

The Casuarina Chronicle

Focus on Play

The importance of play
5 characteristics of play
Play at Casuarina
Let the children play
Movement and play
Children's right to play
'It's just a game': Technology play
Outdoor play
...and more...

” We are never more fully alive, more completely ourselves, or more deeply engrossed in anything than when we are playing. ”

•Charles Schaefer

The importance of play

Dear parents and community,

In a time of increasing pressures through hurried life styles, changes in family structures and ever growing attention to academic achievements, national testing and extension programs it seems counterintuitive to discuss ‘the importance of play’.

Is there more to ‘Child’s Play’ than ‘something very easy to do’ as a dictionary would have me believe? Is it understood as a luxury rather than a necessity? Or are these adults’ perspectives on an activity we have lost the understanding for by growing up? What is this activity that is considered important enough to be mentioned in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child? Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that:

States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.



We are asked to ‘recognise’ in order to ‘respect’ and ‘promote’ these rights So what is play and why is it important? College explored this question over the last weeks and months through discussion, research and reflection. You find in this Chronicle a collection of articles from various sources. They reach from very comprehensively researched and referenced studies to ideas and guidelines that might inspire recognition and action.

Happy playing!!!

Warm regards,

Elsbeth

“ Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity. ”

Kay Redfield Jamison



Five characteristics of play

1 Play Is self-chosen and self-directed

Play, first and foremost, is what one wants to do, as opposed to what one feels obliged to do. Players choose not only to play, but how to play, and that is the meaning of the statement that play is self-directed. In social play (play involving more than one player), one person may emerge for a while as the leader, but only at the will of all the others. Anyone may propose rules, but the rules must be agreeable to all if the behavior is to remain in the realm of play for all. The most basic freedom in play is the freedom to quit. The freedom to quit ensures that all of the players are doing what they want to do, and it prevents leaders from enforcing rules that are not at least tacitly agreed to by the other players.



2 Play is intrinsically motivated—means are more valued than ends

Play is activity that, from the conscious perspective of the player, is done for its own sake more than for some reward outside of the activity itself. In other words, it is behaviour in which means are more valued than ends. (...)Play often has goals, but the goals are experienced as part and parcel of the activity, not as the primary reason for the activity. Goals in play are subordinate to the means for achieving them. For example, constructive play (the playful building of something) is always directed toward the goal of creating the object that the players have in mind; but the primary objective in such play is the creation of the object, not the having of the object once it is built. Similarly, competitive play is directed toward the goal of scoring points and winning, but if the activity is truly play, then it is the process of scoring and winning that matters to the player, not some subsequent consequence of having scored and won. Competition can turn play into non-play if rewards for winning extend beyond the game itself. “Players” who are motivated primarily by trophies, praise, or increased status outside of the game are not fully playing.



3 Play is guided by mental rules, but the rules leave room for creativity

Play is freely chosen activity, but not freeform activity. Play always has structure, and that structure derives from rules in the players' minds. In social play, the rules must be shared, or at least partially shared, by all of the players. The rule-based nature of play is the characteristic that Vygotsky (1978) emphasized most strongly, as he built his argument that play is the means by which children learn to control their impulses and abide by socially agreed-upon rules. The rule-based nature of play is an extension of the point made above about the prominence of means in play. The rules of play are the means. The rules are not like rules of physics, nor like biological instincts, which are automatically followed. Rather, they are mental concepts that often require conscious effort to keep in mind and to follow. The rules of play provide boundaries within which the actions must occur, but they do not precisely dictate each action; they always leave room for creativity. Activities that are precisely prescribed by rules are better referred to as rituals rather than as play. Different types of play have different types of rules. A basic rule of constructive play, for example, is that you must work with the chosen medium in a manner aimed at producing or depicting some specific object or design that you have in mind. In sociodramatic play (the playful acting out of roles or scenes, as when children play "house" or pretend to be superheroes) the fundamental rule is that players must abide by their shared understanding of the roles that they are playing; they must stay in character. Even playful fighting and chasing, which may look wild to the observer, is constrained by rules. An always-present rule in children's play fighting, for example, is that the players mimic some of the actions of serious fighting, but don't really hurt the other person. They don't hit with all their force (at least not if they are the stronger of the two); don't kick, bite, or scratch. Because of its rule-based nature, play is always an exercise in self-restraint.

4 Play is imaginative

Play always involves some degree of mental removal of oneself from the immediately present real world. (...) As Vygotsky (1978) pointed out, the imaginative nature of play is, in a sense, the flip side of play's rule-based nature. To the degree that play takes place in an imagined world, the players' actions must be governed by rules that are in the minds of the players rather than by laws of nature or impulsive instincts. Imagination, or fantasy, is most obvious in sociodramatic play, where the players create the characters and plot, but it is also present in other forms of human play. In rough and tumble play, the fight is a pretend one, not a real one. In constructive play, the players may say that they are building a castle from sand, but they know it is a pretend castle, not a real one.

