

TINY BITS (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER) FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP
NOVEMBER 2020 TINY BIT

UNSTRUCTURED PLAY TIME

Unstructured or free play is defined as play without any set rules or guidelines and is often made-up on the spot and changeable. Free play includes building forts, pretending to be a superhero and finger-painting. Why is unstructured play important? Unstructured play builds independence, imagination, creativity and problem solving. It also is a great stress reducer!

How to Encourage Unstructured Play

1. **Praise your child's play** – Regularly tell your child that they are doing a great job playing. Resist the urge to give them suggestions during free play.
2. **Cut back on scheduled or structured activities** - Let your child have days without any scheduled activities. During this free time explore new playgrounds and lounge around reading books.
3. **Set screen limits** – Allow only limited screen time so that your children don't start to rely on it when bored.
4. **Let your child get bored** – In order to play freely, your child needs time to get bored and then discover activities to overcome the boredom.
5. **Go outside** - Removing the walls gives children a chance to use all their senses and gain a sense of wonder and respect for the world around them.
6. **Provide opportunities for you children to create and get messy** - Keep a box of toilet paper rolls, yarn, glue, pinecones, tissue paper, etc. for your children to create something new and exciting. Let you children “cook” in the kitchen or dig through dirt to find bugs and plants.
7. **Don't solve their problems** - Have your children brainstorm ideas to figure out their real-life problems, like opening a tricky box or being able to reach something.
8. **Say yes:** Give your children an unexpected “yes” when they expect your answer will be “no”.
9. **Be realistic** – Don't expect your child to play for hours while you work or do the laundry. Free play takes some time to develop. Depending on your child's age and personality, success may be fifteen minutes of free play initially. You can work up to longer periods of time.
10. **Teach by example** – Let your child see you work out, paint, read, go for a walk or garden. You are teaching your child that play is important no matter how old you are.

Excerpted from: <https://www.scholastic.com/parents/family-life/parent-child/how-to-encourage-free-play.html> **and** <https://www.ahealthysliceoflife.com/encourage-unstructured-play/>

