

## How to Play with Your Children (parent handout)

The most important person in a child's life is their parent. Children look to their parents not only for guidance and support, but also as someone they can interact with in a fun and playful way. Play is actually the easiest and most enjoyable activity parents can do with their children, and results in a happy and confident child, as well as a pleased and content parent.

Today's families are stressed and busy, and rely heavily on technologies such as TV, video games, digital pads and cell phones which serve as an "escape". Technology not only entertains children, but also is used by many parents as a soother or reward if their child is upset. As parents connect more and more to their own technologies, they are disconnecting from their children, and as a result, many children are forming unhealthy relationships and addictions to technology. Disconnecting from technology, and reconnecting to your children, is never going to be an easy task, especially for families who are addicted to technology.

Parents who use a lot of technology often express fear, or feel uncomfortable connecting with their children, and possibly even their partners. This fear of socializing is understandable when we realize how isolated from each other we have all become. Gaining social confidence and skill with your children is best done through play, as there really are no rules, and ways of play are simply endless. The following play tips will help parents as they explore different ways of interacting and connecting with their children.

- 1) **Follow the child's lead.** Ask them what activity they would like to do with you and let them take the lead and tell you what to do.
- 2) **Listen closely and ask questions** if you don't understand. Try to be the follower, and resist the need to take over control of the play situation.
- 3) **Offer suggestions**, but only if the child asks or indicates they aren't sure what to do.
- 4) **Keep it simple**, at least to start. Don't make play complicated.
- 5) **Do physical activities first** involving rough-n-tumble play such as play wrestling, pillow fights, building forts with couch cushions, foot ball, soccer. This allows your child an energy outlet which will enable them to calm themselves and focus on a more sedentary play activity.
- 6) **Bring on the games!** Board games, cards, reading, arts and crafts, cooking, dancing, and even chores such as cleaning rooms together can be a fun and bonding experience.
- 7) **Family theme nights** can be a fun way to connect with your children e.g. Monday is baking cookies night, Tuesday swimming, Wednesday go to the park etc.
- 8) **Prohibit technology** from the car, an hour before bed, and during dinner prep/eat/clean-up. This is an important time to bond with your children, and hear about their day.

No matter what you do, your children will love you for it! Your children are an investment in the future. Start your investment today by playing with your child every day!

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