5 Play is conducted in an alert, active, but non-stressed frame of mind

This final characteristic of play follows naturally from the other four. Because play involves conscious control of one's own behavior, with attention to means and rules, it requires an active, alert mind. Players have to think actively about what they are doing. Yet, because play is not a response to external demands, and because the activity takes place in a fantasy world rather than the real world, and because the ends do not have immediate consequences in the real world, the person at play is relatively free from pressure or stress. (...) The mental state of play is what Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has called *flow*. Attention is attuned to the activity itself, and there is reduced consciousness of self and time. The mind is wrapped up in the ideas, rules, and actions of the game and relatively impervious to outside distractions. This state of mind has been shown, in many psychological research studies, to be ideal for creativity and the learning of new skills (see Gray, 2013).

Play at Casuarina

Looking at how we as a school can support children in their need of meaningful play we took a closer look at our playground. While I am proud to say that we have the great fortune of having an excellent outdoor space for the children to play, we identified several areas we would like to improve.

As you know, Don has very lovingly created a few corners where children can 'disappear' in a little island or bush. Over quite some time we observed that children love spaces where they feel they are not seen, where they are engulfed by nature and can just sit and be part of their surroundings. So one of our projects is to either enlarge or create more such spaces. To be able to build cubby houses is another favourite and often only depends on the availability of materials. There will be a dedicated cubby building area – if you have materials from your garden that lend themselves to cubby building (palm fronds, bamboo poles, tree stumps etc) please get in touch with either the office or Don.

We might be looking at the sculpting of the play area landscape as another project: hills, extension of the sand pit and further work on the roughly established watercourses from the play pump are some of the ideas. The bouldering wall remains a further focus, and with the help of parents we were guided in the right direction to make this feature more attractive. Play also changes through the seasons. While the sandpit is a hub of activity in summer it is a more neglected space in the colder season. To offer an alternative, a play area has been created in and around the learning support room and the woodwork room. Here children have the opportunity to play inside and be creative in a different way.



Water pump area



Clay pit area



Secret bush hideaway



Bush cubby



Encouraging imaginative and creative play:

- Provide your child with various props to help them create their imaginary world – cloths, dressing up, wooden toys, stuff from the pantry. Encourage them to think up role play situations like a shop, café, fire station, superheroes or vets.
- Help your child to build their own cubby house and then suggest they have a tea party and invite their favourite friends / toys along.
- Encourage your child to get creative with arts and crafts. Supply them with paper, card, scissors and glue and watch them take off. Be prepared for them to get messy, they'll enjoy it more that way!
- Send your child on a 'mission' to collect bits and pieces from a nature walk, or in the garden or yard. They can then use these bits and pieces to create a sculpture or textured picture.
- Provide your child with an empty box or two and ask them to make something out of it. They could create a rocket, or doll's house, or secret treasure trove. The possibilities are endless. They could even paint and decorate their creation.

Let the children play

Play is a fundamental aspect of developing skills for life – here’s just a few skills that children learn as they play – that become part of their life toolbox:

- Language skills
- Creativity and the ability to pretend
- Fine and gross motor skills
- Motor sequencing and planning
- Cognitive planning and problem solving
- Social skills – turn taking and getting along
- Resilience
- Confidence
- Persistence
- Relationship skills – building relationships, assessing relationships, repairing relationships
- Conflict resolution
- Negotiation
- Risk assessment and risk taking

These are all skills that we all use in our adult lives – some on a daily basis – and they all had their humble beginnings in play. In a rapidly changing world, children are experiencing less and less opportunities to play safely but in a way that really develops their social skills, their independence, their ability to take calculated risks – and sometimes fail. Because, sometimes it is the failing and the trying again that builds the core factors of persistence, resilience and confidence.

Let’s just explore the development and contribution of the relational aspects of play – a child’s social and emotional well-being. Those first experiences of building relationships are a fundamental part of a child’s sense of self worth and self esteem. Being able to navigate complicated social terrain is a necessary skill from the very first moment two tiny people reach for the same toy. In the hustle and bustle, give and take of play, children learn patterns of empathy and gratitude – fundamental to later positive social connection in the playground. It is a fallacy that children simply learn the prosocial aspect of play. Using eye contact, turn taking, listening to others, sharing, talking about common interests, warm body language and inviting words. Some children are natural and gifted social butterflies. Others are not and need specific and regular guidance about using and developing the skills to enable better social success and better inclusion in play.

It is the responsibility of every adult – parent, grandparent, aunty, uncle, teacher... involved with a child to help them along the road of developing themselves during play as it will form the basis of many of their interactions for life. A child who is never taught to be careful of younger children, may not sufficiently develop empathy and is at greater risk of engaging in bullying behaviours. A child who isn’t taught how to approach a group, say hello, use warm body language is at greater risk of exclusion and social isolation.

So, the simple act of play is actually highly important, has an essential function and needs to be encouraged in every child in every home and every classroom. Teaching children a set of TOOLS that improves their play outcomes in terms of relational aspects of play is essential to their future success – not just as a child, but as an adult too. If you would like to read more on developing the relational aspect of play, please do read our [Kids and Parents Notebooks 4 Friendships](#) and [Kids and Parents Notebooks 4 Bullying and Teasing](#). These four little books help kids and parents to understand social complexities and develop a set of life TOOLS.

www.bestprograms4kids.com

Article written by Danielle Barnes



“Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning.”

