



# PLAY MATTERS

FOR AGES 0-18



**PLAY** **FOR** **PARENTS**  
**GUIDE**



## CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PLAY

Every child has the right to play. This is recognised throughout the world in the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Convention lists 42 rights that children and teenagers (under the age of 18) have, including the right to play. The Convention applies to all children - whoever they are, wherever they live and whatever they believe. So as parents and carers, it's important to make sure that your child has the space, time and company of others to play. Playing is your child's right wherever they are - at home, in childcare and at school.

## PLAY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

On behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive, the Department of Education has lead responsibility for the development of a Children & Young People's Strategy. A draft strategy has been developed in the context of the Children's Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015 which places a duty on the Executive to adopt a strategy to improve the well-being of children and young people. The Act defines the well-being of children and young people against eight characteristics, one of which is 'the enjoyment of play and leisure'. The Children and Young People's Strategy Team within the Department of Education lead on this work.

## PLAY MATTERS

Play Matters is a Department of Education project funded through the Early Intervention Transformation Programme. It is aimed at increasing societal awareness of the value and importance of play for children's health and well-being. PlayBoard NI is the lead delivery agent for the Play Matters project.

This publication is based on Play Scotland's *Parents' Play Pack* and adapted, with their kind permission, for a Northern Ireland audience, along with contributions from the Department of Education's *Play Matters* project.



Northern Ireland  
Executive



Department of  
Education



A full-page background image showing a man with a beard and a striped shirt lifting a young girl with a large bow in her hair into the air. They are both smiling and looking up. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage.

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# WELCOME TO OUR PLAY FOR PARENTS GUIDE

**Parents and caregivers are the most important people in children's lives and whilst we all want our children to grow up happy and healthy, unfortunately babies don't come with a set of instructions.**

Instead, we tend to muddle along listening to the advice of our family and friends while trying to do the best we can.

For parents/caregivers their child's health and happiness is the number one priority. Sometimes however, in the hustle and bustle of life we can lose sight of one of the most important elements of a child's life – play!

Children are born with a natural desire to play. Whether playing alone, with a parent/caregiver, or with another child, play is not only a legitimate activity for children, it is vital for their growth, development and well-being!

The importance of play has been underlined through research which has shown play's positive contribution to children's physical and mental health; self-confidence and sense of self-worth; social skills and their ability to better understand and engage with the world around them. As parents, when we provide access to different play opportunities, we are actively supporting this growth and development.

It is important to remember that children also gain enormous benefit from unstructured play – play opportunities which aren't planned or expected. By engaging in simple, unstructured play activities such as singing rhymes and telling stories, you are helping to expand language skills, emotional regulation, and social skills. Such unstructured play also helps to nurture children's imaginations, building their sense of adventure and helping to develop their creativity.

Playing is as critical to a child's development as eating and sleeping. As parents, one way that we can know for sure that we are doing something good is to play with our children and to let them play.

I am confident that you will find the information and ideas contained in this resource useful, and that you will have lots of fun in your everyday play adventures with your children.

**Jacqueline O'Loughlin**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**PlayBoard NI**



**BLIND MAN'S BUFF**

**MAKE SLIME**

**COPY CAT**



# WHY PLAY MATTERS

**... because play is the most natural way for children to learn, grow, develop and make sense of the world and their place within it.**

## ***Play benefits:***

- ✓ Healthy brain development
- ✓ Fit and active bodies
- ✓ Cognitive agility and learning
- ✓ Emotional regulation and strength
- ✓ Inquisitive minds
- ✓ Imagination and creativity
- ✓ Social etiquette and making friends
- ✓ Conflict resolution
- ✓ Negotiating skills
- ✓ Managing and assessing risk and challenging situations



## **Play builds resilient children**

Resilience is the ability to bounce back after getting knocked down. It is the way that we cope with setbacks and disappointments without them becoming debilitating hurdles that hamper our progress.

Make time for play every day and help your children develop the skill of resilience, it will assist them to bounce back when the knocks and hardships of everyday life come their way.

As we now know, if a child encounters too many, or ongoing stressful situations their life course can be altered. Too many Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) occurring during childhood can result in young bodies encountering 'toxic stress'. Toxic stress can trigger hormones that wreak havoc on the brains and developing bodies of children, putting them at greater risk of disease, and limiting their life chances and choices.

Your child might not remember all the great play opportunities and experiences you provided over the years but their bodies and brains certainly will.

Helping your child to become more resilient is an important part of parenting. It's tempting to protect your child from setbacks and difficulties; however, building the essential skill of resilience will serve them much better now and into the future.

