

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

Is there FUN in your Family?



BY KIM DeMARCHI

Does fun really matter in a family?

When you let loose, cut up, have a dance party, or play hide-and-seek, you're taking the time to make a connection

with your kids. Senseless, silly moments of joy are important to all of us—but especially to your kids. When you take time to play, you're actually saying, "I value who you are and you're worth having fun with." You're saying, "I love spending time with you!"

So many families have somehow lost sight of the fun in raising children. It's completely understandable: Amidst the academics and extra-curriculars, the priorities and to-do lists, fun can get pushed to the side in favor of "more important" things. There is homework to do. Children to shuttle. Dinner to make. Bedtime routines to adhere to.

Many of us do have to make a conscious decision to be a Playful Parent—and that often requires letting go of our ideas about how things are supposed to be. It's true: if you're a playful parent, your house may be messier (because fun is more valuable than another load of laundry), and the homework might not get done in a solid hour of totally focused silence (because maybe you had to stop to play a game of keep-the-balloon-off-the-floor). Allowing space for fun means setting aside ideas of perfection.

Here's what play gives to your children:

1. Children spend a lot of time following rules and being told what to do. Play lets children take the lead and be in charge of the rules, the games, the moment, and the scene.
2. Play is good for building self-confidence and skills.
3. Play helps children work out difficult feelings that they can't articulate. They can express their emotions with puppets, dolls and figurines.
4. Play can help kids become better problem-solvers. Play helps kids come up with their own creative options, rather than simply trying to figure out what a teacher wants them to say.

5. Play in the family strengthens relationships. Siblings who play together more, learn ways to interact without arguing or fighting. They learn that there are ways to engage their parents' attention positively (and that their parents will be more receptive to an invitation to play than an invitation to argue or struggle).

10 Free Ideas for having fun in your daily life:

1. **Shoe Match:** Many young children love shoes. Pile up all of your shoes and give your child one shoe; tell them to find a matching shoe in the pile.
2. **Wakey, Wakey!** Wake your kids up with a different kind of music every day: Irish polka, Madonna, African folk music, Katy Perry, you name it! Have a speaker in the hall for just this purpose!
3. **At dinner time, play true or false.** Each person says one statement and other family members guess whether it's true or false. (Young children even love finding out silly things like: Mom likes vanilla yogurt better than peach.)
4. **Make an "I'm Bored" jar.** With your child, come up with 10-20 fun things he loves to do. Write them on scraps of paper, fold them up, and put them into the jar. Next time he says, "I'm Bored," have him take out a slip of paper. Drop what you're doing and do it with him.
5. **Have a dance party.** Every family in America should have a dance party.
6. **When mom or dad comes home**

after work, have the kids run and hide when they hear the key in the door. Mom or Dad has to find the kids first thing!

7. **Knock Your Socks Off.** In this game, the goal is to get your opponents' socks off while keeping your socks on. If someone is a lot better, that person could use only their non-dominate hand, start with only one sock, or wear shorter socks. You get the idea.

8. **Be Each Other:** at dinner, swap chairs with another family member and act like each other. Kids can talk in a low voice like dad or pop up to get something like mom. The objective here is to be silly and have fun.

9. **Clown Hug.** Hug each other tightly while jumping up and down, turning in a circle, or swaying crazily back and forth. Make silly sounds or say things you love about the other person.

10. **New Neighbor.** Knock on the door and when they answer pretend to be someone new (the president, an overzealous salesperson, a know it all, a gossip, someone who asks WAY too many questions).

We have Family Game Night in our family. We love a good game of Phase 10 or Yahtzee! Now go be more playful with your family. The rewards are immediate—and long-lasting.

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