



The American Association for the Child's Right to Play

POLICY BRIEF

THE HEALING POWER OF 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

- ✓ Promote more child-directed play in your community and across generations.
- ✓ Remove barriers to child-directed play by limiting screens and increasing access to parks, nature, and places to play in neighborhoods.
- ✓ Research on intergenerational relationships and the benefits of mutually caring and sharing activities across the elderly and the younger populations strongly supports increased community-based activities that unite the generations (Stegelin & Kashuck, 2024).
- ✓ Collaborate with hospitals to include play as a way to reduce child anxiety and promote parent-child attachment.
- ✓ Collaborate with others on providing information about the way child initiated play can build resilience.

THE BENEFITS OF DOING SOMETHING	THE COST OF DOING NOTHING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Intergenerational relationships enhance the quality of life for both older and younger family members (Stegelin & Kashuck, 2024). ✓ Play can serve as a tool for reducing hospitalized children's anxiety levels, buffering stress, and aiding in their recovery process (Han & Kuntz, 2024). ✓ Play provides positive benefits physically and psychologically. For children, play can also be utilized as a tool to promote parent-child attachment relationships, especially when children are separated from their familiar home environment (Han & Kuntz, 2024). ✓ When one deeply understands how play and protective factors support the development of resilience, it is not hard to connect play and whatever standards "guide" our work with children. Both play and resilience are critical aspects of the human experience long before standards became the driver of education (Goloway, 2024). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study alerted us to childhood adversity's prevalence and lifelong impact (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2014). ✓ Ongoing research, anecdotal evidence, and reports of the global pandemic's impact on both children and adults have confirmed that both short-term challenges with learning and behavior and long-term challenges with mental health, including depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders, have increased in children, youth, and the general population (Goloway, 2024). ✓ Without play, children lose one of the most effective protective factors available. Through play, children build resilience skills that, in the face of adversity, lead to faster recovery. (Goloway, 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.