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Solutions Through *fun*

BY DR. PAT SPUNGIN AND THE BRITISH TOY AND HOBBY ASSOCIATION



The best way to make children good is to make them happy.

Oscar Wilde

the way we live now

Over the past 30 years significant changes have occurred in family life. Factors ranging from changing working patterns to the way in which we now enjoy our leisure time, have all had an impact on the relationship between parent and child...



Kids Top Tips:

Do childish things together, jump in puddles, look for conkers, hool a hoop. The child teach the parent to do something.



Kids Top Tips:
My mum to get off the phone and play wiv me

Government statistics reveal one of the greatest social changes to impact the family has been the increase in working mothers. In 1980, less than a third of mothers of young children worked. By 2004, that figure had jumped to 55% of mothers of children aged between 1 and 5. By the time children go to school, 73% of their mothers are in part-time or full-time work. In addition to this, 93% of men with dependent children are in the labour force.

With both parents working, the time they have to spend playing with their children has shrunk proportionately. A recent survey showed that a vast majority of parents recognised this and wished they had more time to spend with their children.

(www.raisingkids.co.uk Survey Nov 2005)

Our leisure time, how much we have of it and how we use it, has also changed over the past 30 years. A snapshot of family life in the mid 1970s would probably show families who spent a significant amount of their time together, sharing face-to-face time in a family room and doing everything from watching TV and playing to eating meals together.



Kids Top Tips:
Chase me with the watering can!

What little time parents do have has become increasingly scarce and instead of making the time to play, other domestic and external chores and workloads have taken over.

So how can we close the gap between parent and child and ensure that family relationships are made as strong as possible? One tool that every parent or carer has at their disposal is play. Whether it's with a toy, board game or in the playground or park, the time spent playing with your child pays dividends in strengthening your bond with them as well as creating a supportive and happy environment.

Sharing playtime activity and the enjoyment that comes from play creates good feelings that reinforce family togetherness.

We all play. I play, my husband, the nanny... My son uses all his adrenaline and then passes out. That's a good night.

Madonna



why play matters



To children

From the first time a baby shakes a rattle to the time a teenager wipes the floor with his parents at Monopoly, play helps a child to develop a whole range of skills from learning how to share and how to listen, to increasing confidence and self-esteem. Play is crucial to your child. It can provide the time for discovery, exploration and growth as well as fun. The most important thing for parents to remember is that through fun and play a child can learn about the world around them,

whilst developing key skills needed throughout life. Play can be divided into five developmental processes – Physical, Emotional, Social, Mental and Creative /imaginative. Through play, children learn:

- * Precise hand eye co-ordination
- * To walk, run, jump, balance, catch and throw
- * To work through their feelings and develop empathy for other individuals
- * To build self esteem and confidence
- * To understand how to follow instructions, how to take turns and share
- * To problem solve, as well as developing their curiosity and intellect
- * To extend their imagination beyond the limits of their world.

To adults

It's not only children who benefit from time spent playing. Adults who take time to enjoy play with children will find it both relaxing and stimulating – helping themselves get in touch with their 'inner child'. There's nothing like kicking off your shoes and getting into the mindset of a child, to give you a break from being a grown-up!

Play, fun and laughter create a happy family environment in which both children and adults thrive. So why not use it more in everyday life and see what your children can teach you?

- * Help a parent identify their children's interests and so build self esteem
- * Highlight a child's talents. This ability can then be focused on and built on in other ways
- * Be a great incentive for good behaviour
- * Give the opportunity for parents to find out what their children are interested in and what games they would like to play. This allows the children not the parents to lead the playtime
- * Be a great opportunity to strengthen bonds and reinforce the importance of team work.

To families

Playing together as a family or one-on-one can:

- * Help to alleviate stress
- * Provide an opportunity for parents and children to communicate
- * Help a parent to understand their child's feelings
- * Provide a time for a parent to understand their child's concerns
- * Help a parent recognise feelings a child may not be able to articulate themselves



Kids Top Tips:
Enjoy yourself
and go bonkers

The average child laughs about 300 times a day. Whereas the average adult laughs only 17 times a day

Association for applied and therapeutic humour

The best inheritance a parent can give to his child is a few minutes of their time each day.