Fred Rogers

Movement and Play

Play is the heart of childhood, the foundation of our humanity. We can retain the ability to be playful as we grow, and a playful, flexible mind can be a measure of health and grace, even into old age. Humanity is given a very long period of infancy and childhood. During this extended infancy, the brain is 'wired together' for efficient learning and functioning, which still serves us the rest of our life. When we watch our little children play, we are filled with tenderness at their innocent worldview, filled with gods and fairies. But if we study more closely the brain development that takes place in these years, we will stand in awe, thunderstruck at the marvel of each child.

We say that children 'learn by doing'. This is a common way of saying that the learning process is a miraculous orchestration and integration of the entire body, moving a million tiny interconnected particles toward the "gestalt" that is meaning. Children think through movement and play. In movement and play the brain goes through all the complex processes of growth and learning. The main avenue through which the child perceives the world is the realm of the senses. Through the natural sensory input of play, the child actively makes the world his own, rather than remaining a passive observer. Neurophysiologist Carla Hannaford, author of *Smart Moves* says, "The richer our sensory environment, and the greater our freedom to explore it, the more intricate will be the patterns for learning, thought and creativity.... Our sensory experiences, both external and internal, shape our way of imaging and therefore, our thinking". *It is the life force through which the young child plays that will grow eventually into cognitive thought....*

This is part of a chapter taken from a great read called *Heaven on Earth, A Handbook for Parents of Young Children*, Chapter 4. Written by Sharifa Oppenheimer



Naturally Playful – Class Two

Babies play with their eyes as soon as they can focus. Searching out the differences in their environment and finding themselves entertained by the changes around them, the smiling faces, the loud noises and changes in colours and forms.

Toddlers seek out amusement, exploring their environment and those within it; responding accordingly, happy, excited, angry or sad.

As adults we may ask ourselves 'what is the role of play in the life of a child?'

As a teacher I ask 'what is the role of play in a child's school life?'

Over time I have come to appreciate how much easier it is to approach and reach a happy, healthy child. What makes a child happy and healthy is their sense of well-being and feeling of being recognised for who they are. Is there any difference as we mature? Are we available when we are out of sorts or invisible?

Being well and happy allows us to engage in the game of life. To have the courage to get in a have a go - to participate and play with others.

Primary school plays many roles in a child's life. Education, these days, has tended more towards outcomes and less on the process. Success is measured and compared. There is a narrowing of views and standardisation determines the norm.

Rudolph Steiner's indications for teaching the child embraces an holistic approach. Consideration for the individual, within the group, is paramount. The class teacher is asked to develop an environment to cultivate social and emotional well being through a rich and deep curriculum that grows through the years. This is a developmental approach with consideration for the many facets of the growth of the human being.

Play is a natural process for experiencing and learning.

Class Two - the children are mostly seven, turning eight years old

We as adults must remember children of this age are full of fun and naturally curious, wanting to explore the world and everyone in it. They find themselves at school, among others and in a class of their own, with like-aged children we anticipate they'll befriend. So many expectations on our part for each child to fit a mould and participate.

Consideration for the differences between individual children is paramount to integration. The experience of being a part of the whole is a major step to feeling accepted for who we are.

It's a tricky business walking into school every day, maintaining equilibrium and self esteem, as the system demands so much all the time. It can be exhausting for the child.

At eight, with eyes and ears wide open, the child continually builds a picture of themselves within their context of home, family and school. After school is a precious time of letting go and relaxing and we know we all do that in our own way. Some talk, some wont, some let of steam and others retreat. Holidays allow a breathing out, a time of reflection and rest.

Play is not limited to break times at school, or the weekends. Play is the natural essence of children. When we approach each other playfully, maintaining integrity and respect for the other, we enjoy our shared time. Creating this environment, which appeals to the child, requires our mindfulness and consideration for appropriateness and the child's developing skills.

Social filters and cues are learned at an early age by most children, but so often we notice children isolated, ignored and easily offended due to a lack of social skills, including being sensitive to others, understanding signs and interpreting behaviours.

There is a line between allowing children to play freely and realising when help is required to develop social skills. This is a shared responsibility of parents and teachers. It entails being involved, observing and contributing unobtrusively.

Relationships develop and grow in a healthy environment.

In Class Two, mostly the children have been together with their class teacher for at least a year. Expectations are usually established and generally adhered to. The curriculum supports a budding sense of morality through main lessons such as Aesop's Fables, adding to the toolbox for social well being.

Alongside Free-play, skipping, Morning Circle, gym and the Movement program offer structured play opportunities, where the children slip into roles within stories, whilst using their bodies expressively and in line with consideration for physical, emotional, social and moral development.

As issues manifest in the playground, or during class activities, in groups or out and about, the time is taken to explore incidents and look at the best way forward, with shared understanding, learning from our experiences. Trust and co-operation begins to develop or not, depending on individuals. Miraculously, a class can work wonders as a whole.

'Belonging' is integral for a feeling of wellness, as is that sense of fairness. Problems often stem from children perceiving wrong-doing or coming across another who has a different set of values and practices. By Class Two we are discovering what is acceptable to all and why. The children create play environments that embrace the group. During break times, these groups vary in size and according to interest. Left to their own resources the children soon develop the awareness of what is working for them on the day and move to meet their needs. It is helpful to be open to change and listen to the requests of each other.

Independence and resourcefulness develop at this stage of development as the children begin to know themselves and others and are able to reflect on the appropriateness of behaviours, responsibilities and understand consequences.

