



Developed in association with Parent Educator: Genevieve Muir of Connected Parenting

Play is a magical thing, it not only releases endorphins and increases the parent-child connection, but scientists have also discovered how impactful play can be for a child's growth and development. In fact, research suggests that it normally takes 400 repetitions to create a new synapse in the brain, unless play is involved, in which case it only takes 10 to 20 repetitions¹ - which can be a gamechanger for children and parents alike.

Everything from social skills, emotional regulation to creativity is best learned through play. It's therapeutic, it's mindful, it's low pressure and it's how children learn best about their world. Children can learn more from watching a bug, hanging from a tree or being in their own imaginations, than being taught to read with flashcards.

Whilst developing our children's IQ is important, today's parents are just as (if not more) invested in developing their children's emotional intelligence (EQ), and play and connection has a big role to play in developing EQ.

However, we are not parenting in the world our parents did. We are parenting in a post pandemic, modern world where the information overload is real - and the village has changed.

Today's parents are spending more time and energy on their kids than any previous generation, AND at the same time, being harder on themselves about their failings as parents than any previous generation. The expectations on parents have shifted and the amount of pressure to get it right is huge. If you are feeling like parenting is harder these days than it used to be, you are not imagining things. It is harder.

Knowing how important play is for children's growth and development, but understanding just how time-poor and overwhelmed today's parents are, BabyLove Nappies in partnership with Parent Educator, Genevieve Muir developed the '5 a Day of Play' guide.

The guide explores five core concepts: Messy World Play, Me & You Play, Rough & Tumble Play, In It To Win It Play and Let's Get Silly Play, and is accompanied with simple and practical expert tips which time-poor parents can use to turn everyday routines into mini moments of play to support the growth and development of their child, whilst also bringing more fun and peace into their homes.

Whilst it would be amazing to tick off each 5 a Day of Play concept everyday, let's be real...perfect parenting doesn't exist! Our hope is that the 5 a Day of Play guide can act as a source of inspiration for parents and carers, to encourage creative play from what surrounds us in that moment, that can be incorporated into your child's everyday life.



"Because more play means more connection, more learning, more love, maybe a bit less chaos and modern parents are here for it." - Genevieve Muir

5 a day of Play



5 a Day of Play developmental benefits:

- *Social skills*
- *Emotion regulation*
- *Creativity*
- *Improves EQ*
- *Teaches resilience*
- *Cooperation*
- *Models gratitude*
- *Overcomes food aversions*
- *Balance*
- *Coordination*
- *Strength and agility*
- *Nonverbal communication skills*
- *Self-esteem*
- *Releases endorphins*
- *Lowers cortisol*

messy world Play

Most parents dread the 'mess' that can come with dirt, crafts or worse - slime. But, letting kids explore with their senses through messy play has enormous sensory benefits which helps them to become calm, safe and comfortable in their own skin. It also teaches children resilience, leads to creative open play and best of all - there's no right or wrong way to do it. Messy play can even help children overcome food aversions (which is a whole other challenge!), so now is the time to embrace a messy moment that can be wiped up later.

One of the easiest and best ways to allow some messy sensory play is simply having kids barefoot and exploring the outside world. Toddlers view the world as one huge wonderful adventure and often when we get them outside time just slows down and they are very good at exploring their surroundings; from the ladybug on a plant to the leaf floating in a puddle after the rain.



Expert tip:

Toddler having a bad day? Simply add water! Water has incredible benefits, it is soothing, it provides sensory input and warm water has a soporific effect (brings on deeper sleep). We know parents are busy, so try placing a bucket of water outside with your child on a warm afternoon and popping LEGO or dinosaurs in it to change up the play. Alternatively, simply add some coloured food dye or bubbles to your child's bath in the evening and watch the water soothe your child and hopefully help with a better night's sleep for you all!

5 a day of Play

me & you play

While multiple parents or caregivers and children can engage in each of the other 5 a Day of Play concepts, Me & You Play is all about making dedicated time for one-on-one connection with your child. Children are wired for connection with 1-2 primary caregivers (usually their parents). Their worlds revolve around seeking connection and time with their parents, and when they feel this connection, they receive the answer to the question they're seeking from their parents 'am I loved?'. When kids feel connected with their parents, their nervous systems become physically settled and it leads to happier, more confident children - who are often better behaved too. The catch is parents can have multiple children, competing demands and work to do.