There comes a time when your child or children will unfurl their wings. We can't be there forever to smooth the path before them so it pays to lay the groundwork now.

Children need time to relax, rest and play every day (Article 31, UNCRC), because play builds children. It's important to make time for play every day.

**BLOW BUBBLES**

**BUILD A DEN**

**HOPSCOTCH**

# AGES, STAGES AND TYPES OF PLAY

Children can, and do play everywhere and anywhere, with anything. Play can be noisy, boisterous and chaotic, or quiet and calm. It can be solitary or with friends.

Did you know babies and young children go through six social stages of play? The six social stages of play are important for a child's development. All the social stages involve exploring, being creative, and having fun. Children's play changes by age as they grow and develop social skills.



## **Unoccupied play (birth - three months):**

At this stage your baby is making a lot of movements with their arms, legs, hands and feet. They are learning about and discovering how their body moves.



## **Parallel play (two+ years):**

Your child may play alongside or near to others but does not play with them.



## **Solitary play (birth - two years):**

This is the stage when a child plays alone. They are not interested in playing with others just yet.



## **Associate play (three - four years):**

Your child starts to interact with others during play, but at this stage there still isn't a lot of interaction. Your child might be doing an activity related to the children close by, but might not actually be interacting with another child.



## **Spectator/onlooker behaviour (two years):**

During this stage children begin to watch other children playing but do not join in.



## **Cooperative/social play (four+ years):**

When your child plays together with others and has interest in both the activity and other children involved.



***These stages are general guidelines for what to expect of your child's play skills, but remember every child is different. If you have concerns discuss them with your health visitor or another professional.***

For a child, play means doing something for fun, rather than for practical reasons. Children don't think, 'Oh today I will play outside, because I want to get fit and healthy'. No, rather they play because they just want to have fun – multiple benefits are gained without children even trying.

# PLAY THROUGHOUT CHILDHOOD

**How children play changes throughout childhood and every child will play in different ways. Children play anywhere and everywhere, and playing with your child provides a great opportunity to strengthen your bond. Think about how you offer a supportive environment where children can access a range of play opportunities and providing space, time and materials will encourage play.**

Play activities should consider the age of your child, their stage of development and ability. Think about what your child enjoys, give them choice and freedom and of course, join in!

## **Build play into your everyday routines.**

- Sing songs and rhymes – anytime and anywhere.
- Play games whilst tidying up, washing the dishes or doing the laundry.
- Make shopping fun by playing find the item, I spy or using picture shopping lists.
- Play games in the car such as spotting certain types or colours of cars, shops, animals, people etc.



STEPPING STONES

## **Birth to twelve months**

It is not always necessary to purchase shop bought toys to stimulate young babies, often free and found resources or 'stuff' that you find around the home will provide endless hours of fascination and fun.

## **Playful activities could include:**

- Making a treasure basket filled with natural resources such as a small mirror, a clean, dry fir cone, a large pebble, a beaded necklace, a ball of string, crumpled tissue paper, scraps of fabric, a wooden comb, a large shell, a shiny CD or a wooden massager. Change and check the objects regularly and choose items carefully, appropriate to the age and stage of the child and avoid small items which can pose a choking hazard or be poked into the nose or ears.
- Talking and singing, chatting and music, clapping and stamping, peek-a-boo.
- Floor based activities and tummy time, which you could also enjoy outside in good weather.
- Rattles, soft balls, stacking toys, soft books, empty boxes and tubs.



SIMON SAYS

HEAD OR CATCH



## One to two years

Babies between one and two are usually beginning to explore their surroundings and are on the move! They may become quite vocal and love to make sounds and words. They are able to play a little by themselves but prefer playing with parents or adults.

### Playful activities could include:

- Push and pull toys, lift in and out toys or posting boxes.
- Messy/creative activities including painting, cornflour, playdough, shredded paper.
- Sand and water play using a basin or large container.
- Jumping in puddles, exploring outside, movement games, rolling on the grass.

## Two to four years

Toddlers/children will likely play with a wide variety of resources and toys and they often love pretend play and being creative.

### Playful activities could include:

- Dress up – fill an old suitcase with old grown up clothes such as hats, bags, beads, sunglasses, rucksacks, shoes.
- Using household resources - pots and pans, old mobile phones, pegs, bowls, torches, kitchen utensils.
- Creative materials - paints, crayons, chalks, scissors, magazines.
- Books, games and puzzles - reading stories/ looking at books, snap, singing games, clapping games, matching games.



