

MEDIA RELEASE

17 APRIL 2013 | For Immediate Release



THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

In an age of technology, 'helicopter' parenting and 'cotton-wool' kids, the art of carefree playing is fast becoming a thing of the past for children today, or is it?

It's a topic being hotly debated by the experts – play time versus i-time and, while many indications suggest a child's changing priorities are simply a sign of social evolution, a growing number of parents are concerned about the long term impacts on children who miss out on traditional play time.

One such mum is Caroline Marvelli, a Melbourne based mother of two and founder of online children's fashion boutique, [Hootkid](#).

Ms Marvelli, who established her business to encourage children to be playful and spirited in a traditional sense, believes play is fundamental to a child's social development.

"My girls love their iPad as much as they love having a tea party, however given a choice, they will always head to the toy box before picking up an electronic gadget," something Ms Marvelli attributes to turning simple, everyday tasks into playful activities.

According to Ms Marvelli one of the easiest ways for parents to introduce the concept of traditional play is by helping them to 'dress for fun'.

"If kids feel comfortable and are dressed in brightly coloured clothes, splashed with fun images and quirky design elements that inspire a sense of playfulness, they are more likely to 'run wild' and be creative during playtime.

[Playgroup Queensland's](#) Leonie Wallwork agrees and says it's important for children to be able to express themselves through fashion choices because it is good for their imagination, confidence and personal skills.

She does however caution the choices should be limited, "If you give children, especially young ones, too many options they can get confused, so it's best to select two or three outfit ideas and have them select from there."

While a staunch advocate for outdoor playtime, Ms Marvelli also recognises the need to find a healthy balance between 'traditional' and 'technology' playtime.

"The whole premise of my business was to help parents encourage a sense of genuine playfulness in children and yet Hootkid itself operates on the basis of technology. It's here to stay and we need to find balance."

It's a statement supported by child psychologist, Dr Andrew Greenfield, who says it's important not only for children but also parents to learn the importance of balance.

"Like anything, it's all about moderation and ensuring children are still getting outdoors and stimulating their minds."

"We know there is a lot of debate on whether 'screen time' is bad for kids, but whether we like it or not, it's the way of the future and it doesn't have to be negative. The trick is finding technology-based games that have an educational or physical element to them," he says.

Balancing playtime with i-time is a sentiment also echoed by Leonie Wallwork from Playgroup Queensland.

"While technology has made many children more inactive, it does have its benefits if properly managed."

"Technology can teach children to take turns and encourage a sense of teamwork and sharing, and kids who play with electronic devices also tend to develop great motor skills and eye-hand coordination."

Ms Wallwork goes on to say that despite the positive benefits of technology, most paediatricians warn against entertainment that fails to stimulate interaction or thought, and recommend a maximum of two hours screen time per day, which covers phones, computers, iPads, TV time etc.

So how much *physical* play should children have each day? Dr Greenfield says the more the better.

"It's hard to fit in more than one hour a day these days because kids are engaged in so many different activities, and that's in addition to their schooling. Generally we would say 1-2 hours of traditional play each day is a great outcome."

The benefits of physical play are hard to ignore – it's great for general health, weight management and fantastic at helping kids learn to take risks.

“Calculated risks that come with exploring their environment are vital for development” says Dr Greenfield, “as is using their imagination and being able to discover their surroundings – it’s all about letting kids be kids.”

PhD researcher Deb Moore from the Australian Catholic University education faculty's Senior Proven Research Team believes children who are busy playing in a 'natural, secret place', such as cubby houses and trees, show “amazing inventiveness, creativity and great imaginative play.”

“Kids model off their parents so if parents are lazy and sit on the couch all day, kids begin to think that’s expected behaviour. By maintaining good activity levels and encouraging play with their children, parents are able to bond with their kids in a more enjoyable way,” says Dr Greenfield.

So if your child is often cranky, tired and lacking in concentration – the advice from the experts is get them outside and involved in some traditional play.

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