Often outcomes are unexpected and surprising. The impact of incidents depends on the growth of the individual, experience and exposure to the wider world, either physically or through screen time. Bringing pictures through 'therapeutic stories' often assists with deepening understanding. The children too, have their own stories to share, which are always relevant and useful. It is a given that as adults we must be watchful as to what the children are exposed to in given situations.

With guidance and trust we watch the children grow together through their play, giving time and consideration to nurture the wholesomeness of the class family. Children are happier if they are comfortable with their peers and teachers, trust and confidence develops and friendships grow deeper. One of the most important concepts to foster is that we are all individual, with gifts to share and lots to learn - from each other and in the context of school.

Happy, healthy children are open to learn.

Linda Mayer
Class Two Teacher

Children's right to play

by Stuart Lester & Wendy Russell

This is the title of very comprehensive research by *Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell* and published as *'Working papers in Early Childhood Development'* by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, Netherlands.

Investigating in depth the above mentioned Article 31 the authors of this highly recommendable paper look at various dimensions of children's' play: *'Understanding of play, Play as self-protection, Play as participation in everyday life and Providing for Conditions for Play to take place.* They look into economic, societal and cultural aspects of play.

While it is beyond this Chronicle to summarise all key points, here are a few 'tasters' of the discussed topics.

In the chapter 'Play as self-protection' the authors point out that:

From the early months of life, play has a central role in developing significant attachments with others and represents a key feature of resilience. The ability to establish friendships interconnects with other adaptive systems in highly complex feedback processes; playing with others is pleasurable, and the mutual sharing of positive affect in play leads to strengthening friendships. These friendships provide protective mechanisms against stress; secure attachments establish the foundations for co-creating situations of graduated uncertainty, to empathise with the emotional expressions of others and work collectively to restore balance. Playing with others requires constant maintenance, reading and

differentiating the intentions of others and adjusting behaviour in response. It is evident that these interrelated components enhance children's repertoire of social, emotional and cognitive abilities (Pellis and Pellis 2009).'

They summarise this chapter as follows:

'Play enhances and refines key adaptive systems, although it cannot guarantee this by itself, given the importance of environmental context. Through playing, children situate themselves in a better state of mind-body-environment interaction, certainly more so than if there were no play. The act of playing is both evidence of, and supportive of, a smooth running of adaptive systems working in concert to generate positive emotions. The larger the sphere of influence of the positive emotions, the more likely that the child will be happy and have a strong sense of well-being. The more the child is influenced by negative emotions, the 'more the paths towards unhappiness are paved' (Panksepp 2001: 143).'

'The generation of positive affect in play enables children to perceive and respond to a broad range of stimuli and to connect these in novel patterns and forms, creating their virtual realities or spaces that temporarily suspend (adult) order and structure. Play becomes an urge to turn the world upside down and create new identities and forms of expression, to disorder the structured spaces of their worlds.'

'Playing becomes a highly attractive form of self-protection for children, and the very 'unwittingness' of this from a child's perspective adds to its value: for children, play is simply about having fun, messing around and being with friends. It also represents 'ordinary magic': for many children, play is just something that happens, but it has the potential for the emergence of magical properties, to support survival and enhance well-being. For this self-protection, or ordinary magic, to be realised requires active participation in everyday life, in environments and communities that support this through offering time and space for play.'



In the chapter 'Play as participation in everyday life' the following is described:

'Playful interactions of children will display multiple expressions of inclusion and exclusion, sharing and selfishness, dominance and subservience, kindness and hostility. Play is imbued with asymmetrical relationships, and the ways in which children continually seek to position themselves in play is a vital part of playing; the contests and arguments often add to the emotional tenor and value. Children develop 'playful' strategies to cope with these, including negotiating and changing rules, playing with language, asserting one's position both verbally and physically, taking affective stances, challenging rule breaking and rearranging the social structure of the group (Goodwin 2006).'

'Children's play is supported by environments (physical, social and cultural) that offer children the opportunity to actualise independently the available affordances in their immediate neighbourhood. The environment has to provide something that the child perceives to be of value for their play, and the act of perception will be a reflection of the feelings that children have about themselves and their relationship with their places. When playful urges are actualised in a supportive environment, children will develop a friendship with the place. The place affirms a child's value, and child– environment interactions are mutually supportive and caring and can provide a place that is a buffer from stresses and pressures in their lives. This stimulates the desire to further explore the possibilities of this relationship.'

They conclude that that play is fundamentally connected to children's rights in general. Play is as important as other right and not a mere luxury. The right to play is a reflection of the right to be a child without future agendas. By supporting the right to play we support the right to be a child.

Through play children build resilience across various aspects of their well being – pleasure, emotional regulation, how to respond to stress, friendship with peers and belonging to place, learning and creativity.

These positive aspects are fostered through play's unpredictability, its spontaneous nature, its nonsense and irrationality as well as children's sense of control.

It is the adults' responsibility to provide children with a physical and social environment that supports play. This means avoiding the notion of play as frivolous luxury, resisting restriction through fear for and of children or abstaining from controlling and using it for more instrumental purposes.

While the above is only a snippet of the work we highly recommend reading the whole paper. We are happy to sell you a hard copy for the cost of the printing (\$5).