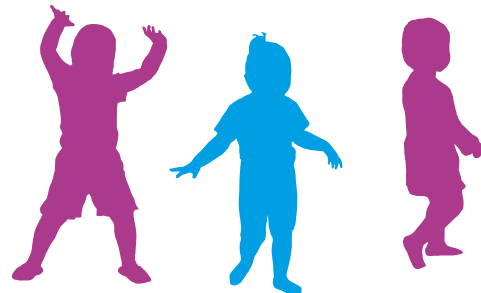
**For younger children always be aware of choking – toys/loose parts intended for children under 36 months must not present a choking risk – a test can be carried out using a ‘small parts cylinder’ (toys or parts of toys/loose parts that can fit entirely inside the cylinder are identified as choking hazards).**

## Four to five years

At this age, children have often joined a pre-school setting and may have new routines and structures. They are usually very interested in things around them and are eagerly exploring their environment. They are also learning about sharing and taking turns. Playing with your child is still lots of fun but you should also be encouraging independence and free play choices.

### Playful activities could include:

- Going on an adventure - go for a walk and bring along bags to collect things in, a magnifying glass and a camera, children love to explore their surroundings.
- Arts and crafts, junk modelling, making slime or playdough.
- Baking and cooking, gardening and planting seeds.
- Helping and having fun with everyday jobs - helping make snacks, hanging out washing, putting away shopping.



### School aged children

As children get older they are usually becoming much more independent. Allow children the freedom and opportunities to make choices in their play both in the home and garden and in the wider environment.

#### Playful activities could include:

- Loose parts, that is free and found items children can use to play with, in a flexible way, to move, manipulate, build and create.
- Outdoor play - ball games, hopscotch, hide and seek, swing ball, bike rides.
- Music and dance.
- Board games, crafts, baking, street games.



### Pre-teen and teenagers

As children get older, don't forget that they still need time, space and permission to play, hang out or chill out! This free time becomes increasingly important now as the time spent on schoolwork and/or structured activity usually increases. Your child's friends and friendship groups are important. Older children often enjoy socialising with their peers or in public places.



→ For more read *Playing with stuff around the home* at [www.playboard.org/what-we-do/play-matters-project/play-matters-resources/](http://www.playboard.org/what-we-do/play-matters-project/play-matters-resources/)



DIG FOR BURIED TREASURE

HIDE AND SEEK

PUT ON A PLAY

# PLAY TYPES

**There are sixteen agreed types of Play.**

**There is no right or wrong way to play. Children just need access to a balanced diet of play opportunities and experiences.**

## Symbolic play

Using objects, actions or ideas to represent something e.g. using a cardboard tube as a telescope.



## Social play

Any social or interactive situation where the expectation is that everyone will follow the set rules, e.g. an established game or made up game.



## Rough and tumble play

Less to do with fighting and more to do with gauging relative strength. Discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display and it's friendly and positive.



## Creative play

When children explore and try out new ideas and use their imagination. They can use lots of different items and materials to alter something or make something new.



## Socio-dramatic play

When children act out experiences, e.g. playing house, going to the shops or doctor.



## Communication play

Play using words and gestures, e.g. charades, telling jokes, putting on a show.



### **Dramatic play**

Play where children figure out roles to play, assign them and then act them out.



### **Locomotor play**

Things like chase, tag, hide and seek and tree climbing fall into this category.



### **Deep play**

Self-directed play which allows the child to encounter risk and challenge. These experiences help children conquer fears and develop resilience and competence.



### **Exploratory play**

Play that uses all the senses of smell, touch and even taste to explore and discover the texture and function of things around them.



### **Fantasy play**

This type of make believe play is where the child's imagination gets to run wild, and they get to play out things out like being a pilot or driving a car.



### **Imaginative play**

Play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply, like imagining you are a bee and pretending you have wings.



### **Mastery play**

Control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments, like digging holes or constructing shelters.



### **Object play**

Play which uses sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements, like using a paintbrush.



### **Role play**

Play exploring ways of being, e.g. playing house and being the parents or other significant other such as doctor or nurse.



### **Recapitulative play**

Play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness.



**Play Types images courtesy of Play Scotland  
A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types, Bob Hughes**



# YOU KNOW YOUR CHILD BEST

Playing is the most natural way for parents to help their children develop new skills and to learn about the world.

All children enjoy playing but your child's age, stage and ability will determine which types of play are most suitable. There is no right or wrong way to play. Play is open-ended.



