



Mental health in infancy and early childhood affects social functioning, psychological well-being, and physical health throughout life.



### The Importance of Unstructured, Child-led Play

All children deserve the right to play. However, often we do not take the time to actually examine the benefits of play. Unstructured, child-led play is key in the emotional, social, and physical development of children.

Play allows for bonding to occur within families. Parents who follow their child's lead in play communicate with their young child in an attentive, intuitive, and relaxed way. Children learn that their parents value them, as well as their decisions and choices. This promotes secure attachment.

Play allows children to explore their emotions and different ways to express these. Play gives young children opportunities to problem solve and learn that there are many possible solutions to situations. It also lets children explore their world and through this develop courage, curiosity, resilience, and an understanding of their environment.

Finally, through play children develop social skills, whether they are playing by themselves, with adults, or with peers. Children learn to communicate with others, to share, to solve conflicts, and to take risks. Through play, children learn to take leadership roles and to follow others. They also learn to identify their strengths.

Professionals can advocate for the importance of play and the creation of opportunities for play. This includes recess and unstructured free time. While organized sport and structured activities can also create opportunities to grow and learn, both must be provided.

Grusec, J. (2011). Socialization processes in families: Social and emotional development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 62.

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Milteer, R. & Ginsburg, K. (2012). The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds: Focus on children in poverty. *Pediatrics*, 129 (1).

## Canadian Best Practice Portal for Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention

[www.phac.gc.ca/cbpp](http://www.phac.gc.ca/cbpp)

The Canadian Best Practice Portal for Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention is a valuable resource for anyone working in health promotion, from decision makers to planners. Through this website, you can find up-to-date information about programs related to chronic diseases, prevention, and health promotion. Topics include, but are not limited to, nutrition, smoking cessation, oral health, and violence prevention. Not only can you see what others are doing across Canada, but you can also add information about evaluated promising practices.

Available on the Canadian Best Practice Portal for Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention are health promotion and program planning tools. The *Online Health Program Planner 2.0* provides interactive tools to assist in all levels of health promotion. The first tool, *Program Planning Steps*, leads individuals through the process of planning a health promotion program. The *Planning Steps* helps the user to create target audiences, develop goals and objectives, choose strategies, determine resources that are needed, and develop indicators of success.

Next, the online *Business Case Creator* assists in the analysis of not only the plan, but also the topic, the community, and the political environment. By assessing the risks and benefits before carrying out a plan, individuals can determine the suitability of the health promotion plan. If the plan is promising, this tool also helps make a case for implementation.

Finally, the *Project Management Tools* can guide the user through the implementation of the program or project. These tools include step-by-step guidance in the development of a budget, resources, evaluation,

and work plan. They also help to determine the roles and expectations of stakeholders and partners.

All of the tools in the Online Health Program Planner 2.0 are free of charge. Users set up an account through the website cited above. This account allows the user to work through one or more plans at a time, returning as often as needed.



Registration is quickly filling up for the Prevention Matters 2013 conference. Be sure to register soon in order to be ensured a spot. Registration and program information can be found at [www.skprevention.ca](http://www.skprevention.ca)

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