



# Home play pack

Supporting children and families  
to play and learn at home

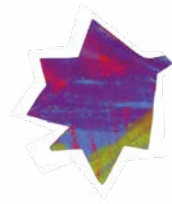
## What's inside

- #101waystoplay
- A balanced diet of play
- Loose parts play
- Play in and around the home
- Digital play
- Helpful resources





# New ways to play



## Working and playing at home

As I've tried to navigate working from home with a 3 year old, I've been rediscovering what it is to be playful all over again.

Although I've written and researched about play, this has reminded me of the nature of it in real life. The first day of moving between episodes of play that last (at a maximum) 15 minutes, was a challenge! But as I did this, I realised what helped me as a parent: a playful mind-set.

There is an incredible amount of play and learning ideas generated and shared through social media; this can be brilliant for giving us ideas but can also make parents feel as if they are supposed to be teachers, play workers as well as parents (who may well be working). It can also feel as though we need to have an endless supply of materials and resources with which to play. As I've been reminded - all resources become boring pretty quickly if we don't think of new ways to play with them and those with only one predetermined purpose become redundant even more quickly.

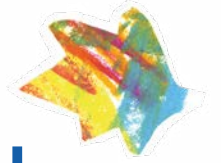
Keeping a playful mind-set is not only helping keep my child interested, it's making things much more fun for me too! I'm a big advocate for adults playing and we need it more than ever at the moment. Some starter thoughts are below but you will have your own ideas! I'm off to make a slip 'n' slide for a princess...

- **Explore...** (rooms, objects, toys, natural materials, technologies or apps...)
- **What would happen if...?**  
(We turned this upside down?  
We put this in a different place?  
We made this fly?  
We added water?)
- **How might...**  
(I make this go faster? I make this more colourful?  
I make this out of that?)



*Louise Scott-McKie*  
Parent, Lecturer ITE,  
Board Director of  
Play Scotland

Play this  
Way



# In this pack you will find

- What happens when children are playing and why is it important
- Great ideas for playing in and around the home
- Loose parts play with free and low cost resources
- Top tips and helpful websites.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on family life.

The “new normal” is putting a lot of pressure on parents as many are working from home, home schooling as well as playing with their children and teens. For children and young people, the necessary restrictions are making it even more difficult for them to get on with their very important business of playing, everyday!

**Enabling children and families to play in and around their homes has never been more important or more challenging. It is vitally important that parents set aside time to give undivided attention to their children. We realise that parents can feel under pressure, but even just spending 30 minutes per day together without the distractions of a phone or laptop can make a huge difference. Showing care and affection in families is so important to support everyone to manage this new situation.**

We know children need play to thrive and make sense of their world and that play supports their mental and physical health and wellbeing. Play Scotland have created this pack and our [#101waystoplay](#) campaign in order to support children and families to stimulate their imagination, creativity and play time. Many ideas can be led and carried out by children themselves, with very little adult support and some are good fun for all the family! Many are suitable for indoors or confined spaces, and most are low cost or free.

**Make time for play, and enjoy!**

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for more playful ideas everyday.

Twitter [www.twitter.com/Playscotland](https://www.twitter.com/Playscotland)

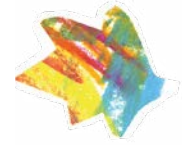
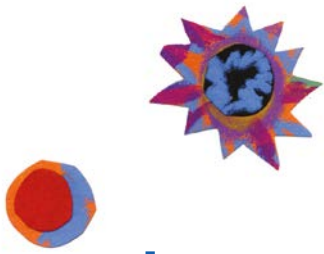
Facebook [www.facebook.com/nationalplayscotland](https://www.facebook.com/nationalplayscotland)



*Marguerite Hunter Blair*  
CEO Play Scotland

**“I like nonsense, it wakes up the brain cells.”**

**Dr. Seuss**



# What's happening when children are playing?

We know that play is a life-enhancing experience. Play builds children's capacity to thrive despite stress and adversity in their lives. "Just playing" can help build more resilient children.