With a bit of creativity and thought, many play activities can be adapted to meet the needs of every child. As parents you know your child best – try to adapt activities to include and meet the needs of your child.

There are lots of ways to adapt games or activities so that no-one is left out. For example, reduce the pace by using a soft ball instead of a bouncy one,

use sensory clues in a scavenger hunt, make sure instructions are really clear, adapt them and use fun sounds or visuals where appropriate. Children can buddy up if some are less confident or physically able, pair fast runners with slower ones, pair older children with younger ones, use fun symbols, badges or flags, use sound and rhythm.

**Adapt the rules and include everyone!**

# PLAYING OUTDOORS

Children growing up today are experiencing fewer opportunities to play independently outdoors and yet there's something about open outdoor spaces, where there are fewer rules and restrictions that is hugely exciting for them.

The sense of freedom gained from playing outside and running about without limits, generally brings a happiness that is hard to rival. Outdoor play is one of the most natural ways that children of any age can engage in physical activity.



## Be your child's play champion

**Lead by example** - from an early age encourage children to be outdoors. Fresh air and physical exercise is good for adults too.

**Prioritise time for outdoor play** - allow children the space and freedom to play outdoors. Encourage some of the old traditional games such as skipping, hopscotch, kersbie and tag.

**Get to know your neighbourhood** – go for a walk or cycle in your local area. Agree boundaries and no-go areas. Let your toddler walk beside you rather than being in a buggy.

**Walk to school** - a great way to build skills and confidence. It also adds the potential for lots of informal play and activity into the daily routine.

**Encourage others** within your community to allow children outdoors to play. The more children there are outdoors playing, the safer and friendlier the neighbourhood will be.

**Teach children** how to stay safe outdoors from an early age. Show them road safety skills and how to deal with particular situations.

**Take time-out** and stay nearby if you are worried about children's safety. Sit discreetly and read or have a chat with friends and remember the independence and fun that you had as a child playing outdoors!

**Try to keep worries in perspective** and remember children learn by doing. The more children play outdoors the more confident they will become, gaining skills for staying safe.

**Time outside** in the natural environment costs nothing. Encourage children to play outdoors, use their imagination and have fun.

**Turn off screens** to encourage children to explore outdoors. Time spent at sedentary activity (including screens) should be minimised.

**The benefits of outdoor play far outweigh the risks** – scrapes, bruises, bumps and falls are all part of growing up.

PAPER PLANES

BE AN INVENTOR

SKIPPING GAMES



Evidence suggests that time spent in the natural environment offers developmental, emotional and overall health benefits for children. Try to introduce some nature into your child's day.

There are many barriers impacting on children's play within our communities and neighbourhoods, such as lack of time, less green space, increased housing and traffic, parental fears for children's safety, increasing use of technology, and a sometimes negative view of children playing or hanging out within communities. For children with particular needs or a disability there are sometimes further barriers such as physical or attitudinal issues.

Giving children permission to play outside their home, in their neighbourhood and within their community helps them to gain an understanding of the world they live in and offers all kinds of valuable learning opportunities and life skills.

Whilst commercial play spaces and local play parks offer valuable play opportunities, the excitement and adventure of unstructured, unplanned play that can be gained from playing close to home, within communities should be considered and can also contribute to creating a play-friendly and cohesive community.

A shift in how we think about playing outdoors within communities is the single biggest change that parents can make to support their children's play.



**BIRD WATCH**

**WHEELBARROW RACE**

**CLIMB TREES**

## Benefits of outdoor play

Playing outdoors, children encounter many opportunities for development, growth and learning, with benefits such as:

- Improving physical fitness and helping prevent obesity.
- Developing coordination, strength, agility and stamina.
- Building self-confidence, independence and self-esteem.
- Engaging with others, fostering social connections, solving problems and increasing resilience.
- Training their immune systems through exposure to bacteria, germs and microbes in the environment.

**Physical activity should be encouraged from birth. Children of pre-school age who are capable of walking unaided should be physically active for at least three hours throughout the day. Children and young people over five years should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes every day.**



**For more on the Chief Medical Office (CMO) guidelines on physical activity go to [www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-physical-activity-guidelines](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-physical-activity-guidelines)**

**There is no better or more natural a way to meet these guidelines than to play outdoors!**



## PLAY WHATEVER THE SEASON

*"There is no such things as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing."*

Ranulph Fiennes



With our ever-changing weather it's important to have a playful, positive attitude to outdoor play and whilst it almost seems natural to allow children to play outside during the warm spring and summer months we are sometimes much more hesitant about being outdoors when winter comes along. Remember that regardless of the weather, whatever you do outdoors is supporting your child's health, well-being and happiness.



