

The American Association for the Child's Right to Play

POLICY BRIEF

IT'S A CHILD'S RIGHT

THE U.N. CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a treaty that the U.S. delegation helped to write during the 1980s under the Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations. It was unanimously adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1989 and signed by the U.S. in 1995 during the Clinton administration (Todres et al., 2006). The Convention spells out 40 substantive human rights to which children are entitled (Lichtsinn et al., 2023), including rights to a name and nationality, protection from violence and neglect, and care by parents unless endangering the child. It also protects against child labor, illicit drug trafficking, sexual exploitation, participation in armed conflict under the age of 15, and capital punishment or life imprisonment without possibility of parole.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- ✓ **Organizations that care about the welfare of children can take action on many issues while informing politicians at all levels of the child's need for play.**
- ✓ **Encourage U.S. Senators to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child.**
- ✓ **Cities and States can pass resolutions supporting the Convention.**
- ✓ **Work with legislators to introduce state and local bills supporting children's right to play.**
- ✓ **Assist parents in recognizing the impact of play on healthy development.**
- ✓ **Organizations can collaborate to establish programs for children that provide child-initiated play.**
- ✓ **Children should also learn in school about the rights protected by the Convention (Jarrett, 2024)**

THE BENEFITS OF DOING SOMETHING	THE COST OF DOING NOTHING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Children in all settings have the right to play. ✓ The American Academy of Pediatrics (2018) recommended that pediatricians advocate for play's importance and prescribe play, especially in the first two years of life, specifically noting its benefits in brain development, learning, pro-social behaviors, coping, and resilience. ✓ Sandseter's (2007) research highlights the importance of controlled risks in play, demonstrating a positive correlation with improved risk assessment skills, resilience, and emotional regulation in children. ✓ Embracing and navigating risks, rather than avoiding them altogether, is crucial for fostering a child's ability to assess and manage challenges in a controlled environment (Hofmann, 2024). ✓ Research on unstructured play, such as studies by Fjørtoft (2001) and Little & Wyver (2008), indicates that children who engage in such activities significantly improve in various developmental areas. ✓ On average, children who regularly participate in unstructured play experiences demonstrate a 25% increase in problem-solving skills, a 20% enhancement in creativity, and a 15% improvement in emotional regulation abilities compared to those with limited play opportunities (Hofmann, 2024). ✓ When play-based learning approaches are coupled with experiences in the natural world, the learning rate increases significantly (Hofmann, 2024). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Research shows that deprivation of the child's right to play exists in schools when sufficient recess is not allowed. ✓ Deprivation exists in the juvenile justice system when recreation is minimized. ✓ Deprivation exists when appropriate childcare is unaffordable ✓ Deprivation exists when poor neighborhoods lack well-maintained parks and playgrounds ✓ In all environments where children are present, deprivation exists when screen time substitutes for play or hands-on, active learning (Jarrett et al., 2003). ✓ Roth et al. (2002) found that 79% of the children had recess on a randomly selected school day. However, only 61% of the Black students and 75% of other minority students had recess compared to 85% of White students (Jarrett, 2024). ✓ Resources and funding formulas across schools might be equal but are not equitable. The need for resources (teachers, equipment, or materials) is greater in some schools than in others (Jarrett, 2024). ✓ When students are not allowed to collaborate or do not see themselves in the curriculum, they feel powerless and have no fun. These students spend time in isolated in-school suspension as punishment; some start skipping school, and many drop out. This is the beginning of the school-to-prison pipeline (Jarrett & Sutterby, 2023).



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.