

The American Association for the Child's Right to Play

POLICY BRIEF

How Parents Can Support the Child's Right to Play

WE BELIEVE

- CHILDREN are the foundation of the world's future.
- CHILDREN have always played in all cultures throughout history.
- PLAY, along with the basic needs of nutrition, health, shelter, and education, is vital to developing the potential of all children.
- PLAY is communication and expression, combining thought and action; it gives satisfaction and a feeling of achievement.
- PLAY is instinctive, voluntary, and spontaneous.
- PLAY helps children develop physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially.
- PLAY is a means of learning to live, not a mere passing of time. (Source adapted from IPAWORLD.org)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Limit screen time to one hour per 24 hrs. This is screen time at school, in the car, and at home.
- Limit your child's ancillary after-school activities to one.
- Encourage your child's school to limit homework.
- Encourage children to play with friends in the neighborhood and local parks.
- Advocate for your children's school to offer at least 30 minutes of recess twice daily.
- As a family, explore the beauty of nature in your local area.
- Play board games as a family.

THE BENEFITS OF DOING SOMETHING	THE COST OF DOING NOTHING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ "Play is the highest level of child development. It is the spontaneous expression of thought and feeling...it...constitutes the source of all that can benefit the child...At this age, play is never trivial; it is serious and deeply significant (Lilley, 1967, p. 84; Ball, 2024)." ✓ Play is powerful and serves as a form of communication. Play is the vehicle for development, the 'breath of life to the child since it is through play activities that he finds mental ease, and can work upon his wishes, fears, and fantasies to integrate them into a living personality' (Isaacs, 1951, p.210; Ball, 2024). ✓ Allowing children the freedom to play outdoors with neighborhood children provides opportunities for children to foster skills of working together, collaborating, learning to share, taking turns, and negotiating, which are essential skills needed for social and emotional development (Ball, 2024) ✓ Play is vital for a child's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth. When parents understand the importance of children's play, recognize the stages of play, and are aware of how play assists children in making sense of the world around them, they can provide experiences, activities, and toys/equipment to support their learning and increase the child's cultural development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The American Academy of Pediatrics stresses the importance of play through their 2007 Ginsberg statement, "Play is essential to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth (p. 183)." ✓ When adults control play, children acquiesce to adult rules and concerns and lose some of the benefits play offers them, particularly in developing creativity, leadership, and group skills (Ginsburg, 2007, p. 183)". ✓ Access to screens (iPad, phones, computers, TV) replaces the play needed for healthy development. ✓ Without time to play, children lose opportunities to reduce stress and anxiety, increasing physical, social, emotional, and cognitive health while providing children with an outlet for their physical activity needs. ✓ Without play opportunities, children lose a means of learning, socialization, and self-expression. Its significance in human development and well-being cannot be overstated (Broadhead et al., 2010; Briggs, 2024).



IPA USA Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles

Vision Statement:

A world where all children can play

Purpose/Mission Statement (from Bylaws):

IPA USA aims to protect, preserve, and promote the child's right to play.

What is Play?

Play is the work of childhood. Play is biologically driven. There are many types of play. The highest, purest form of play is spontaneous, freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, pleasurable, purposeless, and free from conflicts. For younger children, it also contains symbolism and elements of pretend.

Guiding Principles

- Play, along with the basic needs of nutrition, health, shelter, and education, is **vital for the development of all children from birth to 18 years**.
- Play is **integral and necessary** for social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical development.
- Play **facilitates brain growth**, especially in the frontal cortex, where essential cognitive functions reside, including attention, self-regulation, working memory, and cognitive flexibility, all known as executive function.
- Many foundational skills can only be developed **through play** and thus justify the essential need for recess for younger children and breaks for older children.
- Play opportunities are **needed for children both indoors and outdoors**.
- Play needs differ **among the age groups**: birth to age 2, pre-k, early elementary, upper elementary, middle school, and high school.
- Schools, especially pre-K and elementary schools, **need help understanding** that young children learn best through play.
- Schools need help and support in providing meaningful and appropriate play opportunities, such as experiential, inquiry, integrated, and emergent approaches to curriculum.
- **Families need help** recognizing that play is necessary for healthy development, and that family play also bonds the family and helps build happy childhoods.
- **Community services and regulators**, such as parks and recreation, city planning, playground inspectors, and housing developments, need help understanding why opportunities for risky play should be included in their planning.
- All types of play are essential (e.g., physical play, such as running, climbing, swinging, etc.; block and construction play; play within art and music; games with rules; rough and tumble play; risky play; nature play; role-playing; etc.), but **child-directed, spontaneous play** is the most important type of play during the early years of birth through age eight.
- Children have the right to play as guaranteed by the 1989 [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

The IPA USA's 50th Anniversary White Paper is a comprehensive resource of 57 articles written by a group of dedicated authors to support advocacy efforts in addressing the child's right to play. To learn more about this topic or to review other topics in the IPA USA 50th Anniversary White Paper, please visit IPAUSA.org. Questions? Email ipausa2019user@gmail.com. IPA USA is here to support you in your work.