Alternatively, the full research document can be found here:

<http://ipaworld.org/ipa-working-paper-on-childs-right-to-play/>



'It's Just a Game': Technology Play by Children and Young

People

“Creative play is the foundation of so much of what's worthwhile about being human. It's the foundation of creativity, learning and constructive problem-solving. It's our first experience of intellectual freedom and divergent thinking. It's how children learn self control and the satisfactions of intrinsic motivation. Creative play is inherently healing and how children make meaning of their experiences.... it is listed as one of the United Nation's guaranteed rights of the child. Yet as a society we seem to be doing everything we can to prevent children from playing.”ⁱ

The term 'technology' means applying scientific knowledge for practical purposes. Humans develop scientific knowledge and create tools out of that knowledge but it is my belief that we always retain the right to decide how and whether to use any particular technological tool.

In everyday life we are the beneficiaries of uncountable ingenious inventions, from the creation of the wheel to the printing press, knitting needles, automobiles and everything in between. We are surrounded by handy technologies that we take for granted and rely upon. It is part of the human condition however that we have the capacity to think up a lot more ideas than we would necessarily want to apply. We have heart, mind, body and soul to care for. We are inter-linked with each other and the planet and have a responsibility to ourselves and to each other. So, while humans may create various technologies, we sometimes must actively choose not to use them for ethical, welfare, practical or other reasons.ⁱⁱ

This may seem obvious. Yet it is not necessarily obvious when it comes to popular 'new technologies'. We allow children of primary school age to use technologies as a type of play or entertainment.ⁱⁱⁱ By 'new technologies', I mean computer-based gaming, internet information-sourcing, social media sites, mobile phones, video

technology and even television. In the face of these technologies we seem to have lost the sense that we have an obligation to make active choices for children. Perhaps we no longer believe that we can. We seem unable to resist the inevitability of technological devices and the content that they bring. Yet in 2016 it is precisely here, when we make active choices about which technology, when and how, that we may still protect the precious gift of human freedom for our children's generation.

Technology designed for children and why they like it

According to 2014 research, primary-aged children in Australia are likely to see, be aware of or use the following types of technology: television and DVD videos, YouTube clips; 'interactive' game consoles such as PlayStations and Nintendo DS; Internet game sites for individual or group play; software programs; 'apps' for various purposes; internet-sourced information and images; mobile phones with camera and internet capacity and various social media networks with text and image-capable formats.^{iv}

Indeed, technological devices offer a plethora of opportunities for information flow, text and image connectedness to others, ever-ready entertainment and a general busyness that is irresistible for many children and adults. By their nature, children are curious. They want to know about the world; seek out stimulus and learning opportunities; enjoy story, music and interesting images. They want to play and chat with peers and they do enjoy working quietly on independent activities that are self-calming. Technological devices offer all of this and more.....So what is the problem?

The problem is that new technologies are rather insidious. They take the natural learning instincts of a child, their capacity for creative play and their drive to explore social experience, and exploit them for commercial reasons. At their best, new technologies replace actual experiences of creative play, human contact and environmental exploration with virtual experiences. It's a bit like fast food and slow food. Actual creative play offers slower, more balanced and physically healthier activities that

meet children's interests, passions, creativity, brain, body, social and emotional development needs. Though 'slower' it is a tastier and more nutritious meal.

At their worst, new technologies bombard children with a vast range of unwanted and sometimes quite sinister experiences. New technologies are largely unregulated. Without significant adults applying strict limitations and conscious choices, a child can be subject to any type of information and image via new technologies.

Current research about the impact of technology use in children

New technology is widely embraced through all realms of Australian society and has vast commercial, trade and communication importance. In popular culture, its appropriateness within educational and family settings for children is not seriously questioned. Indeed, being technologically savvy is seen as a useful life skill. So when schools such as ours advocate against primary school children's use of new technologies, we must be able to justify why. The fact is that notwithstanding popular acceptance, there is a great deal of research documenting the many difficulties these technologies pose for the healthy physical, emotional and social development of children. I will summarise some of those findings, but please do consult the footnoted references for further details.

The developing body: the lack of whole body movement and sitting in a fixed position creates the likelihood of musculoskeletal disorder as well as risks to cardiovascular health.^v Repetitive strain injury through keyboard and mouse use is also a risk.^{vi}

Sensory deprivation: Children are deprived of a rich range of necessary sensory experiences when the natural world is replaced by screen time. Louv has coined the term 'nature-deficit disorder' to describe this.^{vii}

Commercialisation of childhood^{viii}: Active and aggressive marketing to children targeted at their psychological vulnerabilities seeks to groom them as tomorrow's consumers. 'Aspirational marketing' through TV, video and internet seeks to foster a child's desire to emulate adults or teens by owning adult-like clothing or other goods which are often inappropriately sexualised.^{ix}

Exposure to sexual and stereotyped gender images: Children can be exposed to sexual content and stereotypes within games, apps and media or at any unmonitored internet moment.^x Once

Children reach the early teens, 'sexting' (the sending of body images via mobile phone) becomes a social practice among some peers. Overseas research suggests about 20% of children are exposed to this.^{xi}

Cyber-bullying and anxiety disorders:

