

Active Play With Your Child

What are the concerns?

Active play is an important part of children's development. However, the amount of time that children spend playing has decreased in recent years. Busy schedules, family changes, and increased attention to academics are just a few factors that might explain this drop in play time. Without time for active play, children might miss opportunities to develop many important skills.

What is active play?

Active play is a special type of play that involves some kind of physical activity or exercise, such as moving, crawling, walking, running, jumping, stretching, bending, throwing, kicking, dancing, etc. In addition, active play is a type of *free play* and does not involve strict rules like those found in organized sports and formal games. Moreover, active play can be a form of *child-led* play, in which parents follow their children's actions while playing together. For instance, if a toddler starts jumping to her favorite song, her parent can jump along.

Why should parents engage in active play with children?

Active play appears to have a number of benefits for children's development. In addition to the health benefits of regular physical activity, active play may also promote children's language, problem solving, motor and social skills. Active play also encourages children to use their imaginations and explore their world, which might help them become more creative and flexible thinkers. Additionally, when parents and children play together, it can be a special time to have fun and bond to build lasting, positive relationships.

How can parents engage in active play with children?

In today's busy world, it is easy for parents to become so over-scheduled or distracted that they rarely make time to play with their children. However, it is very important for parents to set aside time each day to play. To accomplish this, it might be helpful to schedule play times throughout the week. It is also important to remember that active play involves movement and exploration; so, before starting, parents should make sure their children have enough space to move about freely. Finally, the type of active play that parents use will depend on their children's age and developmental level.

Here are just a few ideas for active play with both young and older children:

- Take a ball outside and kick, roll, toss, or throw it to each other.
- Play hopscotch, jump rope, or hula hoop.
- Crawl, jump, or run through an obstacle course.
- Build a fort and play inside of it together.
- Play follow-the-leader, Simon says, or hide-and-go seek.
- Put on some of your favorite tunes and dance.
- Play dress up and stage a pretend fashion show.
- Take a ride together on your tricycle, bicycle, or scooter.
- Play on the playground, and enjoy the swings, slides, tunnels, monkey bars, bridges, etc.
- Take a walk around your neighborhood or hike through the woods together.
- Go on a nature hunt, and collect feathers, leaves, pinecones, or stones; look for frogs, lizards, birds, butterflies, spiders, wildflowers, and wild berries.
- Have a picnic, and bring a Frisbee or ball to play with.
- Swim at your local pool or lake.
- Take a trip to a zoo, museum, or recreational center.



Tips to Remember:

- Set aside time for active play with your child every day.
- The type of active play will depend on your child's age and development.
- Be active together as an entire family.
- Turn off TVs, radios, and remove any other distractions from the play area.
- Remember that younger children have limited attention spans, so limit active play to short periods.
- If your child does not want to do something, encourage him/her to give it a shot, but do not push them too hard.

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