M. Grundler



how to use play

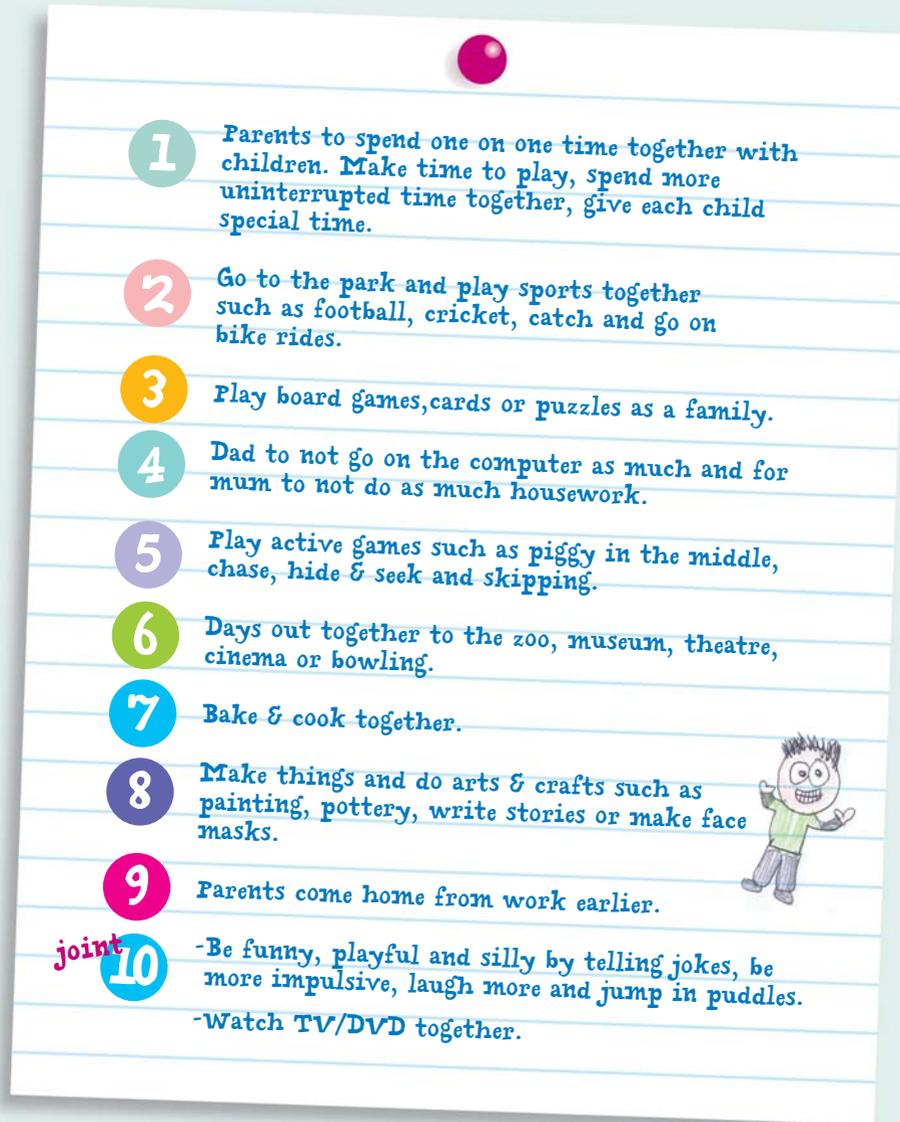
Playing together is a great way for families to develop good communication skills and build bonds. It is a time to build relationships and create a happy environment, as well as an opportunity to establish useful parenting techniques and to encourage good behaviour.

The BTHA's recent research revealed a great deal about what children think and how they see the world around them. Through asking them questions such as 'What tips would you give your mum and/or dad to make spending time with them more fun?' it was found that the majority of children who responded gave very simplistic answers of what they see as fun. All of the research was conducted with over 1000 primary school children. There has been no adult input into the responses.



children's top ten tips

to make spending time at home with the family more fun –



- 1** Parents to spend one on one time together with children. Make time to play, spend more uninterrupted time together, give each child special time.
- 2** Go to the park and play sports together such as football, cricket, catch and go on bike rides.
- 3** Play board games, cards or puzzles as a family.
- 4** Dad to not go on the computer as much and for mum to not do as much housework.
- 5** Play active games such as piggy in the middle, chase, hide & seek and skipping.
- 6** Days out together to the zoo, museum, theatre, cinema or bowling.
- 7** Bake & cook together.
- 8** Make things and do arts & crafts such as painting, pottery, write stories or make face masks.
- 9** Parents come home from work earlier.
- joint 10** -Be funny, playful and silly by telling jokes, be more impulsive, laugh more and jump in puddles.
-Watch TV/DVD together.



Nearly all of these tips and ideas can be made use of on a day-to-day basis to make family life more fun.

tips & handy hints to make family life more fun

Kids Top Tips:
Don't talk about the washing.



Everyone knows that some days you have more time than others for play. Overleaf are some useful tips from children themselves on how you can utilise that time to make it more fun for everyone.



10 minutes to spare...

- * Tell jokes
- * Do the washing up and play with the bubbles
- * Do a puzzle together
- * Read a book together
- * Make tidying into a game – choose a colour and tidy everything that is red, then blue and so on
- * Have a mad five minutes of jumping and dancing around the room together.
- * Blow up a balloon and chase around the room
- * Take it in turns to play with a hula hoop
- * Empty the dishwasher and make it into a counting game.



