

# Why should Adults Play

What is adult play?

In our modern lives, adults focus so heavily on work and family commitments that they never seem to have time for pure fun. Somewhere between childhood and adulthood, they've stopped playing. When we do carve out some leisure time, we're more likely to zone out in front of the TV or computer than engage in creative play like we did as children.

Just because we're adults, that doesn't mean we have to take ourselves so seriously and make life all about work. We all need to play.

Adult play is a time to forget about work and commitments, and to be social in an unstructured, creative way. By giving yourself permission to play with the joyful abandon of childhood, you can reap the health benefits of play throughout life.

The benefits of play

While play is crucial for a child's development, it is also beneficial for people of all ages. Play can add joy to life, relieve stress, supercharge learning, and connect you to others and the world around you. Play can also make work more productive and pleasurable.

Away from the sensory-overload of electronic gadgets, play has even greater benefits.

Play can:

- **Relieve stress.** Play is fun and can trigger the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain.
- **Improve brain function.** Playing chess, completing puzzles, or pursuing other fun activities that challenge the brain can help prevent memory problems and improve brain function. The social interaction of playing with family and friends can also help ward off stress and depression.
- **Stimulate the mind and boost creativity.** Young children often learn best when they are playing—and that principle applies to adults, as well. You'll learn better when it's fun and you're in a relaxed and playful mood. Play can also stimulate your imagination, helping you adapt and problem solve.
- **Improve relationships and your connection to others.** Sharing laughter and fun can foster empathy, compassion, trust, and intimacy with others.

Developing a playful nature can help you loosen up in stressful situations, break the ice with strangers, make new friends, and form new business relationships.

- **Keep you feeling young and energetic.** Playing can boost your energy and vitality and even improve your resistance to disease, helping you feel your best.

"We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing." (George Bernard Shaw)

Play and relationships

Play is one of the most effective tools for keeping relationships fresh and exciting.

Playing together for the fun of it brings joy, vitality, and resilience to relationships. Play can also heal resentments, disagreements, and hurts. Through regular play, we learn to trust one another and feel safe.

Trust enables us to work together, open ourselves to intimacy, and try new things. By making a conscious effort to incorporate more humour and play into your daily interactions, you can improve the quality of your love relationships—as well as your connections with co-workers, family members, and friends.

- **Play helps develop and improve social skills.** Social skills are learned in the give and take of play. During childhood play, kids learn about verbal communication, body language, boundaries, cooperation, and teamwork. As adults, you continue to refine these skills through play and playful communication.

• **Play teaches cooperation with others.** Play is a powerful catalyst for positive socialisation. Through play, children learn how to "play nicely" with others—to work together, follow mutually agreed upon rules, and socialise in groups. As adults, you can continue to use play to break down barriers and improve your relationships with others.

• **Play can heal emotional wounds.** As adults, when you play together, you are engaging in exactly the same patterns of behaviour that positively shapes the brains of children. These same playful behaviours that predict emotional health in children can also lead to positive changes in adults. If an emotionally-insecure individual plays with a secure partner, for example, it can help replace negative beliefs and behaviours with positive assumptions and actions.

### **Play at work**

Many companies have long recognised the link between productivity and a fun work environment. Some encourage play and creativity by offering art or yoga classes, throwing regular parties, providing games such as Foosball or ping pong, or encouraging recess-like breaks during the workday for employees to play and let off steam. These companies know that more play at work results in more productivity, higher job satisfaction, greater workplace morale, and a decrease in staff turnover and absenteeism.

Using play to boost productivity and innovation

Success at work doesn't depend on the amount of time you work; it depends upon the quality of your work. And the quality of your work is highly dependent on your well-being.

Taking the time to replenish yourself through play is one of the best things you can do for your career. When the project you're working on hits a serious glitch, taking some time out to play and have a few laughs does a lot more than take your mind off the problem. When you play, you engage the creative side of your brain and silence your "inner editor" that psychological barrier that censors your thoughts and ideas. This can often help you see the problem in a new light and generate fresh, creative solutions.

### **Playing at work:**

- **keeps you functional when under stress**
- **refreshes your mind and body**
- **encourages teamwork**
- **helps you see problems in new ways**
- **triggers creativity and innovation**
- **increases energy and prevents burnout**

How to incorporate more play into your life

Incorporating more fun and play into your daily life can improve the quality of your relationships, as well as your mood and outlook. Even in the most difficult of times, taking time away from your troubles to play or laugh can go a long way toward making you feel better. It's true what they say: laughter really is the best medicine. Laughter makes you feel good. And the good feeling that you get when you laugh and have fun remains with you even after the laughter subsides. Play and laughter help you keep a positive, optimistic outlook through difficult situations, disappointments, and loss.

Develop your playful side

It's never too late to develop your playful, humorous side. If you find yourself limiting your playfulness, it's possible that you're self-conscious and concerned about how you'll look and sound to others when you attempt to be lighthearted. Fearing rejection or ridicule when attempting to be playful is an understandable fear, but it's important to point out that as a child, you were naturally playful; you didn't worry about the reactions of other people. You can reclaim your inner child by setting aside regular, quality playtime. The more you play, joke, and laugh—the easier it becomes.

Be spontaneous, set aside your inhibitions and try something fun, something you haven't done since you were a kid, perhaps. And enjoy the change of pace.

from authors: Lawrence Robinson, Melinda Smith, M.A.,  
and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D. Last updated: April 2014.