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5 Fun Ways to Enjoy Free Play with Children

Child experts all agree on at least one thing: Play is vitally important for children. Free play (as opposed to structured sports or video games) is an important way for kids to learn and develop. Here's how to help your kids enjoy the real benefits of child's play:

1. Turn off the television.

Too much television leads to sedentary bodies and minds. The solution is quite simple: Just turn it off. You can turn off your TV on specified days of the week (*no TV on Tuesday or Thursday*) or during specific time periods (*no TV from 3 to 7 PM*). Once TVs - as well as DVD players, video games, and computers - are OFF, kids can get up, get active, and get creative.

2. Go outside with your children.

The options for what to do when you turn off the TV are endless, especially when you open the door and head outside. Give children some time every day for unstructured play and interaction with a daily dose of nature. It will improve their physical health and enhance their emotional well-being at the same time. Learn more at **www.greenhour.org/**.

3. Save money with reused "stuff."

Although many families spend tons of money on fancy toys, young children are often just as happy with reused household items. Before you recycle or throw things away, ask yourself: *How could a child play with this?* Paper towel tubes become bowling pins; cereal boxes and margarine tubs become blocks; and old (clean) socks become puppets.

4. Let imaginations run wild.

Imagination is one of the most amazing gifts of childhood. To cultivate the creativity and innovation that lead to school and work success later in life, kids need time to practice their imaginations. Adults can encourage imagination with simple *what-if* questions (*What if lions squeaked and mice roared?*) and by pretend play with simple props (boxes, fabric, yarn, etc.)

5. Teach skills during playtime.

Playtime doesn't have to be all dragons, fairy princesses, and super heros. Playtime is a wonderful time for young children to learn basic social skills, such as taking turns and following directions. Indoor and outdoor obstacle courses are great for large motor skills, while scavenger hunts are perfect for language skills as children follow (or develop) clues.