



# NURTURE YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH PLAY

**Play is crucial to children's healthy development and happiness and is vital for children's mental health and wellbeing.**

It is through playing that children, from a very young age, engage with and learn about the world around them. Play allows children to create and explore the world; developing lifelong skills and competencies. From birth through to teenage years, babies and children develop important social and emotional skills through watching, listening, and interacting with you and through their play. Good play experiences can therefore help nurture children's emotional and mental health.

## **Play is a natural part of childhood and through play, children:**

- make sense of the world;
- can feel in charge, express and learn to manage their feelings;
- build skills and self confidence in themselves;
- learn about relationships – making friendships, negotiating with others, leading and following, being patient, caring for others;
- develop resilience and empathy, and learn to control their impulses or frustrations;
- learn how to make decisions, fix mistakes and to feel better and
- HAVE FUN!

## **How parents or adults can support children's play:**

- allow time for play – try not to schedule too much into a child's day (whatever age);
- provide playthings (dependent on child's age) and allow children to play in their own way both indoors and outdoors;
- play and interact with babies, toddlers and children throughout the day – most children love adult company and babies in particular need frequent positive interaction and engagement with adults;
- join in when invited - follow the child's lead and resist the temptation to always direct a child's play experiences;
- watch for play cues - children have different ways of signaling if they would like adult involvement or help, resources or encouragement and
- BE A POSITIVE, PLAYFUL ROLE MODEL!

## How to nurture your child's mental and emotional health:



Life often throws challenges our way and it is through talking, listening interacting and playing that children learn to deal with these situations and develop new knowledge and coping skills.

As parents remember you play a vital role in encouraging children to be healthy.

- ☺ Make time for fun and “down time” with your children, especially as they get older.
- ☺ Enjoy some time watching, listening and playing with your child.
- ☺ Allow your child to learn from their own mistakes with support.
- ☺ Give your child age appropriate freedoms and help them learn their own limits; show them you trust them to make appropriate decisions.

Visit <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/play-matters> to find Play Briefing sheets on various play topics. Recreate some of your childhood play memories and make some time to play each day.

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