

Facts on Play

Play has purpose and we can prove it.

There is a wealth of data on the power of play and the difference unstructured play can make on the health and well-being of a child. The numbers of children suffering from obesity, ADHD, and depression are alarming, and we hope these facts move people to take action.

The belief that play is a luxury has deep roots in our nose-to-the-grindstone, work-hard-now-and-play-later lives. The very definition of play is to “have fun”—and we are taught from childhood that fun things aren’t necessary. Our cultural bias is exacerbated by technological, societal, and educational trends that further erode the incidence of play.

KaBOOM! strategies, programs, and online tools motivate people to act, providing them with straightforward methods and achievable goals. We provide individuals with the means to become leaders in the movement of play, leading the charge in their own communities, converting new advocates to join them, and taking the actions needed to save play.

With the support of a growing network of parents, teachers, community leaders and corporate sponsors, KaBOOM! works to ensure that today’s children will have the spaces they need to develop into happy, healthy, and active adults.

The Play Deficit

- Only one out of five children in the United States lives within walking distances of a park or playground. This statistic worsens in low-income neighborhoods (CDC, 2010).
- Children between the ages of eight and 18 spend an average of over 7.5 hours per day on entertainment media. Due to media multitasking and using multiple forms of media simultaneously, children actually pack in nearly 11 hours of media use daily (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010).
- Children’s free play and discretionary time declined more than nine hours a week from 1981 to 2003. The way kids spend this time has changed—less time is spent in unstructured activities (e.g. free play) and more time is spent in structured activities (e.g. sports and youth programs) (Hofferth and Sandberg, 2001; Hofferth and Curtin, 2006).
- Since the late 1970s, kids lost 12 hours of free time per week and experienced a 25% decrease in play and a 50% decrease in unstructured outdoor activities (Juster, 2004).



it starts with a
playground.





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Kids Who Play Are Healthier

- Unstructured play may be an exceptional way to increase physical activity levels in children, thus reducing the potential of childhood obesity (Ginsburg, 2007).
- The Stanford School of Medicine recommends that children should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day; at least half of this should take place at school in either gym class or at recess (Stanford School of Medicine, 2007).
- As levels of play have decreased, levels of obesity have skyrocketed; the prevalence of obesity in six to 11 year olds has more than tripled since the 1970s (Ogden, 2002).
- In neighborhoods without a park or playground, the incidence of childhood obesity increases 29%. Children with a park or playground within half-a-mile are almost five times more likely to be a healthy weight than children without playgrounds or parks nearby (Singh, 2010).

Kids Who Play Are Happier & More Social

- Free play gives children an outlet to express their emotions and feelings and helps them to develop a sense of who they are (Santer and Griffiths, 2007).
- Play is critical for stress relief as it allows kids to create fantasies that help them cope with difficult situations (Wenner, 2009).
- Free play can contribute significantly to the social and emotional development of young children as it improves language skills and allows kids to practice life skills such as conflict resolution, cooperation, sharing, and problem solving (Thian, 2006).

Kids Who Play Are Smarter

- A recent study of 11,000 third graders show that children who have more than 15 minutes of recess time per day are better behaved in class and are likely to learn more than peers who have had less than 15 minutes of recess (Barros, Silver, and Stein, 2009).
- Recent medical research has shown a relationship between physical activity and the development of brain connections (Jarrett, 2009).
- Children are less fidgety and more on-task when they have recess; and children with ADHD are among those who benefit the most (Jarrett, 2009).