## Autumn & Winter

Wrap up warm and embrace the play opportunities that winter brings. Creating and engaging in winter play activities is fun for both you and your child, and very easy to do!

### *Spray paint art*

Fill squeeze bottles with water and food colouring and draw pictures in the snow. Or use old paintbrushes and buckets to paint the snow.

### *Build a snowman*

A childhood must! Add some props like hats and scarves, pebbles, twigs and sticks and maybe a carrot for a nose.

### *Frozen bubbles*

Blow bubbles outside in the cold icy air. They will be much harder to pop and last much longer. Catch frozen snowflakes or hailstones on your tongue.

### *Windy walk*

Go for a walk in the wind and see how the wind blows the leaves and the trees. Remember the joy of crunching fallen leaves underfoot?

### *Jumping puddles*

Put on raincoats, water boots and splash or jump in puddles, another childhood must!

### *Rainy walk*

Don't let the rain put you off. Take umbrellas and head off for a walk in the rain. There is something about umbrellas that toddlers and children love ... using them as a walking stick, twirling them around above their heads or use them as broomsticks to fly through puddles.





## Spring & Summer

**Playing outdoors with your child can be anything from tickling your baby's tummy on a rug, playing peek-a-boo, to playing hide and seek in the garden or park. A simple walk in the park or street, or playing in the garden can offer all kinds of playful fun.**

### Bubble socks

Cut a plastic bottle in half and cover it with a sock. Dip it in soapy water, blow through the end ... bubble socks!

### Build a den

Gather together some props (let your children help you) ... sheets, blankets, material, rope, pegs, sticks and twigs, cushions or carpet mats. Be creative and build a den, great for getting shade from the sun once finished.



### Water painting

Give your child a bucket of water and a paint brush (this can be a household bucket or container and proper decorating brushes). They'll find lots of amusement 'painting' walls, pavements, drainpipes etc.

### Chalks

Most bargain shops sell cheap chunky chalks. Chalks can give hours of amusement outdoors where children can chalk merrily anywhere – let them chalk on pavements, walls, fences, bricks ... there's no worry about making a mess - after all it will wash off!

### Go big!

Take old rolls of wallpaper, large sheets of cardboard or material sheets outdoors along with felt tips, crayons, paints etc. Roll or spread it out and away you go!

### Scavenger hunt

Explore your garden or neighbourhood and see what treasures you can find. The beach is the ideal place for a hunt too where you can find shells, pebbles, driftwood, seaweed etc.

### Climb a tree

How high can you climb and what can you see?

### Teddy bear picnic

Why not have lunch or dinner outside? Invite some cuddly friends to join you and make it into a teddy bears' picnic – what fun!

### Traditional games

Skipping, Two Ball, Jacks, German Jumps, Kerbsie, Tag, Hide and Seek, Simon Says, Duck Duck Goose, Egg and Spoon, Blind Man's Bluff, Kick the Can, Stick in the Mud, Piggy in the Middle.

### Chill out

Encourage older children and teenagers into your outdoor space too. Consider seating areas for 'chilling out' (this can be as simple as old carpet squares, a sheet or rug or two crates with a plank of wood). Add props such as playing cards, dominoes, marbles or a football. Add music too to create a real hang-out space.

### Make perfume

Pick some daisies or dandelions and make some perfume.

### Playing with mud

Digging in mud or splashing in muddy puddles can be a great form of physical exercise - mould it, squish it, squelch and shape it. Make mud sculptures or mud pies, add some leaves, twigs, pebbles, stones or shells, and water! Help your child to feel confident whilst playing by 'allowing' them to get dirty or to make a mess.

**! \*Remember to wash hands thoroughly after playing with mud. It's a good idea to have old clothes, shoes and towels set aside for muddy play\***

**Equipping children to keeping safe outdoors is essential but affording children the time, space and opportunity to access outdoor play is essential. Try to encourage playing outdoors regardless of the weather!**

→ For more read *Playing outdoors* and *Playing with nature, mud and getting dirty* at [www.playboard.org/what-we-do/play-matters-project/play-matters-resources/](http://www.playboard.org/what-we-do/play-matters-project/play-matters-resources/)



# RISKS AND CHALLENGES

As adults you can probably remember the thrill and excitement of testing boundaries – climbing higher, swinging harder, balancing on beams, jumping rivers, running faster, swimming further, doing something for the first time!

Just as you did, your child will also need and want to create challenge and uncertainty in their play. Having a balanced, thoughtful approach to supporting challenging play is a helpful starting point.

