**Play**

**Children of all ages want and need to play.**

Where there is uncertainty and worry, the need to play is even greater. Play supports children to be happier and healthier. It can reduce stress and also support learning. Playing can give children a sense of control, and a way of making sense of feelings and aspects of their lives, at their own pace. Providing space to play is of course more challenging when needing to stay indoors and keep physical distance from others when outside. There are some links with play ideas at the end of this document, considering these challenges.

**Play can be free and child-led or more structured and adult-led**, or anywhere in between. It’s good to find a balance. Being playful is about fun, enjoyment and being ‘in the moment’. Structured activities can also be playful (e.g. board games, cooking, learning new skills, reading together).

**Play can look different for different children and at different ages**. Some might enjoy:

* **Creative play** (e.g. making dens, junk modelling, playing with Lego, arts and crafts, making/playing musical instruments);
* **Communication play** (e.g. word games, charades, singing, poetry, story writing, talking via mobiles and social media, telling jokes, debates, play acting);
* **Exploratory play** (e.g. handling/banging/mouthing/throwing objects, building towers, cause and effect play, sorting and organising objects into patterns and shapes);
* **Imaginative play** (e.g. pretending to be various people/characters/animals, dressing up, role play);
* **Physical/movement play** (e.g. playing chase, spinning, climbing, sports, dancing);
* **Rough and tumble play** (e.g. play fighting, tickling, wrestling);
* **Sensory/messy play** (discovering textures and sensations like water, sand, foam, rice, paint, dough, ice or seeking enjoyment from sights and sounds around them);
* **Socio-dramatic play** (acting out real and potential personal and social experiences).

**Free play is about the process, not the product**. For younger children especially, as an adult/playmate, try not to focus on an end product; be guided by the child as much as you can. If they invite you into their play, try to copy their actions, comment on what they are doing (a bit like a sports commentator’s play-by-play description of a game), and comment on the skills and emotions you notice. Other times, if children are safe and having fun, let them play independently. Depending on the needs of your child, try and get a balance between playing alone and playing with other children and adults if possible. Some children might like to play with others through video calls. Older children might like to lead their own creative and educational projects, with an adult at times, learning and playing alongside.

**Your child may also be interested in play in the virtual world.** They might be spending more time than usual using a screen. Children’s digital lives are important to them. Children often do not distinguish between play in the real world and the virtual world. Virtual play might also be fun, creative, motivating, and a way of communicating with friends. Exercise video games, where fitness routines involve role-playing and dancing can also provide much needed physical activity. It is a good idea to talk with children about alternative play/activities to balance their screen use. Some children might also like to involve adults in their virtual play worlds. It is also important that children are safe online <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>.

**Remember adults need to play too!** It helps reduce stress and increase positive feelings. Try and find time and space in the day to play, whatever that means for you.

# **Useful websites:**

# **Play in the time of coronavirus blog,** by Tim Gill and Penny Wilson. <https://rethinkingchildhood.com/2020/03/18/children-play-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-playwork/>

**Sensory and creative play**, most suitable for early years/primary aged children, though many activities might be enjoyable and therapeutic for older children too. <https://www.playscotland.org/parents-families/im-bored/> <https://www.playfulchildhoods.wales/blog/im-boooored>

**Outdoor learning online support group during COVID-19,** by Learning through Landscapes<https://www.ltl.org.uk/news/free-online-outdoor-learning-training/>

**A list of no/low resource games** by @amandasays. Mostly aimed at children who can read and write, with suggestions for how they can be more accessible for others. <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11DgMxMA_-ge6Dv2kriA3aXw1mZZvoVHs7H_5j3D9504/htmlview>

**Activities to do indoors** from The Scouts. Most suitable for children aged 6-14 <https://www.scouts.org.uk/the-great-indoors?fbclid=IwAR1awPFsOt4yI1ctsIDkurd4nAev1VIb-Tm17M07hz7wf7pmqRdPz3BTpOA>



*Graphic artist Camille Walala with a colourful reminder to play more!*