- Play builds health and wellbeing – being active through play helps children physically and emotionally, contributing to their health and happiness
- Play builds brain development and supports a range of learning skills
- Play builds resilience – playing boosts children's confidence, creativity, problem-solving skills and perseverance, enabling them to cope with stress and challenges throughout life.

As they grow and develop, play offers children the opportunity to develop a range of physical, emotional and social skills, helping them make sense of the world they find themselves in.

Children from a very young age take part in lots of different types of play. From early games such as peek-a-boo to more complex dramatic role play, to just "hanging out", children and young people are learning to communicate and build relationships. So many skills are best learned through play.

Contact with nature, including through outdoor play, has been associated with children's ability to concentrate and be self-disciplined.

The physical activity involved in play can increase fitness, while also helping improve brain development and learning.

Allowing children the time and freedom to play freely, completing their chosen activities in their own time and to their own satisfaction, promotes the development of concentration and attention.

The evidence demonstrates the importance of play in the development of language skills, problem solving, gaining perspective, representational skills, memory and creativity.

Playing with arts and crafts gives children the opportunity to develop finger and hand muscles and fine motor skills required for hand-writing.

Play this  
Way

“When you take away the **phone** and **email** and you don’t have a million things to run around to, it allows your mind the **space to think** more expansively about the things that matter.”

Ewan McGregor, actor





# A balanced diet of play



Playing covers a wide range of activities. Sometimes parents worry that their children aren't playing enough or aren't getting enough of the 'right' kind of play.

A good balance of play experiences could be seen as a healthy play diet.

If you think about what you eat, a balanced diet helps to make sure you are fit, healthy, enjoying the pleasure of food, and the social experiences of eating together. Cake, chocolate and fast food are ok sometimes but not if they are the main ingredient!

It's the same with play. To be happy and healthy, to learn and develop, children need a range of play opportunities, indoors and out, some sociable, some active, some adventurous and some relaxing.

Here are some of the kinds of play children can get up to in and around the home. Older children don't always refer to what they are doing as 'play' - and either do adults - but most of us have things that we choose to do, in our free time that makes us feel happier. Often, that could be described as play.

**Making things:** drawing, painting, building things, making models, making dens outside.

**Riding around:** cycling, skateboarding, skating, using a scooter.

**Quiet play:** day dreaming, imagining, inventing, hiding, chilling.

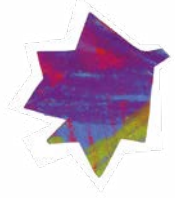
**Reading:** reading books or magazines.

**Getting wet or mucky:** playing in mud or rain, digging, water fights.

**Interactive digital playing:** hanging out with friends online, computer games, smartphone/tablet apps, social media (including posting pictures, comments, videos and blogs online).

**Active play:** informal games, running, jumping, handstands, chasing, skipping.





# Top tips for parents and carers

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## Getting started

Children play and learn all through childhood, and just because your baby can't talk, doesn't mean they're not learning. Babies, toddlers and even older children learn all the time through watching and listening. Try to be playful and sing, joke and have fun with your child when you can. Think of asking "what if?" or "lets explore" to start play off.

## Messy play

Children really love messy play. Play with things that your child can get their hands into – something as simple as a bowl of water or sand can be fun to a child. Keep messy play to one area in your house and put down a plastic sheet or newspapers. If you can, take messy play outdoors.

## Leave the clearing up

Don't get too worried about having a tidy house. The mess will still be there tomorrow. Children and tidy homes just do not often go together!

## Be creative

Children don't just play with toys. Children love playing with household items such as pans, wooden spoons, and sponges (see suggestions in loose parts section). Leave your child to choose what to use and how to use it, for example, a sheet thrown over a table or chairs makes a great den.

## Helping out

Young children love helping around the house. What may seem like boring chores to you can be fun as well as a real learning experience for your child. It may take longer but getting meals ready, clearing up, washing up and matching socks can be good fun when you do them together.