No one wants their child to come to harm when they are playing so how do we find a balance when we know taking risks, or being challenged is a necessary part of playing?

Challenging, risky play can look different for different children dependent on their age, stage or ability and children with a disability have an equal need for adventurous play. One child's idea of something challenging might be something easy for another.

Children need to explore their limits, try out new experiences and develop their capabilities. This will be evident from a very young age. Children would never learn to crawl, walk, climb stairs or ride a bike if they were not afforded the opportunity to stretch and challenge themselves.

Occasionally children do (and will) have minor accidents (cuts, grazes, bruises) when taking part in challenging play activity.



As parents it is our responsibility not only to keep children safe but also to help them to manage and experience challenging, risky opportunities through play.



JUGGLE BALL

SAND SCULPTURES

MAKE SHELL JEWELLERY

## Challenges are important

Through taking part in challenging, risky play children will:

- Learn to be emotionally and physically resilient, helping them to manage difficult situations, resolve disagreements between each other and keep themselves safe.
- Raise their self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Engage their curiosity.
- Be more physically active.
- Develop a sense of independence.

**The development of these skills in early childhood will help equip children to manage risk safely throughout their lives.**

**“The Health and Safety Executive fully recognises that play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. The opportunity for play develops a child’s risk awareness and prepares them for their future lives.”**

**Health & Safety Executive -  
[www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)**

→ For more read *Play and Challenge* at [www.playboard.org/what-we-do/play-matters-project/play-matters-resources/](http://www.playboard.org/what-we-do/play-matters-project/play-matters-resources/)



**DRAW WITH CHALK**

**FRISBEE**

**GO-CART RACING**



# FUN IDEAS TO TRY

## Free and found stuff

Your home, garden and the outdoors are full of 'stuff' that can be used for play. With a little imagination, everyday items such as an old handbag, fabric, shoes or pots and pans will transport your child into a world of fun. These resources can be used in many ways and there is no right or wrong way to use them.

## No-cook playdough

**You will need:** 2 cups plain flour, 2 tbsp vegetable oil, 1/2 cup of salt, 2 tbsp cream of tartar, 1 to 1 1/2 cups warm water, gel food colouring, few drops glycerine.

**What to do:** this recipe requires no cooking, simply place all the ingredients in the bowl and knead until smooth.

## Leaf printing

**You will need:** leaves (with their stems) in different shapes and sizes, water-based paint, small paintbrush, old toothbrush, plain paper, newspaper.

**What to do:** hold the leaf by the stem and paint one side. Place the painted leaf face down on the plain paper. Place newspaper on top and rub gently with the toothbrush. Lift the newspaper and leaf up to reveal your print.

## Stargazing

**You will need:** A cloud free night, a constellation book or chart, a collection of pebbles, buttons, beads, pulses etc.

**What to do:** copy a constellation by using your pebbles etc. You can use glue to stick them to paper.

## Make a shaker

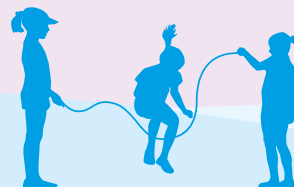
**You will need:** 1 empty clean yoghurt pot, 1 piece of paper, some rice or dried beans, a rubber band, pens and stickers to decorate your shaker.

**What to do:** cut a circle of paper large enough to fold over the sides of the pot, put some of the rice or dried beans into the pot (not too much or it will not make much noise), put the paper over the top of the pot and secure with the band, decorate the lid of the shaker.

## Paper crown

**You will need:** stiff card, sticky tape, pens or crayons, glue, glitter, sequins, bits of scrap material.

**What to do:** measure a strip of card to fit round your child's head, fasten the card with sticky tape, cut a zig zag pattern along the top of the crown, your child can now decorate.



### Obstacle course

Make an indoor obstacle course. You can use cushions, pillows, small tables, hula hoops etc. Make a balance beam by marking a straight line on the floor with masking tape. Jump in and out of circles - mark these using masking tape. Climb high, lie low, jog on the spot, star jumps and lots more!

### Glow in the dark bowling

**You will need:** empty plastic bottles (preferably the same size), cold water, glow sticks, ball.

**What to do:** fill the empty bottles with cold water, break glow stick to activate, pop in the bottle and close the lid. Once it's dark these will glow – now it's time to bowl!

### Spaghetti snakes

Cook spaghetti and once cool, add into a basin with a little water (to save from sticking) for your child to play with. You can even add in food colouring and shaving foam for extra fun.

