There was a time when children played from morning till night.

They ran, jumped, played dress-up, and created endless stories out of their active imaginations.

Now, many scarcely play this way at all. What happened?

- Over four and half hours per day watching TV, video games, and computer screens

- Academic pressure and testing, beginning with three-year-olds

- Over scheduled lives full of adult-organized activities

- Loss of school recess and safe green space for outdoor play
Time for Play Every Day: It's Fun and Fundamental

Written by Pathways Magazine

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The evidence is clear, healthy children of all ages love to play. Experts in child development say that plenty of time for childhood play is one of the key factors leading to emotional and social health. Children need time for self-initiated play. Child-initiated play lays a foundation for learning and academic success. Through play, children learn to interact with others, develop language skills, recognize and solve problems, and discover their human potential. In short, play helps children make sense of and find their place in the world.

Physical development: The rough and tumble of active play facilitates children's sensorimotor development. It is a natural preventive for the current epidemic of childhood obesity. Research suggests that active play boosts schoolchildren's academic performance.

Social and emotional learning: Play is critical for the development of imagination and creative problem-solving skills. Social and emotional learning: Research suggests that social make-believe play is related to increases in cooperation, empathy, and impulse control, reduced aggression, and better overall emotional and social health.

Sheer joy: The evidence is clear—healthy children of all ages love to play. Experts in child development say that plenty of time for childhood play is one of the key factors leading to happiness in adulthood.

So how can you do it to help your child play?

Reduce or eliminate TV: Give your children a chance to flex their own imaginative muscles. Make-believe play to inspire their inner creativity.

Curtail time spent in adult-organized activities: They may be bored at first. Be prepared with simple playthings and suggestions for make-believe play to help your child get started.

Encourage outdoor adventures: There is a close link between play and healthy cognitive growth. It lays the foundation for later academic success in reading and writing. It provides hands-on experiences with real-life materials that help children develop abstract scientific and mathematical concepts. Play is critical for the development of imagination and creative problem-solving skills.

Bring back the art of real work: Rocks, snow, and mud—these raw materials of play are the raw materials of productivity. Believe or not, adult activity—cooking, raking, cleaning, washing the car—actually inspires children to play. Children like to help for short periods and find great joy in the process.

Spread the word:

- Encourage outdoor adventures.
- Bring back the art of real work.
- Spread the word.
- Become an advocate for play.
- Start an annual Play Day. For tips on how to do this in your neighborhood or town, see ausa.org.
- Reserve time every day for outdoor play where children run, climb, find secret hiding places, and draw or dance. Natural materials such as dirt, sand, water, rocks are the raw materials of play.
- Washdown the raw materials of play. Bring back the art of real work: Believe or not, adult activity—cooking, raking, cleaning, washing the car— actually inspires children to play. Children like to help for short periods and find great joy in the process.

What you can do to help your child play?

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2. Curtail time spent in adult-organized activities: They may be bored at first. Be prepared with simple playthings and suggestions for make-believe play to help your child get started.
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