



# Play in times of hardship



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Play is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and well-being, and is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 31.

Play helps children to develop their inner resources, building the resilience to better face the challenges and uncertainties they experience throughout life and in times of crisis. Play is a natural, active and often unplanned process in which thinking, feeling and doing can flourish; when children are playing, they are able to be inventive, creative, and learn to self-regulate.

In these times of economic hardship, the play needs and natural urge to play for children will remain. Play activity doesn't need to cost lots of money or involve expensive toys or days out. There are so many '**free and found**' play opportunities that can take place within homes, communities, and settings.

## Loose parts

Often the most effective types of play come through the use of free and found materials, also known as '**Loose Parts**'. Loose parts are simply any item that children can use for play. They are resources that can be moved about, manipulated and adapted, and will provide high levels of flexibility and choice for children. There are endless possibilities for how loose parts can be used and there is no right or wrong way to use them. They encourage creativity and imagination and develop more skill and competence than most modern plastic toys.

There are many ways to find loose parts. You could gather materials from around the home such as cardboard boxes and old sheets to build a den; old clothes, shoes and jewellery for dressing up; old mobile phones, pots and pans. Create fun opportunities outside in your garden or street using old crates, planks, tyres, guttering and buckets, or play some traditional games such as chasies, tig, kerbsey or two balls. Take children on a scavenger hunt to find interesting natural materials for play. Go for a walk in the woods, to your local park, or to the beach to find driftwood, logs, sticks and twigs, stones and rocks, pine cones, shells or leaves.

You could also visit local companies, building site offices, factories and shops to explain what reusable free and found materials you are looking for as well as going to charity shops, jumble sales and car-boot sales to find cheap resources for children's play. Let children, parents, friends and colleagues know that you are looking for reusable materials. You may know someone who works in construction, plumbing, electricals or woodwork - this could be a great way to get bricks, wood or pipe cut offs or wiring reels. Join a scrap store such as Play Resource or Recreate.

This resource provides lots of free and found play ideas that can make play possible in times of hardship within homes, communities, schools, childcare, play and youth settings.



# Play types, activities and ideas

Play doesn't need to cost a lot of money and can take many forms. It can be quiet and solitary or noisy, chaotic and sociable. In playwork we commonly use a model known as the 16 play types - identified and outlined by Bob Hughes (2006). These play types are not set in stone and do have some overlap; they attempt to describe the full range of children's play behaviours and how they might contribute to children's physical, mental and emotional development. We have provided some cheap play activities for each type of play – these can be used indoors and out.

## Deep play

Deep play allows children to encounter challenging or risky experiences thus helping them to develop survival skills and conquer their fears. Challenging, risky play can look different for different children dependent on their age, stage, or ability, and children with a disability have an equal need for adventurous play. One child's idea of a challenging activity might be easy for another child (climbing high, touching creepy crawlies etc.). Children need to explore their limits, try out new experiences and develop their capabilities from a very young age.

## Play ideas

- Climb some trees and allow children to explore their limits in a safe way.
- Go on a bug or nature hunt – you could make this into a fun game to see who can collect the most items.
- Go fishing for crabs or tadpoles in rivers or streams.
- Go on a bike ride or take a walk in the dark.

Hughes, B. (2006). *A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types*. Playlink.





## Socio-dramatic play

Socio-dramatic play involves the enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature. Children often act out different life experiences and by providing a safe space for children to act out different or new scenarios you are helping them to improve their confidence, resilience, creativity, and imagination. Children can learn about their emotions and how to regulate these emotions as they grow and develop.

### Play ideas

- Role play games – use loose parts to encourage role play, for example, being a racing car driver, using cardboard boxes as the car.
- Playing shop, house or school – use items from around the home or setting.
- Gather some props – old clothes, shoes, bags, mobile phones, cameras, sunglasses etc. – store them in a basket or suitcase and let the children use for play.

## Mastery play

Mastery play is where children take control of the physical and moving ingredients of their environment. There are numerous benefits of this type of play ranging from increased creativity and problem-solving skills, reduced stress and anxiety, and increased physical activity levels. Studies have also shown that fresh air, sunshine and increased activity levels are mood boosters that can help to reduce depression and anxiety.

### Play ideas

- Building dens or forts indoors or outdoors out of old sheets and tarpaulin.
- Have a digging area in the garden, or use pots or trays to plant flowers or seeds.
- Explore the elements by making a dam in a stream, build a bonfire, make mounds in earth or sand.





## Exploratory play

Exploratory play can involve play using senses of smell, touch and taste to explore and discover the texture and function of things around us. It can also help children access factual information consisting of manipulative behaviours such as handling, throwing, banging or mouthing objects. This type of play has numerous benefits for children, including babies and children with additional needs; these include encouraging them to explore and investigate all of their senses, creativity and exploration.

