, children conform to adult rules and concerns and lose some of the benefits play offers them, particularly in developing creativity, leadership, and group skills. In contrast to passive entertainment, play builds active, healthy bodies. In fact, it has been suggested that encouraging unstructured play may be an exceptional way to increase physical activity levels in children, which is one important strategy in the resolution of the obesity epidemic. Perhaps above all, play is a simple joy that is a cherished part of childhood.

## The effects of technology on the developing brain

Technology changes the way children socialize and interact with others, which can have huge impacts on their mental and emotional well-being. It has now become common knowledge that high levels of social media use, in both kids and adults, can lower self-esteem and create negative moods. However, all types of technology can actually have negative effects on children when used in excess, because they lower children's frequency of interacting with their peers. This makes it more difficult for them to pick up on social cues and develop meaningful relationships with others; something that can have serious negative consequences as they grow and develop. They also have a difficult time developing emotions the same way other kids would if they spend too much of their time with technology and not enough time being engaged while in the presence of others.

## Tips to encourage imagination and play at home

1. **Make a dedicated space for play:** show yourself, your kids and others just how serious you are about encouraging free play, dedicate a space in your home for it. This space should be devoted to creating messes and should be a zone that encourages the imagination to take hold.
2. **Go outside:** children today spend 50% less time playing outside than in the 70's. The fresh air opens possibilities for coming up with creative ways to play. Consider putting together a sandbox in the yard, or a box full of toys that will help them play well outside. This could include items like tarps, shovels, and traffic cones. Regardless of what toys are given, being outside can do wonders for awakening creativity.
3. **Try not to intervene:** this is a hard one for parents, but sometimes you just have to let their imagination take hold of them without interruptions from you. For example, you see your son or daughter attempting to build a bridge out of blocks, but know that it may not work, an overwhelming desire may come over you to fix it or show them a better way. Let them learn how to make it better by trying to fix it themselves.

4. **Make open-ended toys available:** “He had more fun with the box than what was inside it”. It’s a common phrase and one that gives a real clue into the power of free play. Refrigerator box spaceships and blanket forts, these are the results of imaginative play. The only tools needed are those already on-hand and in the house. The suggestion is to bring toys and items into your home that encourage imagination and creativity. This includes things like blocks, balls, boxes and dolls.
5. **Use electronics sparingly:** Electronic screens are introduced at a very early age with the youngest generations experiencing a large volume of screen time. It’s common to see many parents handing over their electronic devices to calm kids in restaurants, meaning those children are using electronics to cope with a very real, everyday situation. What does this teach them in way of interacting and communicating as an adult? Limit screen time to less each day and see a transformation take hold of your young child.
6. **Limit the number of toys:** think about going to a restaurant. Unless you’re the type to order the same thing at every meal, how long does it take you to decide what to order? How many times do you second guess yourself when you think you’ve made your decision? It’s the same with your children and toys. When you’re being offered so many choices you get overstimulated and can’t make a decision you’re comfortable sticking to. By limiting the number of items available- both on the menu and in toy selection, you’re guiding your child in the decision-making process, allowing him or her to fully experience what is available.
7. **Allow boredom to happen:** if you’ve ever watched a cartoon from 50 years ago and then one from today, the difference in the pace may catch your eye. The amount of activity occurring in the latter is a direct indication of the attention span to which companies are trying to cater. There’s no time for boredom. How do you encourage free play when kids are used to being bombarded with messages, activities and technology? Boredom forces creativity and allows children the freedom to entertain themselves.
8. **Declutter Your Schedule:** free play takes time; with so many parents running around from structured activity to structured activity, there’s little time left for encouraging kids to learn and develop by simply playing. If you’re serious about incorporating free play into our family, start crossing things off everyone’s to do list. Unstructured free play is incredibly beneficial to children. Help your kids get a head start in problem-solving and creativity by bringing it into your own home.