**Kids
Top Tips:
Be silly!**

An hour...

- * Let your children help you prepare dinner
- * Sit down as a family and play a board game
- * Play cards
- * Eat meals together around the table
- * Let children be involved with doing D.I.Y jobs around the house
- * Play hide & seek
- * Do some baking together
- * Plant some mustard & cress on the kitchen windowsill
- * Put on aprons and do some painting together
- * Take it in turns to paint each other's faces
- * Play ball games outside
- * Have a competition on a dance mat
- * Dress up and act out a play or story
- * Make mud pies
- * Take the dog for a walk as a family
- * Wash the car together
- * Run a bath and play with the bubbles while washing
- * Read bedtime stories or listen to an audiotape together
- * Do some arts and crafts.

More than hour to spare...

- * Go to the park together
- * Play piggy in the middle outside
- * Have a water fight
- * Prepare a picnic to eat indoors or outdoors depending on the weather
- * Jump in puddles and see who can splash the most
- * Build a den using old sheets and pegs
- * Teach your child how to cook a favourite meal such as pasta and sauce
- * Do the gardening together, clear the leaves and de-head the flowers
- * Let your child choose a game or toy to play with
- * Make models out of playdough or modelling clay
- * Host your very own teddy bears' picnic or dolls' tea party.

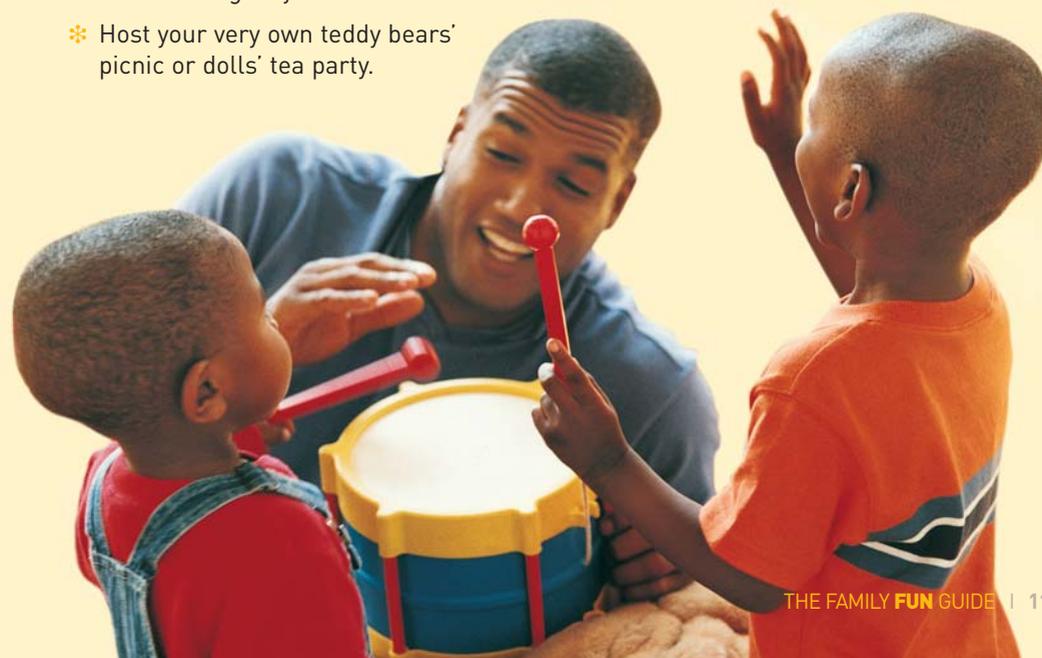
Once a week...

- * Set aside one night a week to have a family games night
- * Go out on a family bike ride.

Never leave children unsupervised when cooking or playing with water.

It is a wise father
that knows his
own child

William Shakespeare



have fun!

Although there are lots of developmental advantages in play, the best thing is to enjoy it for yourself rather than see play purely as an educational benefit for your child. Have fun yourself and it will be fun for your child.



Kids Top Tips:
Stop what they are doing, even for 5 minutes to play with us children.



Kids Top Tips:
Play a game instead of watching TV

The essence of childhood, of course, is play.

Bill Cosby

BTHA

The British Toy & Hobby Association (BTHA) believes play should be protected, enhanced and celebrated in its many forms.

The BTHA website hosts various leaflets by the National Toy Council (NTC) on issues surrounding toys, play and children.

www.btha.co.uk

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Dr Pat Spungin is the founder of leading parenting website, www.raisingkids.co.uk. A former university lecturer, Pat has a PhD in Psychology and has written and broadcast extensively on parenting and other family issues. She is married and has raised three children.

www.raisingkids.co.uk