### Picasso box

Ideal for younger children. Get a large box and take the top of the box off. Pop your child inside or lie on floor to enable them to get in and out, give them crayons and let them draw their masterpieces inside the box.

### Sensory kitchen

**You will need:** bucket, sink, soap, shampoo, shaving foam, dolls, action figures.

**What to do:** Bathe the dolls and action figures, get covered in foam, roll on the grass!

### Clothes peg game

**You will need:** Lots of pegs!

**What to do:** Attach pegs to top/jumper and try to grab one off. Whoever grabs the most wins!

→ For further ideas you can purchase *The Way to Play* at [www.playboard.org/product/way-to-play-ebook/](http://www.playboard.org/product/way-to-play-ebook/)



ROLLER SKATE

MAKE MUD PIES

DRESS UP

## DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Digital technology is now a huge part of our everyday lives, from a young age, and many parents question if their children are missing out on normal social interactions or are more inactive because of digital technology.





### Screen time tips

- ✓ **Limit screen time as much as possible** - the younger the child the less time they should spend on devices. Set limits and apply these limits consistently.
- ✓ **Keep certain times and areas as technology free zones** - e.g. mealtimes, before bedtime or when outdoors. Consider using screens within family spaces only, i.e. no TVs or computers in children's bedrooms.
- ✓ **Don't be tempted to use screens to distract children or to keep them quiet** - talk to your children, play games or look at a book instead.
- ✓ **Set a good example** - parents should abide by the same rules, limiting screen time and not being distracted by your device. Interacting, talking and playing with your children is much more fun!
- ✓ **Join in your children's screen time** - just like offline activity children will sometimes need adults to support their play. Interaction is key, join in online activity by engaging and talking to children. Passive screen time should be avoided especially for babies and toddlers.
- ✓ **Provide choices** - remember the amazing play opportunities that children have around the home and within communities. Encourage children to play both indoors and out and keep taking those little steps towards finding a balance between screens and other play opportunities.



### Remember

- ✓ Time spent on screens takes away from time spent crawling, walking, climbing, interacting, playing or exploring. Physical play is needed throughout childhood and it contributes to children's mental health and emotional development.
- ✓ Children of all ages need the opportunity to interact with others, which is crucial for language development and social skills. Children learn best through two-way communication.
- ✓ Screen time affects sleep and using screens last thing at night may affect sleep quality. Screens should ideally be kept outside of children's bedrooms and not used in the run up to bedtime.
- ✓ Having a TV on continually (in the background) may have an effect on children's listening skills and may impact on the interaction between the adult and the child.

Digital technology can have both positive and negative effects and children need adult support to navigate and stay safe online. Agree rules with your child and manage their settings and controls. Check they know how to keep information private, what is and is not ok to share online, how to block or report someone or something and to speak up if anything makes them feel uncomfortable.

The NSPCC website has further information on keeping children safe online at [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

There are, of course, positive opportunities for using digital technology as children get older. When using apps or online games look for those which are age-appropriate, interactive and playful.

→ For more read *Play and digital technology* at [www.playboard.org/what-we-do/play-matters-project/play-matters-resources/](http://www.playboard.org/what-we-do/play-matters-project/play-matters-resources/)



# OLDER CHILDREN

As children grow older it's important to remember that they still need time, space and permission to play. Playing isn't only for younger children – teenagers play too.

Your teenager may call play something else, such as chilling out or hanging out. Playing, relaxing, and socialising all contribute to your teenager feeling well, happy, and able to cope with life's ups and downs.

Chill out time becomes increasingly important in the teenage years as time spent on schoolwork and/or structured activities increases.

## Playful ideas for chilling out

During the teenage years children and young people seek greater independence away from their parents as friends and friendship groups become very significant.

Accept that your 'young person' might do things differently from you, acknowledge and respect their choices, follow their lead and allow them the opportunity and independence to choose for themselves.

Spending free time together is a great way to stay connected with your teenage child.



DANCE

MAKE PERFUME

NIGHT HIKE

- ✓ Go on a walk, night-time hike or mountain biking.
- ✓ Have a movie night, choose a movie together and add some popcorn.
- ✓ Get competitive and challenge each other to a game of chess, dominoes, jacks or card games.
- ✓ Board games can be great fun!
- ✓ Join in, have a go on a dance mat or playing a Wii game.
- ✓ Ping pong, air hockey, tennis, darts, pool or snooker.
- ✓ Have a pamper night with facemasks, foot soaks and hand massages.
- ✓ If you have a 'gamer' in the house – play together, teens find it hilarious to see how bad their parents are at gaming!

