

# What does play look like

While we all loved to play as children, unfortunately when we grow into adults we forget what it was like to be a child at play. From our mature perspective, we may have a very narrow view of what play is. We might think it only includes organized sports and games like volleyball or football. Play encompasses much, much more. It includes a wide array of activities and behaviors children engage in. Explore some examples of “types” of play below to broaden our definition of what play is.

These “play types” are adapted from playworker Bob Hughes “A Playworker Taxonomy of Play.”



Sometimes children use objects to represent something they imagine to be “real.”



Sometimes children look like they are fighting. They tackle, tickle, and wrestle with each other just for fun.



Sometimes children imitate the everyday activities they see the adults around them do. They pretend to be mothers and fathers, to cook a meal, or drive a car.



Sometimes children make up new games and they create their own rules to follow.



Sometimes children may use tools and materials to design, create, and build something creative and unique.



Sometimes children use their voice to play. They joke, make funny sounds, and mimic the voices of others. They sing, debate, and rhyme.



Sometimes children try out what it's like to be a big, important person. They imitate the people – politicians and celebrities they see on TV, or play-act the weddings, funerals, and ceremonies they see in their community.



Sometimes children do risky things when they play. They experiment with fear and danger.



Sometimes children use their eyes, ears, hands, and even mouth to play – they use their senses to discover.



Sometimes children's imaginations run wild. They dream up fantastical stories of make-believe.



Sometimes children play with imaginary friends.



Sometimes children like to move their bodies in every direction!



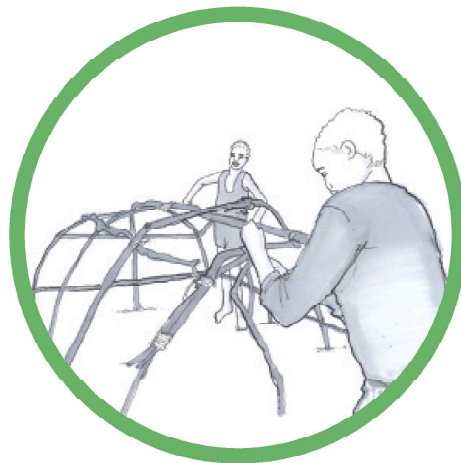
Sometimes children will try an activity over and over again until they've mastered it.



Sometimes children play with ordinary objects in new ways.



Sometimes children try on what it would be like to be someone else. They experiment with being a teacher, a bus driver, or a policeman.



Sometimes children's play mimics basic survival skills. They run and hide, pretend to build shelters, or dam streams.

Children at play are truly engaged in a universe of imagination and innovation the adult onlooker is often oblivious to. In the illustrations of "play types," can you identify what a child engaged in each "play type" might be learning?

Can you see that the child playing with sticks and sand



are maybe learning the principles of mathematics and physics? It's true! Perhaps they're counting how many stones they can stack high and how many handfuls of sand fit in a cup. Watch as they pour the sand onto their hand,

For the children play fighting,



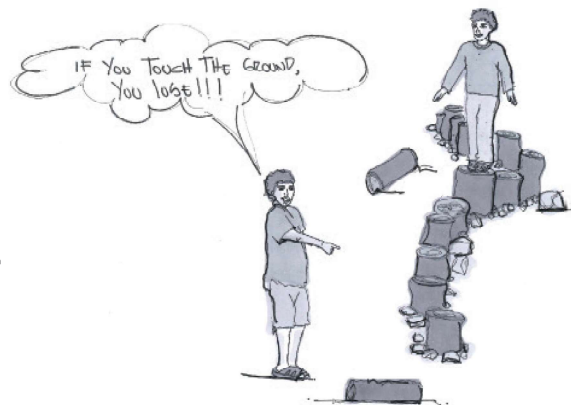
they are coming to understand how their growing bodies work. When they engage in rough play, they're testing their muscles, learning their strength and flexibility, and developing the necessary emotional and social skills to interact with others.

For the child engaged in risky play,  
jumping of the tall tree branch,



they are building crucial survival skills and developing courage. Perhaps they will get hurt in their play, but in the process they will learn how to assess risk better next time, how to be resilient, and to try again when they have failed. Children must experiment with an element of danger while they are young in order that they understand how to manage risk and head caution when they are older.

The children making up a new game



children must communicate, follow the rules they set, and work together. They're practicing important language skills that will improve their reading and writing, as well as social tools to cooperate with others.

It is not until we stop and truly look that we see the great "work" children are undertaking in play. Learning is happening in every corner of the schoolyard.