



*A partnership to promote the VALUE OF PLAY throughout life*

## THE SERIOUS SIDE OF PLAY

While most of us can remember playing as a child, we were likely not aware of what we were learning or gaining through our play experiences. Play is important for all of us to be physically active, mentally alert, creative and socially connected.

### WHAT IS PLAY?

Although it is difficult to pinpoint any ONE definition of play, it is important to note that play is self-initiated and freely chosen. It can be planned or spontaneous. Moreover, it is not relegated to children; it can be seen in people of all ages and serves to enhance health, happiness and quality of life.

### WHY IS PLAY IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN?

Play is how children:

- acquire motor skills like running and jumping
- stay healthy through physical activity
- learn to play with others and to interact in a world outside of themselves
- acquire skills to make choices and solve problems
- learn to communicate, and
- develop self-confidence

In short, play shapes the physical, mental, social, and educational aspects of children's lives.

### WHAT ARE THE THREATS TO PLAY?

Children spend less time playing for a variety of reasons, but here are three main threats or concerns linked with the decrease in child's play:

- The amount time allowed or given for play in children's lives has decreased. Many children are as heavily scheduled as their working parents. Also, schools are limiting or eliminating recess.
- Sometimes the types of play children are involved in and exposed to often do not allow for creativity and independence.
- Safety – both real and perceived.

### WHY IS THE EROSION OF PLAY AN ISSUE?

- Obesity - When children are not active – physically, mentally, and socially, they run the risks of becoming overweight and obese due to lack of physical activity.
- ADD/HD is on the rise. Children who are not able to play and exercise their creative muscle, the brain, have difficulty learning and concentrating. Children who do not have the opportunity to learn social skills on the playground or in play environments often have difficulty getting along with their peers.
- Depression - The American Academy of Pediatrics released a study that found that increases in depression and anxiety appear to be linked to a lack of unstructured playtime.

### VARIATIONS IN TYPES OF PLAY

- Adventure play
- Construction play
- Physical play
- Rhythmic play
- Creative play
- Technology play
- Language play
- Nature play

Learn more about the VALUE of Play with the US Play Coalition – [usplaycoalition.org](http://usplaycoalition.org)