- ✓ Go outside – play some football, frisbee, dodgeball, piggy in the middle or stick in the mud, you'll be amazed at what fun can be had!
- ✓ Share some of your old traditional games – kerbsie, two-ball, german jumps, kick-the-can, skipping ...
- ✓ Have a picnic, cook a meal together, or plan a BBQ and sleep outside!

Get to know your child's friends, welcome them into your home and allow them space to chill or hang out comfortably. Reflect back on your own teenage years from time to time ... remember your experiences and allow your child the playful opportunities that you had.

→ For more read *Hanging out – older children at play* at [www.playboard.org/what-we-do/play-matters-project/play-matters-resources/](http://www.playboard.org/what-we-do/play-matters-project/play-matters-resources/)



PAMPER NIGHT

PEEK-A-BOO

ROLL DOWN A HILL

# TEN THINGS EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PLAY!

## 1. **Playing is the FUNdamental way for children to learn, grow and develop.**

- cognitive skills – like maths and problem solving in a pretend grocery store
- physical abilities – like balancing, running and catching
- new vocabulary – like the words they need to play with toys e.g. dinosaurs
- social skills – like playing pretend with friends
- literacy skills – like making up stories or acting out a fairy tale

## 2. **Play is healthy**

Play helps children grow strong and healthy. It also counteracts obesity issues facing many children today.

## 3. **Play reduces stress**

Play helps your children grow emotionally. It is fun and provides an outlet for anxiety and stress.

## 4. **Play is more than meets the eye**

Play is so simple and also very complex. Children play because they need to find stuff out.

## 5. **Make time for play every day**

As parents, you are the biggest supporters of your children's learning. You can make sure they have as much time to play as possible during the day to build attachment and promote cognitive, language, physical, social, and emotional development.

## 6. **Play and learning go hand-in-hand**

They are not separate activities. They are intertwined. Think about them as a science lecture with a lab. Play is the child's lab.

## 7. **Play outside**

Remember your own outdoor experiences of building forts, playing on the beach, or in the snow, playing with friends in the street. Make sure your children create outdoor memories too.

## 8. **Play is for all children even the teenagers**

They might not call it play, but teenagers need time and space for creative thinking, problem solving, independence, and perseverance. Play addresses teenagers' developmental needs for greater independence and ownership in their learning, opportunities for physical activity and creative expression, and the ability to demonstrate competence.

## 9. **Trust your own playful instincts**

Remember as a child how play just came naturally? Don't fill children's time with toys and structured activities. Let them be bored and see all that they are capable of when given the opportunity.

## 10. **There's a lot to learn about play**

There's a lot written on children and play. We've included some useful links and signposting on the next page.



## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

[www.playboard.org](http://www.playboard.org)

[www.actionforchildren.org.uk](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk)

[www.capt.org.uk](http://www.capt.org.uk)

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

[www.ci-ni.org.uk](http://www.ci-ni.org.uk)

[www.cypsp.org](http://www.cypsp.org)

[www.early-years.org](http://www.early-years.org)

[www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

[www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk)

[www.home-start.org.uk](http://www.home-start.org.uk)

[www.mumsni.com](http://www.mumsni.com)

[www.ncb.org.uk/northern-ireland](http://www.ncb.org.uk/northern-ireland)

[www.niccy.org](http://www.niccy.org)

[www.nicma.org](http://www.nicma.org)

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/play-matters](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/play-matters)

[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

[www.parentingni.org](http://www.parentingni.org)

[www.playday.org.uk](http://www.playday.org.uk)

[www.playengland.org.uk](http://www.playengland.org.uk)

<https://playingout.net>

<https://playsafetyforum.wordpress.com>

[www.playscotland.org](http://www.playscotland.org)

[www.playwales.org.uk](http://www.playwales.org.uk)

[www.safeguardingni.org](http://www.safeguardingni.org)

Some images supplied by [www.tourismni.com](http://www.tourismni.com)





# PLAY MATTERS

FOR AGES 0-18

PlayBoard is an independent charity and the lead organisation for the development and promotion of children and young people's play in Northern Ireland.

PlayBoard is committed to supporting children and young people's play through a combination of:

- Service delivery and development
- Campaigning and lobbying
- Research, evaluation and awareness raising
- Working in partnership with others to put play on the agenda of policy makers and resource providers
- Promoting best practice in Play and Playwork

## Our Vision

A society where the right to play is both valued and realised.

## Our Mission

Leading the Play Agenda.



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