

# The Science Behind Imaginative Play

Why Your Kids Should Be Playing with Toys, Not Tech



The advent of new technology such as iPhones and iPads has changed our lives for the better, at home and in the workplace, and for many parents, they've also become an effective form of childcare!

But as handy as it can be to sit children down in front of an iPad for an hour or so, it's all meaning that they're spending far less time actually playing.

To some, this might not seem like that big of a deal, but the role of imaginative play in children's development is huge, helping them develop their creativity, problem-solving skills, and empathy.

We've looked into the science behind it all, and got in touch with a couple of experts to highlight five reasons kids should be spending more time messing around with toys and less time in front of screens.

## Independence

Giving children the chance to choose their own activities based on their interests gives them a sense of independence.

Instead of being guided by adults, free, imaginative play allows little ones to do exactly what they want to do, which is why it's totally ok if they'd rather ignore their shiny new toy and would rather play with the big box that it came in.

This also means that the subsequent personal and psychological growth which follows is a natural by-product, and not forced upon them in any way.

## Decision Making & Problem Solving

Having total control over their play helps children's decision making, and allows them to deal with any problems which come up on their own.

Those who grow up without this degree of self-control over their own lives can often experience anxiety and depression.

## Dealing with Setbacks

Inevitably, leaving children to their own devices has its risks, whether it's falling out with a friend, or taking a tumble and grazing their knees.

However, these setbacks give children a chance to learn how to deal with negative emotions such as fear and anger.

Small doses of these emotions at a young age will help ensure that they aren't overwhelmed by more serious situations later on in life.

## Social Skills

Sitting in front of a screen is largely a very solitary and lonely activity, but playing with other children is a natural way for children to make friends and develop their social skills.

Once children realises that their playmates are free to leave the activity if they please, they begin to understand that the needs of others are just as important as their own.

## Happiness

Ultimately, while technology can be a useful time-killer, it doesn't bring the same unadulterated joy which play can.

Taking all of the psychological benefits away, free play brings happiness to children, and after all, isn't that the most important thing?

## Advice from the Experts

We took the time to speak to two of the UK's leading authorities on child play on the topic and here's what they had to say...

### Colette Etheridge

Colette Etheridge - Child Behaviour Solutions

"When parents and children come together in a world of play, creativity and imagination, confidence and self-esteem grow, relationships are built, and fun is had by all. When we pay positive attention to our children, they learn to show us positive behaviour. In being accepted by their parent as a fun person to play with, a child will learn to love."

"Take the time to learn about the world your child lives in. It may be a little different to the world we live in but they still want you to join it and enjoy it with them."

### Sarah Beeson MBE

Sarah Beeson MBE - Former Health Visitor and Author of *Happy Baby, Happy Family, The New Arrival and Our Country Nurse*

"Children are naturally curious and imaginative play is an important part of a child's emotional development. Playtime gives your little one the opportunity to explore the world using all their senses."

"Through role play, they can test out new roles, unlock ideas about their relationships and themselves, learn to respect others and take a little bit of responsibility for their belongings."

"Parents are often presented with a mirror to their home life when their child starts to act out scenarios and enjoy playing with you or on their own. A toy often becomes a young child's friend to share in their new experiences and build memories that will last a lifetime."

"Take the time to learn about the world your child lives in. It may be a little different to the world we live in but they still want you to join it and enjoy it with them."



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