



US Play Coalition is a partnership to promote the Value of Play throughout life.

**Welcome to PLAY PULSE.** If you are a regular reader, you will recall that our usual format includes statistics and research about play for all ages, physical activity, nature, and creativity and more. Previous issues of PLAY Pulse can be found online at [usplaycoalition.org](http://usplaycoalition.org) under the Communication heading.

With this issue of PLAY Pulse we are making a shift from *knowing* to *doing*. Fall and winter are a time of change - new school year, new friends, new habits, new hobbies, new seasons, New Year - what better time for putting the information and statistics cited previously into action?!

As a society, we seem to give lip service to a number of reasons as to why our children don't get adequate amounts of unstructured play. The same is true for adults as Americans work more and vacation less and often stay connected to the office while they vacation.

Welcome to the transition from **knowing to doing**, using PLAY Pulse strategies as our vehicle for change.

## PLAY PULSE STRATEGIES

There are a whole host of strategies that could help all ages and all life stages to live, work, and play better. *PLAY Pulse* highlights three strategies in this issue.

### Strategy #1 – Return to Play

### Strategy #2 – Connect/Disconnect

### Strategy #3 – Downplaying

**Return to Play.** Essential to this strategy are the characteristics inherent within "true" or "real" play. For play to be "true play," it must be self-initiated, freely chosen and intrinsically motivated. It also requires active involvement, true engagement and a creative element.

**Connect/Disconnect.** Technology has been such a boon for society and has reshaped how we go about our daily activities. This strategy reinforces the importance of balancing between the need to connect with other people and the need to disconnect from the intensity of the day to day world.

**Downplaying.** Yes! DOWNplaying. This refers to pursuing play opportunities that do not necessarily involve extensive pre-planning, costly fees and gear or extended time for participation.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF "TRUE PLAY"

For play to be "true play," it must be:

- self-initiated
- freely chosen
- intrinsically motivated

"True play" requires:

- active involvement
- true engagement
- a creative element (especially for children)

## PULSE POINTS

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"Play for grown people is recreation – the renewal of life; For children it is growth - the gaining of life."

Joseph Lee, the Father of the American Playground Movement

What is *Play Pulse*? It is a barometer as to how well our society is doing to connect with the wide range of benefits of play and leisure that can be accrued across all age groups and interest areas.

In a recent survey, over one-half of parents of children under 12 years of age who were recently surveyed believed that today's children have fewer opportunities to play than children did twenty years ago. In addition, 92% of mothers and 84% of fathers considered play and creativity of similar importance to academics and critical thinking. (shapedbyplay.com)



## Strategy #1 | Return to Play

There is no lack of evidence that play is missing from our every day lives, especially among children. If the recent clamor for fidget spinners didn't attest to that, what else could?! A recent study conducted by the University of Minnesota Institute of Child Development confirmed that our way of life is infringing upon children's opportunities to play.

### Return to Recess.

The need to protect and insure recess in schools was highlighted in the **Spring 2015 PLAY Pulse** - and the need is still prevalent as we head into 2018. Currently, only 6 states in the US require recess in the elementary schools with 7 other states that require some general physical activity for this age group.

Some strides are being made. In Florida, the 'recess moms' have succeeded in making recess a requirement in their state. New Jersey supporters got the requirement through the New Jersey legislature, but it is pending state assembly education committee approval. In Arizona, a recess bill went down to defeat after complaints by school administrators that it was just one more thing they had to squeeze into a jam-packed school day. A grassroots group is renewing the effort and is hopeful for 2018. Massachusetts is also hopeful for 2018.

The Centers for Disease Control has great resources under the healthy schools section of their web site. Check out their "Strategies for Recess in Schools" at <http://bit.ly/CDC-recess-strategies>

### Less Structured Play

Most children play, but often under hovering supervision. It is the less structured play that requires nurturing.

Can you recall young children at holiday time appearing to be more attracted to the box and the gift wrap than the actual gift? This exploratory, freely-chosen activity is what we call 'true play' and is limited only by imagination. From playing make-believe to pounding spoons on pots and pans, such creativity is essential for a child's development and enjoyment.

How to bring real play back to your children, grandchildren, classroom, or playground? Joan Almon, the co-founder of the Alliance for Childhood, has some suggestions as follows:

- Be sure you are comfortable with play. Draw on your own childhood experiences, share play memories with others, and explore play now with blocks, mud pies, and dress ups.
- Deep, satisfying play needs time. Let children play for 45 minutes or more, giving help as needed, but letting children initiate and direct their own play.
- Help parents appreciate play. Direct them to articles, websites, and videos. Organize a play session as part of a parent evening and have them also share play memories.

Source: [communityplaythings.com](http://communityplaythings.com)

Only 6 states in the US require recess in the elementary schools with 7 other states that require some general physical activity for this age group.

## Strategy #2 | Connect-Disconnect

In today's society we are both over-connected and yet disconnected simultaneously. Consider the amount of time people spend with screens as opposed to time for direct human interaction. Play Pulse Strategy #2 is not about giving up screen-time, but rather about establishing a balance between the two.

