



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Parenting the  
Preschooler



# Play Together

## Get Active: Play Together

- Play is important for learning, healthy development and relationships.
- Pick a time of day when you will both be less rushed, hungry, thirsty, or tired. Take an active play break for 20 minutes or more.
- Set aside your to-do list and distractions. Ignore messes to clean or piles of paperwork for now. Leave your phone in another room and skip screen time.
- Let children lead. Allow them to pick the game or make up the rules. This builds skills and confidence.
- Go outside for playtime whenever possible.
- Give encouragement. Preschoolers need to hear your positive reinforcement.
- Get physical and make contact. Activities like dancing and light “rough and tumble” play build confidence and help children learn about safe touch.
- Model positive play to demonstrate fairness, self-control, healthy competition, and empathy. Children learn a lot from watching you.
- Laugh and have fun together.

*Children need to move their bodies often. They need a total of 60 minutes or more of physical activity throughout each day. Make sure part of this time is spent with you. Aim to spend at least 20 minutes every day in active play together.*



Photo by Family Moments from Stocksnap

Children need you to play with them. Physical activity is good for both of you. Active play time together builds important skills for children and strengthens the bond between you.

## *Seven Benefits of Playing Together*

1. **A natural brain booster:** Research shows that physical play stimulates brain development and boosts school test scores.
2. **Stronger family relationships and friendships:** Spending a few minutes playing together is an investment in your relationship. You can use playtime to teach cooperation and how to channel competitive energy.
3. **Problem solving skills:** Children learn self-control when they practice taking turns and following the rules of the game. (“Oh, I see dad didn’t get mad when his turn was over.”)
4. **Healthy habits:** More time spent together playing means less time sitting and watching TV or playing alone on devices
5. **Emotional intelligence:** Children gain empathy and learn fairness in winning and losing when you show them your emotions. Children gain confidence when they learn to recognize the emotions of others as well as manage their own emotions during play. (“Mom won’t like it if I push too hard; then we will have to stop playing tag.”)
6. **Health and fitness:** Physical activity strengthens the body and improves heart health, coordination and flexibility. You will both sleep better, too!
7. **Joy and laughter:** Playing together reduces stress. Happiness is a great gift you give each other through play.



Photo by Александр Давыдов on Canva