

Unstructured Play



Did you know that what your kids do after school can affect what they do at school? Research shows that regular physical activity contributes to better academic scores. Active play also improves concentration and connectedness to school. Emotional regulation and self control, stress management, and the ability to cope with anxiety and depressive symptoms are also improved through unstructured active play. Unfortunately, only 35% of 5 to 17 year olds meet the physical activity recommendation within the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth (2014-15 CHMS, Statistics Canada).

Unstructured play is important for a child because it gives them a sense of freedom and control. It also allows them to learn about themselves, what they like and don't like, and even make mistakes without feeling any pressure or failure.

In order to encourage more unstructured play in your house, you can try some of the following suggestions:

- Increase outdoor playtime. Be active as a family; take a nature walk, ride bikes, visit the local playground.
- Limit time with electronics (TV, tablets, mobile phones, video games, etc.) to less than two hours per day. **Screen time and video games do not count as unstructured play**
- Let your child be bored - resist offering suggestions for how they might entertain themselves. Coming up with an idea for what to do is how unstructured play begins.
- Invite the neighbors. Encourage your kids to play in your front yard. We've become a backyard society and that can prevent kids from having the kind of spontaneous play with neighborhood friends that you probably remember from your own childhood.
- Try some of these play ideas; doodle on the driveway with sidewalk chalk, have them erect forts using old sheets and the couch, build towers, rockets, boats, and more with cardboard boxes
- Teach by example. Do you have unstructured play activities of your own? If not, how can you expect your child to? Don't feel guilty about the time you take for yourself to work out, paint, read, garden, or go for a walk. You're teaching your child an important lesson: Play is a priority, no matter how old you are!

Make a commitment to get the whole family out to play.

You will enjoy health benefits, quality time, great memories, and the endless potential for fun and laughs.

<http://itsallkidsplay.ca/unsupervised-outdoor-play-infographic/>