### Play ideas

- Make home-made playdough, add different essences or textures such as glitter or rice.
- Make sensory bags which are great fun for touch and smell. All you need is some nice smelling shower gel, a zip lock bag and whatever arts and craft bits take your fancy. Allow the children to make these with you and then let them play with them freely.
- Do some baking, this is a lovely activity to do with children and doesn't need to cost much.

## Creative play

Creative play involves experimenting and creating with a range of materials or tools (arts and crafts, scrap, reusable materials). Children can also engage in role-playing and imaginative play through creative activities like drama, music, and dance.

### Play ideas

- Different arts and crafts activities are a great way for children to express themselves; painting, colouring and using scrap loose parts are fun activities for all ages and abilities.
- Encourage singing and dancing for children of all ages. If you have younger children, singing nursery rhymes and songs can encourage language and communication skills. Older children often love a sing-a-long too.
- Have a drama show where children can get dressed up and put on a show.

## Fantasy play

Fantasy play is the make-believe world of children. This type of play is where the child's imagination gets to run wild, and they get to play out things that are that are unlikely to occur, like driving a racing car or being a pilot.

*Fantasy play is very closely linked to Imaginative play.*

## Imaginative play

Imaginative play is where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply. Play is based on reality but is not real - like pretending to have wings or having a make-believe friend.

Both fantasy and imaginative play benefit children by allowing them to explore different perspectives, during which, ideas and emotions are molded and rearranged.





## Play ideas

- Imaginative and fantasy play will utilise free and found props such as dressing up with old clothing rather than expensive costumes.
- Host a talent show.
- Story time is a great activity for all ages to help improve children's imagination as it takes their minds to a new place where they can feel free to explore new possibilities.
- Remember, often having too many adults present can inhibit children's pretend play – give them space to play.

## Symbolic play

This type of play allows control, gradual exploration and increased understanding without the risk of being out of one's depth and uses objects, actions or ideas to represent other objects, actions, or ideas, e.g. using a cardboard tube as a telescope. Children use objects to represent something else, or assign themselves and others roles before acting them out. Symbolic play makes use of the items found around the home, such as, cardboard boxes, empty tubes, yogurt pots, egg cartons, sticks, rocks and pine cones - the list is endless.

## Play ideas

- Make some kitchen roll tube telescopes – this is a low cost but effective play activity for children and can encourage imaginative play e.g. pretending to be pirates.
- Use loose parts such as tubes and cartons to make animals, rockets, cars, houses etc.
- Cardboard boxes such as cereal boxes, food boxes or parcels can be such fun when used for play, rather than recycling.





## Locomotor play

Also known as physical play, this type of play is about movement for movement's sake, for example, running, jumping, playing chase, skipping and climbing trees. This type of physical movement will encourage good physical development/health, improve agility, fitness and stamina, help with coordination, balance, strength and stability, and help aid bone density and large muscle development.

### Play ideas

- Develop a homemade obstacle course using planks, crates and old tyres. This can be adjusted depending on the age and ability of the child.
- Go for a forest walk and encourage physical movement. This in turn will help develop large muscle development through jumping and running, as well as aiding coordination when climbing on rocks and trees.
- Play chaises, skipping games or have a dance off to keep children moving.

## Rough & tumble play

This type of play is close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with determining relative strength. It involves play fighting, tickling, tumbling, play with body contact, but with no deliberate hurting. Children discover their physical flexibility and the exhilaration of this display can be friendly and positive. This type of play can burn off a lot of energy, allow children to manage 'risk' safely and to test their boundaries.





## Play ideas

- A slip 'n' slide can be freely made by using a large sheet of tarpaulin, fairy liquid and water.
- Play some group games such as stick in the mud or dodgeball (great for engaging in rough and tumble play in a friendly and positive way).
- Tug-of-war is an engaging, high energy, rough and tumble game which also encourages team work amongst a group of children.

## Social play

Social play is any social or interactive situation where the expectation is that everyone will follow set rules - like during a game or while making something together. This type of interactive play can be revealed, explored and amended.

## Play ideas

- Allow time for free-flowing conversations or opportunities for making things together.
- Play cooperative games like Follow the Leader, Simon Says and What's the time Mr Wolf? which all follow a set of instructions.
- More traditional games such as skipping, German jumps and two ball all require very little props and can be played together by children without a big expense.

## Communication play

Communication play involves words, nuances, body language or gestures, for example, joke telling, name-calling, mime, play acting, singing, debate, and poetry.

### Play ideas

- Play a game of charades.
- Tell some jokes or engage in some play acting. These are great ways for children to communicate with each other through play.
- Play Pass it On – sit around in a circle and whisper anything into the ear of the person sitting next to you. Continue to pass the message until it reaches the last person who needs to announce it out loud. It can be great fun hearing what people come up with.

## Object play

Object play is play which uses infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements, for example, using a paintbrush or examining shells or stones; looking at them, or turning them over and around. Objects can represent a child's feelings or interests and they can provide opportunities for exploration, discovery, understanding and further play. It also allows the development of hand-eye co-ordination and fine movement as children manipulate and control objects.

