

Making Time for Play

Playtime is always important for children—and grown-ups!—and even more so in times of change and disrupted routines. Movement, laughter, and creativity help reduce stress and strengthen bonds within the entire family. Play keeps morale up, and it can create happy memories during otherwise stressful times. Getting down on the floor and being in the moment with children away from media and phones for even five minutes can be a much-needed “reboot” for everyone. You can also try to:

- Have a family dance party (take turns choosing the song).
 - Set out old boxes in different sizes. Use markers, scissors, and paper to create “houses,” “boats,” “nests”—whatever your imaginations can dream up!
 - Role-play “helping” jobs such as nurse, doctor, teacher, firefighter, ambulance driver, and so on.
 - Read a story, then act out some scenes together. Put on skits for other family members.
 - Ask your child to teach the whole family how to play a game she plays in school.
 - Have virtual play dates, with both children engaged in a similar activity such as building with blocks.
 - Set up an arts-and-crafts table in a space where you can join your child in creative play. Include simple items such as a stack of paper (or old magazines) of any kind, child-safe scissors, and a glue stick. Grown-ups can share their own skills, such as making paper airplanes!
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Exercise can elevate everyone’s mood! If you can’t get outside, try some small-space exercises like jumping jacks, freeze-dance, or family yoga. If you can get outside:

Play in your yard. If you have a front or backyard, that’s great! Children can run around to get some energy out and enjoy the outdoors. You may be tempted to go to a park, but it’s important to avoid public play equipment, because COVID-19 germs can linger there.

Walk the dog. Walks around the neighborhood are okay, avoid touching surfaces or getting too close to other people.

Ride your bike or hike in nature. Go on a family bike ride or nature walk (set some ground rules for touching objects and getting too close to others).

Remember, when you return home, please leave your shoes at the door and wash your hands for 20 seconds. While you wash, sing “Happy Birthday” twice or another favorite song—maybe even make up new silly songs to enhance children’s vocabulary!

