

A STEM in the Park

Take Home Activity

STEM

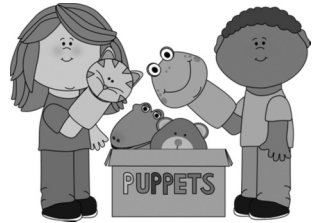
in the **PARK**™

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Free PLAY

It's not just FUN...

It's critical to CHILD-DEVELOPMENT!



What is Free PLAY?

During free play, we give kids the time and space to play in their own chosen ways ... without guidance from adults. It's unstructured, undirected and child-driven.

Why is it IMPORTANT?

During free play, children's brains develop important neurological networks in a different way than during adult-directed play.

When children play this way, they ...

- Figure things out for themselves
- Find innovative ways to think about their world and how it works;
- Develop abilities in creative problem-solving, overcoming obstacles and healthy risk-assessment;
- Gain skills in communication and collaboration, including social rule-making and conflict negotiation

And above all, they...

Experience the **joy and confidence** that comes from pursuing their own ideas without the fear of failure that can arise when there is one predetermined or "right" way to do something.

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Why is it important NOW?

“This is the first time in the history of humanity ... that children have not been able to play freely with other children, for hours every day....”

— **Dr. Peter Gray, psychologist**

Children need to play. It's how they control their environment and their story. It's how they learn. It's how they grow.

Many adults remember playing outdoors for hours on end, roaming neighborhoods or nearby woods and creeks. And we didn't know it, but we were developing important skills... skills that have helped us throughout our adult lives.

But times have changed. Busy lifestyles, societal worries about safety and academic demands and the lure of technology have drastically reduced children's opportunities for free play.

We need to help restore opportunities for free play.

Not just because it's fun ... because their future depends on it.
Help restore free PLAY!

Just keep these four things in mind...

Unstructured time ... every day

Make sure your kids have unstructured time every day for play indoors or out.

Space for messy play

Provide a place where kids know it's safe to play freely and get messy. Even an old sheet on the floor provides a place for free play.

Loose parts for play

Provide simple everyday materials (such as cardboard, old fabrics, crayons, string, tape or glue) that kids can change and use as they please.

Simple support

Children are experts in their own play. Let them lead ... and if invited, play along! Show that you support their play without taking over.

This activity is brought to you by Lake Erie Adventure Play