### Play ideas

- Painting is a great method of object play. As well as using paint, a cheaper alternative is water painting. All you need is a brush and bucket of water. Use a tarmac surface, a wall, or some card to 'paint' on using just the brush and water.
- Make nature paint brushes. Whilst on a walk gather leaves and grass and some short sticks that you find on the ground. Secure the leaves to the sticks with elastic bands or tape to make the brushes. Use thick paper and some paint to dip the brushes into and start painting.
- Bubble wrap comes in many parcels – using it for play is great fun.

## Role play

Role play is play that allows children to explore ways of being, although not normally of an intensely personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature. Children try out roles not normally experienced, for example driving a car or doing the washing. In role play, children imitate others who they may be familiar with, such as, family members, teachers or characters they see on television.

### Play ideas

- Encourage imaginative play using anything around the home or setting. Be a fire breathing dragon, cast spells and do magic, make and use props, eat invisible food, use objects as other objects e.g. create a bus using chairs.
- Use those props indoors and out (clothes from around the house for children to utilise as role play props, old mobile phones, bigger shoes, dresses, shirts, hats, and costume jewellery all make for an adventurous dress up box).
- Gather up old make up and allow children to paint their faces or hands.



## Dramatic play

Dramatic play is where children figure out roles to play, assign them and then act them out. The playing of dramatic events that the child has not been a participant in, for example, pretending to be a footballer or a pop star, or a presenter of a television show.

### Play ideas

- Build a den with a few old sheets and some chairs, children can create their own fort, they can pretend they're guarding a castle against invaders, hiding out from enemy spies, or camping out in the wilderness.
- Make up a play to perform to an imaginary audience, friends or family.

## Recapitulative play

Recapitulative play is play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness. It enables children to access play of earlier human evolutionary stages.

### Play ideas

- Allow children to explore fire through different activities, such as, toasting marshmallows over a fire pit or tea light, melting candles or cooking foil food. These are fun and cheap activities that children will love.
- Have a camp fire sing-a-long. This would be fun in the darker evenings.
- Take it in turns storytelling – one person starts the story with the first sentence, and then repeats around the group or pair.



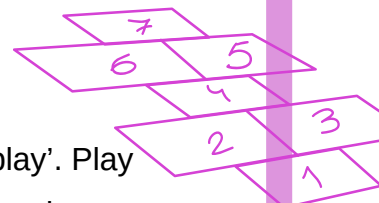
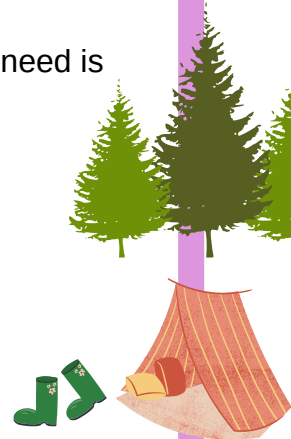
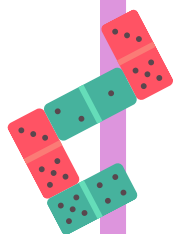
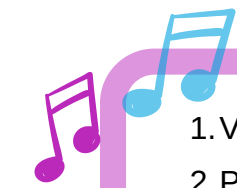


# Low-cost playful ideas



1. Visit parks, green spaces, beaches or forests.
2. Play outside - get the wellies and raincoats on and jump in puddles.
3. Paint the pavement, walls, fences, gates or drainpipes with water - all you need is a bucket and brushes.
4. Have a family dance party or sing-a-long.
5. Create a fort in your living room out of blankets or cardboard boxes.
6. Go on a hike.
7. Have a sunset picnic at a park or beach.
8. Upcycle old toys using stickers, foam or paint.
9. Try some sewing or knitting.
10. Play a game of chess, dominoes, jacks or card games.
11. Make a sensory bottle using old bottles, coloured water, glitter, beads, stones or anything you fancy!
12. Make slime. Pour 2 tbsp of shampoo into a bowl, add 2 tbsp of shaving foam and mix. Add 1 tsp of salt and mix everything together thoroughly. Put mixture into the freezer for approximately 15 minutes.
13. Buy a cheap box of chunky chalk - children will have hours of fun.
14. Make a mystery bag - fill a bag with random supplies and see what children will play or make.
15. Make a mat to play hopscotch on. You can roll it out for play - an old sheet is perfect.
16. Melt ice! Fill cups or containers with coloured water, freeze them, and watch the ice melt as you add salt to it.
17. Make a collage with paper, glue and things to stick like pictures cut out of catalogues or magazines, scraps of paper, ribbon, fabric, dried pasta, natural materials etc.
18. Play x-o-x or eye-spy.
19. Have a game of hide-and-seek.
20. Street play - go outside and encourage other children to go 'out to play'. Play some football, frisbee, dodgeball, piggy in the middle or stick in the mud.

**You'll be amazed at what fun can be enjoyed!**







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