

## FAMILY WELLNESS

# Playful Parenting for Strong Bonds

- Why play?
- Tips to build bonds
- Resources for fun



## It feels good for everyone to laugh and have fun. How can we harness play to create strong bonds?

Play is vital to how kids learn, explore, process new experiences, and even to how they bond with adults and other children. It is so vital, in fact, that play has been defined as a human right for every child across the world as part of the United Nations Commission for Human Rights. Play also allows adults a "glimpse" into their child's world as we watch how they imagine, problem solve, and create. With this in mind, we can acknowledge play as a powerful tool that all caregivers and parents can put to work to bond with and support their child.

When children invite adults into their world of play it creates an open door for that adult to learn more about who the child is and to connect with them on a deeper level. Prioritizing these times of play and choosing to engage with our child when we are invited into the play--or by inviting them into our own play--allows children to create positive memories and find mutual joy with their adults. This lays important groundwork for healthy attachment and meaningful relationships.

# Playful Connections

How to make play count for bonding

## Follow Your Child's Lead

Allow your child to "be the driver" of the play and come up with the scenarios and ideas. As the adult, work to go along with your child and empower them to make decisions about what happens in play. Children spend much of their days following the lead of the adults in their lives. Switching the script and giving them the control is very empowering to children and allows them to practice leadership skills in a safe and fun environment.

## Dive into Messy Play

Messy play engages many senses and can create opportunities for extra fun and bonding. Make mud pies, take a pottery class, do finger-painting--whatever engages your family in play and mess!

## Make it Active

Play provides a great chance for families to enjoy physical activity together. Games like basketball, tag, piggyback rides wrestling, etc. will get the blood pumping and the good times rolling. The physical contact created through active play also supports healthy bonding--especially for the kids who aren't interested in cuddles on the couch!

## Keep it Consistent

Find ways to make play a consistent part of your family's routine. What are the times that everyone can have a little play during the regular schedule--each evening after dinner? Every Saturday morning? Find time to "schedule" family play.

## Protect the Time to Play

As families experience busyness, play is often the first thing to go. Acknowledge the importance of play for your child--both with adults, with peers and siblings, and alone--and make the choice to protect your child's right to play. Do not allow over-scheduling to take over your child's playtime. Even older children still need regular time to play!

**"Every child should experience safe, healthy play every day."**

– PLAYWORKS

# Resources

For continued support

- Use your Omaha Library Card to access [free passes](#) to many playful attractions in the community, like the Omaha Children's museum. If you're not in Omaha, check with your local library, as many libraries offer this service.
- Read the [Playworks Play Book](#) for lots of ideas of fun, playful things to do at home.
- Find a list of fun "[Family Night](#)" games
- Explore [pretend play](#) and why it's important to your child's development.
- Read about [how play has changed](#) through the years and why it's still important for your child's health.

