



Put play on your child's priority list

More than 15% of schoolchildren are considered overweight or obese, a result of a lack of unscheduled time to play, a hurried lifestyle and excessive sedentary time in front of the TV or computer.

By placing a larger emphasis on unstructured play, parents not only can help their children control their weight, but also will help them build resiliency that can benefit them well into the adult years. According to experts, children who develop resilience also boost their seven C's: competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping and control. Free play also teaches young children to cooperate, lead and follow others, and solve problems.

Many children are given less free time and fewer physical outlets at school, making the need for ample free play at home even more important. According to a survey of elementary schools by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, 96% of schoolchildren had at least one recess period in 1989, but that number dropped to 70% one decade later.

The following tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics can help parents encourage children of all ages to engage in free play and build resilience:

- Choose appropriate toys, like blocks and dolls, and avoid passive toys that require limited imagination.
- Avoid over-planning when children are playing. Set the stage with materials and ideas, and let children use their imaginations.
- Encourage children to explore a variety of interests in a balanced way without feeling pressured to excel in each area.
- Choose child care and early education programs that attend to children's social and emotional development as well as academic preparedness.
- Teach children skills necessary to play well with others. This takes time and practice.

Finally, adults should join in spontaneous child-led play. It not only offers parents a glimpse of the world from their child's vantage point, but also provides a welcome break from their hurried, fast-paced lives.

-Trisha Koriath
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