Technology creates social contexts for children that create vulnerability to the group. Compared to their parent's generation, children now have a comfort about their own self-exposure via image and text; they increasingly scrutinise the lives of 'friends' through social media; they depend on 'likes' as peer feedback and are exposed to big groups of peer opinion via social media. Combined with the way that information can 'go viral' on the internet, this can quickly turn a minor social problem for a child into a massive negative group reaction online. Furthermore bullying can happen via online ignoring as much as by what is written or sent.^{xii} Anecdotal evidence suggests increased levels of anxiety disorder among young people related to mobile phone and social media use.^{xiii}

Exposure to violent content: TV, movies, media news, documentary and story content can all contain images and information that is unbearably violent for children. Only films and games are classified for content. Children themselves are often peer-driven and want to access what their friends do. Meanwhile they do not have the maturity or life experience to assess whether what they view is a cause for real concern to them. They are not developmentally able to understand the role of editing in what is being shown or whether it is objective. They forget it is not real life. They cannot process complex societal, political and security issues. Children tend to view all violent content as personally threatening to them or to their family and this is profoundly disturbing.^{xiv} Exposing children to this content removes the right to childhood innocence and threatens their belief in the inherent goodness of the world.

Gaming and addiction: Gambling habits are promoted through the cynically careful design of some games. Governments advise parents to assess the 'gambling ratings' of games as they can be deceiving.^{xv} Addictive behaviour is inherently fostered by devices that are always present, offer ever-new experiences and changing streams of information. Children want to find out what happens next. Addiction to mobile phone usage, social media and computer games among young people has reached disturbing proportions.

Disrupted sleep: Technological devices in the bedroom prevent adequate evening downtime and cause increasingly disturbed sleep patterns.^{xvi}

Predatory Behaviour: by unknown others for various reasons is also a serious concern.^{xvii} Children find it difficult to differentiate a 'real' friend from an unknown online friend.

Quite literally, anything can come into your home and your children's lives via new technologies. Parents have to take up the role of regulator.^{xviii}

Information to help you in the role of regulator

The Australian government classifies only games and films before they can be sold.^{xix} However some government, community and business alliances have developed 'recommendations' sites and parent guidelines for apps and social media sites as well. The sites where this information can be accessed are footnoted.^{xx} Most social media sites are legally limited to over-13s, though there is no mechanism to check this. This age was arbitrarily set and is no guarantee that material viewed there is really suitable for teenagers. Furthermore, security is always set at completely public and open, unless you as a parent set up security with your child. All of this needs careful overview by parents.

Real creative play offers vastly healthier developmental opportunities on every level. Other articles in the chronicle explain why. I will now offer some guidelines to help parents if and when new technologies do become part of your family life, perhaps as your child engages in high school. I am not advocating primary school use of new technologies.

Basic rules for a parent^{xxi}

1. Reinforce with your child that if they feel **uncomfortable about anything** at all on a technological device they should let you or a teacher (or other trusted adult) know as soon as possible. They need reassurance that you will help make the situation safe for them and they won't be 'in trouble'.^{xxii}
2. Use **good computer security** software at home and on their device to filter offensive material. Always use 'parental control' options.
3. Set up any technological device your child is using with **location switched off**. Explain to them it's important to do that so their physical location can't be tracked. Remind them that people they meet on the internet are strangers, even if they seem nice.

4. Insist that your child use any device in a shared space: **never allow technology into their bedrooms.**
5. **Limit the time your child can spend** and set an end time for technology each day so they can wind down.
6. **Follow your own values** about what is ok and what is not. Don't be swayed by what your child says their peers are doing. Be clear with your child that it is a condition of use that you will always know their passwords so you can support them properly. (Your child may come under pressure from peers. Let them be able to say: "Mum/Dad won't let me," if they need to.)
7. Spend some time to get familiar with any social media sites your child wants to use so you understand why they like them. Talk to them about it (ie age-appropriateness, alternative ways to have similar fun).
8. Be clear that you will not allow your child to use any social media unless they are old enough and you are happy with it. **Go to the privacy settings of any social media that you allow and set it to the highest privacy.**^{xxiii}
9. **Join any social media sites** at the same time your child does and 'friend' them. Tell your child it's a condition of use that you do this. Simply knowing that you can read their texts helps a child to self-monitor what's appropriate.

Basic rules for a child

1. **Always use Privacy settings** on whatever you are using
2. **Never give out private information** (that means name, address, information about what you do)
3. **Think before you post.** Re-read & check it is respectful. Never forward hurtful messages, never impersonate another person.
4. **Turn off your location** on your device.
5. **Limit your time** as it is precious.
6. Create a **strong password**.

What are the ethics of technology use for children? What will be the self-imposed limits we set as humans for ourselves and for children in order to maintain our 'humanness', our social cohesion and our psychological health?

When we are responsible for children we must make and hold to decisions to keep them developmentally healthy and safe, and as they get older to guide them to make wise choices for themselves. Technology can be a great tool in the way that a knife can be a great tool: it needs skill, adult supervision and very conscious good intention when first handled. In the case of technology, adult supervision is needed in childhood and throughout the teenage years. For whatever you allow is what your child's experience will be.

