

# the playful mind newsletter

## the developmental importance of play

### CHILDREN FORGETTING HOW TO PLAY

Children are forgetting how to play properly because they are given too many structured activities and high-tech toys.

They do not have enough chance to make up their own games at home and school, which restricts their creativity and initiative.

Some families believe they can help boost their children's brainpower with the latest electronic toys or by enrolling them in sport and after-school clubs.

This is despite the fact they have often been told what games to play in school sports lessons and sometimes even in the playground.

But a report 'The Trouble With 21st Century Kids', compiled by Peter Smith, professor of psychology at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and nutritionist Rachel Biggins called, warns that children need more free time to develop their own ways of playing.

Some structuring of play can be helpful now and then to get children going or help children who have difficulty playing. But this should not go too far.

Regimented play activities can have negative consequences on the social and emotional development of a child because they are too organised and take away a child's initiative and freedom of choice. In contrast, freeform play encourages the creative and multi-sensory development of a child because it has no structure.

Play or games with rules, where it is the outcome that motivates the participation, train a child's thought patterns, leaving less time for their imagination or creative thought process to establish itself and mature.

The report warns that "freeform play" is also under threat due to the increased popularity of television and videos.

Experts agree that pre-programmed electronic toys monopolize the brain, because children respond to a scenario constructed by someone else and this is having an impact on their creativity.

Parents need to begin encouraging their children to go out and play, rather than sitting glued to the TV. If you enforce this rule when they are young, they won't miss what they never had. Without a TV set monopolizing their free time, they'll seek alternatives such as reading and playing games.

Previous research has found that mothers and fathers are inadvertently crushing their children's imagination by arranging structured things for them to do every second of the day.

David Elkind, professor of child study at Tufts University, Boston, United States, has claimed that being bored pushes children into trying out new ideas and showing initiative.

(Extracted from an article by Sarah Harris, Education Correspondent, Daily Mail, 30 May 2006)