

POWER OF PLAY

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Every time I babysit my niece, we have the same conversation as I change her morning diaper.

“Liv, what do you think we’ll do today?”

“Go downstairs and play! And play in the living room... and play outside...”

What would it be like to look at life like a two-year-old whose prime responsibility is to play and have fun? After all, she doesn't have to think about work, car payments, or student loans. She doesn't even have to think about using the bathroom yet! And then I wondered if we're teaching our kids to value and harness the power of play to help them love God and others or if we're pushing play away to make room for duty and responsibility. Do play and accountability have to be mutually exclusive?

Play and creativity can help our kids be more sensitive, loving, and responsible. Using play as a daily discipline, our kids can work out a creative muscle that will only help them become healthier, helpful humans.

- Building a bridge with blocks can help our kids learn to solve problems.
- While pretending with costumes, they're playing out scenarios.
- They make discoveries when making up recipes.
- They imagine possibilities while writing stories.

So, how can we encourage our kids' creativity and celebrate play time? Try these ideas.

Make time to be bored.

We do our kids a huge disservice by forcing them to be busy. Instead of turning on a screen or filling every minute with an activity, allow your kids time to think of what *they* want to do; they'll end up filling the time with unstructured play and imagination.

Mess it up!

Encourage your kids to use their mistakes to create a masterpiece instead of starting over whenever they color outside the lines. God makes something beautiful out of our messes, and we can help our kids learn that messes and mistakes can lead to more imaginative ideas in the long run.

Play!

When you play together, do just that: play! Relearn how to play from your kids. Instead of following directions or creating something specific, take their natural inclination to play freely and relearn it yourself.



Mix media in art projects, weave tall tales, go outside, and celebrate freedom with play.

Pretend!

Pretending can help children learn empathy by putting themselves in another person's shoes. The American Academy of Pediatrics says unstructured play is necessary because it “allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers.” Perhaps you want to choose a Bible story and act it out with puppets. For example, if you're acting out the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000, imagine how the boy with the loaves and fish felt when Jesus asked him to share his snack. Imagine what the bread tasted like. Imagine what the disciples said to one another as they ate. In addition to learning about Jesus, acting out Bible stories will help your kids peer into the minds and hearts of the characters and understand them more fully.

Worship with your creativity.

God's people used their creative gifts throughout the Bible to worship him. Read [Psalm 150](#) with your kids. Think of all the ways it talks about praising God! Then—whether through a living room dance party, painting pictures, or working together to write a poem—worship God with your creativity as a family.

The best Creator of all gave us the unique ability to create, and appreciating their creativity will help our kids love the person God created them to be. Not only will creative play boost our kids' mental and emotional health, it will improve ours as well. Let's let play shape how we worship God, love others, and see ourselves.

Want to do a deep dive? Check out Family Fire's article [Encouraging the Creativity of Children](#).

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