Article written by Linda Burke

*" There was a child went forth every day
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years..."*

Walt Whitman

i Susan Linn quoted in July/August 2008. 'Commercializing Childhood: The Corporate Takeover of Kids' Lives', *Multinational Monitor*, 32-38

ii Some obvious examples are nuclear weaponry, inhumane practices with animals; high-risk manufacturing processes; environmentally wasteful processes.

iii Even though children get information from technology at times, eg documentary films, this article will focus on its role as during leisure time, as a replacement for real-time, active play or interaction.

iv "The vast majority (95 per cent) of eight to 11 year olds had accessed the internet....in the last four weeks, (they) use multiple internet-enabled devices; up to three for a 10 to 11 year old Increasing numbers are using technology at school and at a friend's house, away from direct parental supervisionEven at this young age children are avid social media users.

[Forty-five per cent of eight to 11 year olds use social networking sites.](#)" O'Neale, Rosalie, February 2014. 'Kids online: The statistics' in *Helping Children Learn about cybersafety: KidsMatter enewsletter Issue 8* <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/health-and-community/enewsletter/kids-online-statistics>, accessed 3rd June 2015

v "The body of research evidence is increasing and showing that documented musculoskeletal problems found in intensive adult computer users are now occurring in children." p463 in Straker, L. et al, 22 March 2010. 'Evidence-based guidelines for the wise use of computers by children: Physical development guidelines', *Ergonomics*, Vol.53, No.4 April 2010, p458-477

vi Australian Council on Children and Media Fact Sheet: *Physical effects of Media Use*, www.childrenandmedia.org.au, accessed 20th June 2016.

vii Louv, Richard 2010 *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Atlantic uBooks, London

viii "(TV is) still the primary medium for reaching children, but it's important to remember TV and the Internet are converging.... Children as young as preschoolers are being marketed social networking sites and virtual worlds like Webkinz, Club Penguin, Nickropolis and Barbiegirl.com. These sites are incredibly commercialized..." (Linn, Susan, op.cit. p33)

ix Marketers use the phrase 'Kids are getting older younger' as "an excuse to market violence, sexualized clothing and electronic media to increasingly younger children - the term for that kind of advertising is 'aspirational marketing'. It's a cynical exploitation of the fact that younger children look up to and admire older children and want to be like them." (ibid, p34) See also Susan Linn's book, 2004. *Consuming Kids: Protecting our Kids from the Onslaught of Marketing and Advertising*. Anchor Books (Division of Random House), New York.

x "Pornography can be easily accessible via the internet, even by children and young people. Viewing pornography can adversely impact a young person's perception of sex, sexuality and relationships. A large proportion of pornographic materials depict violence, gender stereotypes and unsafe sexual practices." ThinkUKnow (no date) *Fact Sheet: Inappropriate Content-accessed* accessed on 20th June 2016.

<http://www.thinkuknow.org.au/site/inappropriate-content-accessed>
xi ThinkUKnow (no date) *Fact Sheet: Sexting* accessed on 20th June 2016. This is particularly a risk on social media sites such as Instagram where images are quickly transferred.

xii 17 per cent of 12 to 13 year olds report that they have been cyberbullied. (O'Neale, op cit.)

xiii Social media can provoke anxiety through the 'compare and despair' phenomenon and a fear of 'missing out' March 23, 2016 'Is your online addiction making you anxious?' at Anxiety.org accessed 20th June 2016. A University of Glasgow Study found that "the pressure to be available 24/7" also increased anxiety. Chang, Lulu Sep 14, 2015, "FOMO is a real thing, and its adversely affecting teens on social media" in www.digitaltrends.com/social-media/social-media-overuse-teen-anxiety/ accessed 20th June 2016.

xiv The Australian Psychological Society, (August 2000) *Fact Sheet: The Effects of Violent Media on Children* at www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/effects_of_violent_media_on_children.pdf For recommendations on helping children process media-induced fear if they have been exposed to it, read Australian Council on Children and Media (2014) Fact Sheet: *Dealing with Harms that have already occurred*, www.childrenandmedia.org.au/assets/files/resources/fact-sheets/impact-of-content/Dealing-with-harms.pdf, accessed 20th June 2016.

xv As money can't be won, children's games that simulate adult gambling via specific aural cues, images or activities are unregulated and readily available for children as young as 4 years old. They are designed to appear innocent and quite harmless for children. Government of South Australia, What to Look Out For on website *Gambling is No Game* at Nogame.com.au/what-to-look-out-for, accessed 20th June 2016

xvi Faibe, Jennifer et.al., February 2015. 'Sleep Duration, Restfulness and Screens in the Sleep Environment', *Pediatrics* Vol 135, No.2 www.pediatrics.org/

xvii Stanley, Janet June 2001, Child Abuse and the Internet *NCPC Issues* No.15 at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-abuse-and-internet>

xviii An Australian survey found that although many parents report worrying about the TV their child watches, only a small proportion report that they 'pre-watch' something before they allow their child to watch. Australian Council on Children and the Media, November 2011 *Television and Young Children: Quality, Choice and the Role of Parents*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.

xix You can search for the classification of any game or film in Australia at <http://www.classification.gov.au/Pages/Search.aspx>

xx For examples, see the Australian Council of Children and the Media at www.childrenandmedia.org.au. You can search for appropriate films on 'Know Before you go' at <http://childrenandmedia.org.au/movie-reviews/> and appropriate apps at <http://childrenandmedia.org.au/app-reviews/>. ThinkUKnow.org.au is an alliance of Australian state police and software companies. It offers factsheets about how various social media sites work; how you can set up privacy settings for social media and how you can deactivate accounts.