Children experience this time with them as love, and here is the really good news: we only need 9 minutes of play to fill their emotional cup with one-on-one special time. But, even when parents aren't able to offer a full 10 minutes of one-on-one time with their child, we can still make them feel connected with us through mini moments of connection.

Expert tip:

If you notice your child is seeking you out and you simply don't have time, try 9 minutes of play by blowing them 10 kisses across the room. Tell them some will go high, and some will go low. See how many they can catch and ask them if they can keep some for later or blow you some back. This is an easy game parents can do, even when your hands are full with a feeding baby or you're in the middle of making dinner - and it makes your child feel amazing. When you do have time, join your child in their world for 9-10 minutes of fully focussed play. Boost the connection by telling them how much you love connecting with them and how much fun they are to play with.

Rough & Tumble play

Parents often worry that rough play might hype kids up, or that they may get hurt. However, there is a lot of evidence that suggests that children develop balance, coordination, strength and agility, as well as social and nonverbal communication skills through Rough & Tumble Play. Evidence also suggests that children who play in a rough and tumble manner learn how to manage their emotions and self-regulate faster than those that don't, as they learn how to be gentle and understand where the limits are.

Preparing for bed can often be a challenge, for parents and children alike, so take a few minutes out from your night time routine to incorporate Rough & Tumble Play - which can actually help children settle faster.



Expert tip:

After you've brushed their teeth and popped on their nappy pants, chase them all the way into their room, give them a tickle and delight in their squeals as you catch them, put them in bed and smother them with kisses, so that you can both end the day on a high.

5 a day of Play



in it to win it Play

We all know that yelling 'clean up your toys' from another room rarely results in success, but it's so important for children to understand social rules, family rules and become team players. The truth is, children love to rise to any challenge they're given and when we incorporate playful competition into their day, daily tasks can go a bit more smoothly! It also helps children's emotional regulation and social development, which brings more peace to our homes and increases their emotional intelligence at the same time.

Healthy games with a competitive nature also help children engage and develop their creative, critical thinking skills. Why not challenge them by asking "who can pack up the most toys in 3 minutes?", set a timer and go!

An extension of engaging in competition-based play is giving your child a responsibility. Children love to feel important and helpful, and when kids help, they get to feel like part of a team and parents get to thank them for their contribution. It builds their self-esteem, models gratitude and makes them feel amazing. Bring a challenge to them and see if they can come up with a solution, for example "how should we cut our carrots this evening?" or "how would you like to sort the laundry, by colour, clothing type or size?".

Expert tip:

Tell your kids that we have been invaded by "weeds" and we need to tackle them as a family! Get everyone outside and give them a bucket each to collect their weeds in. In the short term, it's going to fill in some time and make your kids feel important. However, the long-term advantage allows your children to get involved in regular chores, which teaches them how to be team players and leads to greater success later in life.



let's get silly play

Humour, laughter and being 'silly' is one of the most underrated parenting strategies. Sometimes we need to move a bad day from stuck to unstuck and if we can find some humour, we can often shift things enough to reset a mood, or a whole day and make our children feel more connected to us. When our children feel connected to us, their cooperation increases, endorphins are released, and cortisol levels are lowered.

If getting ready for the day can be a challenge, turn on some music for an impromptu getting dressed-dance party. Pretend to be an animal and actually follow through with the behaviour or pretend to be a 'fool' who doesn't know that a hat goes on your child's head and watch as they take charge and show you where it goes. Children love to dive into their imaginations and when adults and parents use theirs or we get silly, it helps to release happy endorphins and reduce cortisol.



Expert tip:

Feeling like your child is always saying 'no' to things, they feel 'stuck' or they don't want to put on their shoes? Try making their favourite toy or other objects talk. This works really well when we have to get children to do things, for example "Mr Teddy needs his nappy changed and he doesn't want to.... He doesn't like stopping playtime for changetime, can you help him?".