## Free play

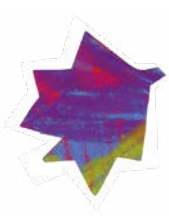
Sometimes children need help with toys or puzzles but it's also OK for children to play on their own. When your child plays alone, they're learning how to keep themselves occupied. When children play with brothers or sisters they often make up games and learn how to get on with others.

## Get out in local spaces

Getting outdoors is important for children's mental and physical health, and its good for adults too. If you can, go outside every day. Walking, cycling and scooting are great exercise too.

## Look after yourself

Being a parent isn't always easy, so it's important to look after yourself as well as your child. Make sure you have people to talk to when you need to and get time to yourself – even if it's only a cup of tea and reading a magazine while your child's playing.



# Great activities

## to get children playing in and around the home

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<p><b>Drama time</b></p> <p>Make up a play to perform to an imaginary audience and/or another family member. Dress up if you can, and make tickets and posters to tell people about your performance.</p>	<p><b>Just dance</b></p> <p>On your own or with your family, just get moving. Can you put on your own silent disco? Why not make up a new routine to your favourite song. Dancing makes us happier, and its great exercise.</p>
<p><b>Board games</b></p> <p>Board games are sometimes a blast from the past but lots of fun can be had by pulling out old favourites, or even just a pack of cards.</p>	<p><b>Small world play</b></p> <p>Make up some stories and adventures using your favourite action figures and toy animals. Or anything really. You can even make your own characters - think Forky in Toy Story 4 :)</p>
<p><b>Imaginative play</b></p> <p>Be a fire breathing dragon, cast spells and do magic. Use props that you can find in your house.</p>	<p><b>Ideas pot</b></p> <p>Use a jar or container and have children come up with play ideas. When they say they are bored, they can choose to do an activity from the jar. Encourage them to keep adding to the pot.</p>
<p><b>Play stop the clock</b></p> <p>Use a phone or clock to give yourself 30 seconds to find as many red things as you can in a room in the house or garden if you have one. Change the colour, place and the amount of time for some variety.</p>	<p><b>Indoor basketball</b></p> <p>Use rolled up socks for balls and something to catch the balls in - like a clean bucket or basin. Move the bucket higher and further away to make the game harder.</p>



## Make a den

Whether inside or out, big or small, building a den is a great fun activity. You can make a den out of things you might have in the house, sheets/towels, cardboard boxes. Be as creative as you can. **Is there a secret door to your den? Or a password?**

## Take in turns story telling

One person starts the story with the first sentence, then the next person leads on the story with another sentence and so on. Keep going around until you get to the end of your story.

## Make an indoor obstacle course

You can use cushions, pillows, small tables, hula hoops. Make a balance beam by marking a line on the floor with tape if you have it. Make stations where you have to lie low, jog on the spot, do star jumps...

## Indoor scavenger hunt

First to find these items in the house - ball, key, sock, shoe, hat, pencil, cup... and add your own items.

## Indoor exercise

Lead a yoga/exercise/zumba class for your family. Make it your own and have lots of fun.

## Making play fun for everyone

**Is everyone included?** There are lots of ways to adapt games so no-one is left out, and children are often really good at finding their own solutions to this. Although it is important that no one feels left out all the time, children don't always have to play together all the time either and it can be difficult to manage this. With older children, having some time for everyone to do their own thing is important, and adults shouldn't feel the need to come up with ideas to amuse or occupy children all the time. Make an ideas pot and allow children to come up with their own activities.

**“Activity has very low risks for most children and young people; however, the risk of poor health from inactivity is very high.”**

Chief Medical Officers – Start Active, Stay Active Report





# Getting out in local spaces

Even if we can't get out much at the moment, it is important for children to go outside for some time every day. There are lots of benefits, even if it is only for a short time. When you go outside, please bear in mind current physical distancing guidance and wash your hands when you come in.

[www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others-social-distancing](http://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others-social-distancing)

Benefits range from:

- Reduced stress
- Increased creativity and problem-solving
- Being physically active
- Learning about the world around us
- Children's learning is enhanced
- Children's ability to focus and concentrate is improved.

