

# THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Written by Dr Kaylene Henderson, Child Psychiatrist

There is abundant research which confirms the importance of play in children's lives. In fact, play is now considered to be so essential for children's development that it has been recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child.

Let's look at the ways that young children benefit through play:

- **Connection and Communication**  
Play provides a wonderful opportunity for children and parents to connect with and enjoy one another. Play also provides a helpful way for children to communicate their ideas and worries to their parents. Often young children will lack the language skills to fully describe these thoughts to their parents, yet the themes will be prominent in their play.
- **Competence - problem solving and mastery**  
In play, young children can practise tasks or act out situations that they wish to master.
- **Brain development: learning, language and motor development**  
The different types of play that children naturally engage in complement each other perfectly to provide them with a rich mix of motor, cognitive and language development opportunities.
- **Social skills**  
When playing with others, children practise lots of important social skills, such as turn taking, sharing, leadership and group skills.
- **Relaxation and fun**  
Perhaps above all, play is relaxing, it's restorative and it's fun.

While the important benefits of play are well known, lots of parents struggle to provide their children with enough opportunities for play. For some, this is a result of being too time-poor and over-scheduled. For others, play simply doesn't come naturally - it might seem too difficult or perhaps too boring. Yet just as we commit to providing our kids with sufficient amounts of healthy food, knowing how good this for them, it's important to consider play in the same way.



**Children need sufficient time and opportunities for play for their healthy development.**

For great suggestions on how to play with children, check out **Raising Good Kids** - an expert-developed online course series helping parents and early childhood professionals to manage young children's behaviour and emotions:

[www.drkaylenehenderson.com](http://www.drkaylenehenderson.com)