Time-tracking research shows that Americans spend over 10 hours a day in front of a screen of some kind, computer, TV, or cell phone. Children are not immune to screen use either. The Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood reports that between the first and second birthday, 64% of babies and toddlers watch TV a little over 2 hours per day. This same group cites an additional statistic for 8 to 18 year olds who spend 7 hours and 11 minutes of screen media per day when multi-tasking time is included.

“ A balance between 'connecting' and 'disconnecting' is a must in today's world. ”

Ellen O'Sullivan

### Connect

Social contact is important for human health and well-being. Socializing provides a multitude of benefits from increased feelings of well-being to reductions in stress and depression. Spending time with friends may also boost brain health and lower one's risk of dementia.

*Psychology Today* offers a few suggestions on how adults can be more social.

- Walk through your neighborhood and make a point of stopping to say hello to people you meet
- Use Skype or Facetime to catch up with family and friends from a distance
- Sing in a choir or play music in a group
- Volunteer at your favorite charitable organization
- Visit a museum with a friend
- Participate in a neighborhood or community group
- Play a group sport such as bowling, golf, or croquet
- Have neighbors over for coffee or tea
- Play cards or board games with others
- Exercise with a friend by walking, swimming, or going to the gym together.

Highly social people are even less likely to catch a cold.

(Journal of Psychoneuroendocrinology)

### Disconnect

While 'connection' play is an important and valuable role in one's life the ability to 'disconnect' is an effective way to revitalize your life. We are not suggesting that you junk your computer or leave your cell phone out in the rain, but we are gently reminding you of the need to 'disconnect' intentionally.

Try implementing a "turn off and tune out" policy. Hide the plug for your TV and computer. Plan on losing your phone temporarily and completely tune out.

Screen Free Week is an annual event supporting children, families, schools and communities by encouraging those groups to turn off screens and "turn on life." This annual celebration celebrated in the spring may make it a bit easier for you, your family, or community to do just that.

*Screen Free Parenting* is another group dedicated to providing ideas and assistance for parents who want to cut down on the screen time of their children. Some specific suggestions from this group include encouraging children to read to a friend, stuffed animal or younger child; making simple art projects; taking family walks or bike rides; collaborating on creating daily conversation starters for the car ride home or at dinner. A walk or hike in a natural setting would be an excellent way to disconnect.

We often don't consider the need to disconnect as related to our well-being and enjoyment of life, but it truly is.

Adults need to own up to their own usage of technology. Children report feeling ignored while their multi-tasking parents are on their phones and talking to them at the same time. When featuring an article on positive pursuits without your smartphone, The Huffington Post has the following suggestions for adults.

- Take a nap without using your phone as an alarm
- Go for an iPod-free run
- Take a hike using a paper map
- Read an actual book not a kindle
- Forget going to Google, learn a few foreign phrases on your own
- Attempt putting together a jigsaw puzzle using real, physical pieces

### Strategy #3 | Downplaying

Have you heard about the new phenomenon called “FOMO”? What is FOMO? This new phenomenon, the Fear of Missing Out, is attributed to Facebook. It occurs when you see friends or family members enjoying fun and memorable activities on Facebook

If you have friends or family members who love to post pictures of the sensational and glorious events of their vacation, weekend, birthday, etc., you get the idea. The result is an increasing number of people have come to believe that their own vacation or special life event can't be as expensive, exotic or boast worthy as those experienced by others. It can lead to people not bothering to play or celebrate at all.

“ **A cynic knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.** ”

Oscar Wilde

Consider how you can have similar experiences without going to the time and expense.

- You can become exhilarated sliding down a great sledding hill without the cost of the lift ticket, equipment, and special clothing for skiing. Plus, the walk back up the hill is an added healthy pursuit.
- Children can play in a recreational community league without the high cost of being on an expensive or time-consuming travel team.

- Bowling is just one activity that can be an alternative requiring only rental shoes and the price of an alley compared to several activities that involve a larger layout of time and money.
- Be a tourist in your own town. Avoid the cost of travel and overnight expenses by taking advantage of any number of free or low-cost happenings in your own community.
- What about renting movies from the local library and holding your own movie marathon complete with popcorn. You can even add a theme, if you like.
- Can you recall games, perhaps from your childhood, that don't require a great deal of time or even special materials. Can you recall 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?' or "Simon Says.' All ages can engage and enjoy these basic games.

Playing does not always or necessarily involve large expenditures of time and money or even the effort for pre-planning. Downplaying is often spontaneous.

The U.S. Play Coalition is a partnership to promote the value of play throughout life. We are an international network of individuals and organizations that recognize play as a valuable and necessary part of a healthy and productive life. Our membership is diverse - including educators, parents, physicians, health scientists, park and recreation professionals, psychologists, landscape architects and many more. We have several publications and offer grants for PLAY research and action.

Membership is free; join online today.



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CONNECT WITH US!

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