Being in nature can reduce negative feelings such as anger and stress. Being outside makes you feel better and at the same time actually contributes to your physical wellbeing, reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension and the production of stress hormones. So pretty good for stressed out parents as well as for the children!

Children need contact with the natural world to support their health and development and build resilience - even if it is for a short time daily.

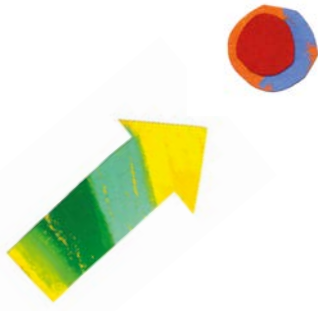
It is sometimes difficult to make this seem like fun for children when they are used to being in the house.

## Get a bit more nature into your day - some everyday tips

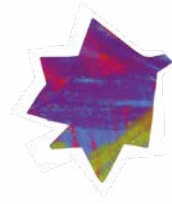
- Dress for the weather! If children can stay warm and dry they will be happier outside
- Stop to look at a view or up to the sky
- Play I spy or go on a 'bear hunt'
- Take up stargazing! Can you see pictures in the stars?
- How about an evening walk with the children? Some parents find an evening walk is a great way to settle down in the evening, making for a better night's sleep and chance to talk.

**“Time in nature is not leisure time; it's an essential investment in our children's health (and also, by the way, in our own).”**

Richard Louv, author and journalist best known for his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*.



# Loose parts play



No, not as odd as it sounds! Loose parts are simply any items children can use to play with, in a very flexible way, to move, manipulate, build and create. Loose parts are different from many toys in that they can be used in endless ways and there is no right and wrong way to use them.

Children and young people will play with loose parts in different ways depending on their age, ability and stage of development. Babies and young children start by holding items and usually try to put them in their mouth. With babies and young children care must always be taken when using loose parts that the materials cannot be swallowed.

Playing with loose parts helps children discover more about their world by learning about natural and manmade materials with different textures, shapes, colours and uses. Playing like this can also help with early counting, matching and sorting, hand to eye co-ordination and problem solving.

Many items good for play can be found in and around the home. A box can become a robot, a car, a house and even a space rocket! The possibilities are endless.

## Some examples of easily found loose parts

**Around the house:** Basin, basket, blankets, clean buckets, cardboard, clothes pegs, foam sponges, hats & accessories, lampshades, old clothes, potato masher, pillows, plastic bottles, sheets, shoe laces, sieve, string, tin foil, trays, wooden spoon, wool.

**Around the local area:** Feathers, leaves, pinecones, pebbles, sand, shells, sticks, twigs.

**Creative and messy play items:** Bottle tops, cardboard boxes, chalk, cotton wool, corks, marbles, old greeting cards, paint and brushes, pom poms, ribbon, wrapping paper, wallpaper, yoghurt pots.

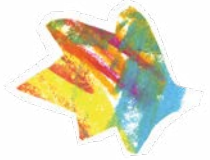
Before you throw packaging and household items into the recycling have think about if they could be used for play. It may get messy but loose parts are a great way to keep children busy and being creative around the home.

**“Loose parts play is a wonderful opportunity for children to grow as confident, resilient, creative, socially aware young people. Children are able to develop their own ideas, work collaboratively and learn from each other.”**

Claire V. Graham, Headteacher, St Marys RC Primary School, Haddington



# Digital play



Using technology together can be a good way of starting conversations about its use and limits. Keeping in touch with family and friends through social media such as facetime, whatsapp are important ways that technology can help us feel connected with others. Children expect us to set limits and help them manage their time online in the same way they do offline.

- Digital play provides new opportunities for children's play
- The internet offers a range of exciting new possibilities for creative development, learning and fun
- Social media helps children to stay in touch with friends, make plans and feel connected
- Some children with additional support needs find digital play especially useful for these reasons.

Here are some suggestions for parents that we've found helpful.

