



Why Unstructured Play Is Important to Child Development

Play benefits all areas of a child's development. One important aspect of this time is unstructured play, also called free play.

Unstructured play allows children the freedom to explore, create and discover without predetermined rules or guidelines. It's been shown to foster cognitive development while boosting physical development and social and emotional development. It specifically helps creativity and imagination, problem-solving abilities and social skills.



Creativity and imagination

Because there are no fixed rules to follow, children can make their own games and guidelines. This opportunity to create and use imagination is important to cognitive development.

Problem-solving abilities

Children work together during unstructured play to solve problems, like who takes the first turn in a game and establishing other rules of play. While activities should be supervised, allow children time to work together on problems before helping resolve a conflict or question.

Social skills

Unstructured play encourages social skills and teamwork. Children take turns, learn to listen and share, develop imaginary scenarios and make decisions together. Because they are the ones driving play, they have the chance to learn on their own among friends.

Playgrounds and outdoor spaces are ideal for free play because there are endless opportunities to explore and interact with the world. Children can race through a play structure, run in open spaces and create their own games based on what's available. Children do not need large open spaces for creative play – often a quiet corner or under the kitchen table are just as fun.

Related content: [Playing Outdoors Helps Children Grow Healthy and Strong](#)