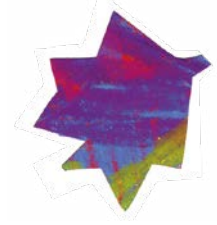
- **Tech-free time and space:** make sure there are some tech-free places and times at home where technology is not used, such as mealtimes, bedrooms in the run up to bedtime or when you go for a walk.
- **Keep talking:** encourage your child to talk to you about how they use the internet and show you what they do. Discuss with them the kinds of things they might come across. Use tech devices in a communal area such as the living room or kitchen. It's fine to ask your children what they are doing!
- **Stay in control:** activate parental controls on your home broadband, all devices including mobile phones and games consoles. Safe search settings can also be activated on Google (and other search engines), YouTube and on entertainment sites like iTunes and iPlayer.
- **Make agreements:** agree and set boundaries with your children for internet use, including when and where they can use portable devices and for how long.
- **Set an example:** think about your own use of technology – do you put your phone away at meal times? Are you distracted by notifications instead of paying attention to the people around you? Do you limit your own time on digital technology?
- **Look up support and up-to-date information:** the NSPCC provides useful tools to help parents keep children safe online ([www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)). Others, like Common Sense Media ([www.common Sense Media.org/app-reviews](http://www.common Sense Media.org/app-reviews)) provide reviews for age-appropriate apps, games and programmes.

“Children are **generally good** at assessing and navigating risks when they are aware of them, but they often don't understand the reach of the **internet...** as well as realising images they post never actually disappear. Parents and play providers are right to take this seriously and develop safeguards.”

Chris Martin, researcher, in Play for Wales, Spring 2017.



# Messy Play



Children love to get mucky, covered in paint and stuff when playing, we call this messy play. Messy play can help develop children's senses as they explore the different textures of materials. Messy play also helps develop creativity and imagination. Remember to dress for mess... old t-shirts, aprons and cover floors with newspapers. Some of these recipes have flour in them, but please don't use flour if you don't have plenty.

## Water play

### What you need:

- Water
- Toys
- Basin/deep baking tray
- Variety of plastic bottles, containers, funnels, sieves, jugs
- Food colouring – just a few drops can add interest
- Bubbles can add interest (but if skin is sensitive use a little bubble bath rather than washing up liquid)

### What to do:

Experiment with volume and pouring and filling and emptying containers. Add things into the water and see if they sink or float. Make up stories with toys in the water.

## Leaf printing

### What you need:

- Leaves – try to get different shapes and sizes
- Paper
- Poster paint in various colours

### What to do:

Paint the leaves then press the painted side down on paper and lift off gently.

## Gloop

### What you need:

- 2 cups cornflour
- Water
- Food colouring – try mixing the colours together

### What to do:

Add water to the cornflour until it becomes semi firm. You will now be able to mould this in your hands but when you stop moulding this will become runny. Add more water to make it runnier and gooier. You may wish to do this over a basin!

## Homemade play dough

### What you need:

- 2 cups of plain flour
- 2 cups of water
- 1 cup of salt
- 2 tablespoons of cream of tartar
- Food colouring

### What to do:

Mix together in a saucepan and bring to boil. Cook for a further two minutes until it forms a solid lump and allow to cool. Knead on a floured surface. Store in an airtight container or cling film. This should last for a few weeks. Why not try making fairy dough by adding some glitter.

## Sponge painting

### What you need:

- Sponges (cut into various sizes and shapes)
- Paint
- Paper

### What to do:

Dip the sponges in the paint and print onto the paper to make your own colourful designs.

## Bubble art

### What you need:

- Bubble mixture:
  - $\frac{1}{2}$  cup washing up liquid
  - $\frac{1}{2}$  cup water
- Paint or powder paint
- Straw
- Thin paper

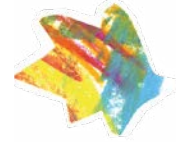
### What to do:

Add paint to the bubble mixture, blow through a straw and once you have a bubble, gently cover with thin paper and you will have a bubble painting.

More ideas at: [www.playscotland.org/parents-families/messy-play](http://www.playscotland.org/parents-families/messy-play)



# Useful Websites



Child Poverty Action Group	<a href="http://www.cpag.org.uk/scotland">www.cpag.org.uk/scotland</a>	Works to get a better life for low-income families
Childline	<a href="http://www.childline.org.uk">www.childline.org.uk</a>	Help and support for children
Family Lives (formerly parentline)	<a href="http://www.familylives.org.uk">www.familylives.org.uk</a>	Advice and support
National Autistic Society	<a href="http://www.autism.org.uk">www.autism.org.uk</a>	Information, support and services
Netmums	<a href="http://www.netmums.com">www.netmums.com</a>	UK website offering local info, parenting advice
One Parent Families Scotland	<a href="http://www.opfs.org.uk">www.opfs.org.uk</a>	Help and support for single parent families
Parent Network Scotland	<a href="http://www.parentnetworkscotland.org.uk">www.parentnetworkscotland.org.uk</a>	Support groups to meet the needs of parents
Parenting Across Scotland	<a href="http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org">www.parentingacrossscotland.org</a>	Supporting children, parents and families
Parent Club Scotland	<a href="http://www.parentclub.scot">www.parentclub.scot</a>	Information and resources for parents
Scottish Book Trust	<a href="http://www.scottishbooktrust.com">www.scottishbooktrust.com</a>	Promoting reading and writing for everyone
Young Scot	<a href="http://www.young.scot">www.young.scot</a>	Opportunities and incentives for 11-26 yr olds
YouthLink Scotland	<a href="http://www.youthlinkscotland.org">www.youthlinkscotland.org</a>	The agency for youthwork

“Play is our **brain's** favourite way of learning”

Diane Ackerman, poet



# Ways to deal with stress



## Slow down your breathing

It sounds like a simple thing, but when you feel stressed try to slow down your breathing and take deeper breaths. Focus on your breathing and try to take your mind off what's worrying you at the moment and calm yourself down. Even just doing this for a few minutes can help you feel less stressed. Recognise that feeling stressed and the physical effects of it are your bodies way of coping. Understanding this is a step towards feeling better.

## Speak to someone

If you are feeling stressed, it often helps to speak to a friend or family member. Speaking about what is causing you worry can sometimes make it seem a bit easier. Also, try to ask how they are doing too, often people are worried about the same things and it helps us not to feel so alone. Video chats are great, but if you can't do that an old fashioned phone call is great for sharing your worries.

If you don't have someone you can talk to, you could try keeping a diary of your thoughts and worries. Sometimes writing things down can help 'unload' your mind.

## Treat yourself

Do something that you think might make yourself feel better, whether it's wearing your favourite top or making your favourite meal or have your favourite hot drink if you can. Write down something you want to do in the future and keep it somewhere safe. Look at photos of things you enjoy, and try to relax.

## Laughter is the best medicine

It is a cliché but if you can take your mind off what you are worried about for a bit. Distract yourself by watching, reading or listening to something funny. It might not work for long, but a bit of light relief is good.

## Try to rest

Stress can often be caused by taking too much stressful information in and feeling that you can't do anything about it. Try to take a break from listening to news, social media or stories that worry you for a while before you go to bed. Colouring or reading can be good for calming down before going to sleep.

## Get some exercise

If you can get outside, getting fresh air can really help with stress. Walking, cycling or scooting are all great exercise. Getting outdoors is also very important for children (see getting out in local spaces). A walk at the end of the day uses up energy and might help everyone sleep better.

## Support is on hand...

These ideas don't sort out the problem, but hopefully they will make stressful feelings more manageable. There are people you can call if you are still feeling stressed and overwhelmed such as **Parentline Scotland on 08000 28 22 33**

Play Scotland delivers the child's right to play in Scotland.

As the national play organisation, Play Scotland promotes the importance of play for children and young people's development and wellbeing, and works strategically to create increased play opportunities.

This pack is produced by Play Scotland in support of playful families and the Play Strategy for Scotland, valuing play, everyday. © 2020 Play Scotland, Edinburgh.

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[www.playscotland.org](http://www.playscotland.org)



**Scotland's  
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Valuing play, every day

**Committed to PLAY**



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