xxi These ideas were garnered from various NGO, health and government safety advice sources.

xxii Research into children's reasoning around technology suggests that they frequently don't report online matters to parents for fear their device will be taken or that their parents simply won't understand.

xxiii Australian Federal Police, *Social Media Reputation Management* at www.thinkuknow.org.au

xiv quoted in Louv, op cit. p v





Encouraging outdoor play:

- If you have an appropriate area, let older children build a camp fire in the backyard. Set safety rules, then stay away while they and their friends enjoy being outside at night. Check for safety by looking out the window or wandering out to ask if they need more snacks.
- Make up challenges for children to do outside while walking. This is a guaranteed kid pleaser, especially if there is a reward (a gift of time with Mum or Dad, or perhaps a night off from helping with the dishes).
- Take a few leaves from different trees while the children are not looking. Give them the leaves and ask them to find which trees they came from. Provide a tree identification book to help kids learn about the trees they see.
- Build a cubby, fort or tree house with your child, or provide them with the tools to do it themselves, with supervision. It could be temporary, or could provide years of fun and entertainment!

Outdoor Play: Just what the doctor ordered

Introduction

In May 2012, Planet Ark developed a report focusing on the benefits of interaction with nature for children's health, wellbeing and development. The report builds on a 2011 study commissioned by Planet Ark that showed a dramatic and worrying shift in childhood activity in Australia from outdoor play to indoor activity in the space of one generation.

Planet Ark's 2012 report, *Planting Trees: Just What The Doctor Ordered*, includes two elements: a review of local and international research into the intellectual, psychological, physical and mental health benefits of contact with nature for children; and the results of a new Australian study called the Nature and Children's Health Survey, which was commissioned by Planet Ark. This survey focuses on how Australians, particularly those who regularly care for children, perceive the link between nature and children's health, wellbeing and development. This article summarises the report, which is available at TreeDay.PlanetArk.org/PlantingTrees.

Benefits of contact with nature: Healthy minds, healthy bodies

There is an emerging body of local and international research linking childhood contact with nature with a range of health and wellbeing benefits, including:

- > Positive mental health outcomes, such as reduced symptoms and severity of ADHD, reduced stress levels, reduced depression, and increased confidence and self esteem
- > Physical health benefits, such as reduced risks of obesity and myopia, and improved recovery from certain medical conditions
- > Enhanced intellectual development, such as improved creativity and imagination, and improved academic performance
- > A stronger sense of concern and care for the environment in later life.

The Planet Ark Nature and Children's Health Survey showed that people do not generally associate regular contact with nature as an effective way to address these issues

Green equals serene: Contact with nature is good for mental health

Researchers have found that contact with nature helps reduce stress in children.

- > A US study found that stress levels were reduced for children with high levels of nearby nature (nature close to their homes) compared with those with little nearby nature.
- > The same US study found that children with higher levels of nearby nature had a higher sense of self-worth. High self-worth in children makes them more resilient during life's stressful times.
- > Deeper, more active contact with nature can provide children with calming and stabilising memories that they can draw on during stressful periods later in life.

Green boosts the brain: Contact with nature is good for the mind

Research has shown that contact with nature can provide a wealth of learning opportunities and improve academic achievement.

- > Nature has been shown in several studies to restore the ability to direct attention and improve the processing of information after extended periods of concentration. This is called Attention Restoration Theory.
- > A Florida-based study found that environment-based education increased critical thinking skills in high school students.
- > Learning to discriminate, categorise and name different objects is a critical part of a child's intellectual development. The rich diversity of nature provides extensive opportunities for children to acquire these abilities.

Researchers at the University of Illinois have been investigating nature-based activities and their potential to reduce the symptoms of ADHD in children. They have found that:

- > Children with ADHD and ADD concentrate, complete tasks and follow directions better after they play outside in green settings. The greener the settings, the more improvement they show.
- > Children with ADHD concentrate better after a 20-minute walk in a park than after a 20-minute walk in a well-kept urban setting.

Studies have shown that contact with nature improves creativity and imagination.

- > A study found that children in areas with trees and vegetation show more creative social play than children in more barren, hard-surfaced or built play areas.

The importance of play in promoting childhood development

According to the report published under the above title by the *American Academy of Pediatrics* 'Play is essential to the development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional wellbeing of children and youth. Play also offers an ideal opportunity for parents to engage fully with their children.(...)'

Play should not be seen as in competition with other meaningful activities but as a balancing factor in children's lives that will allow an optimal developmental milieu to prepare the children to be academically, socially and emotionally equipped to lead us into the future.

Amongst many other reasons for reduced child driven play, some of which are more specific to America, the report points out that '*the decrease in free play can also be explained by children being passively entertained through television or computer/video games. In sharp contrast to the health benefits of active, creative play and the known developmental benefits of an appropriate level of organised activities, there is ample evidence that this passive entertainment is not protective and, in fact, has some harmful effects.*'

The hurried life style of modern families is often a source of stress and anxiety for children. Some children are not given the adequate time for free play because '*parents are receiving carefully marketed messages that good parents expose their children to every opportunity to excel, buy a plethora of enrichment tools, and ensure their children participate in a wide variety of activities.*'

But it is not only the child who misses out. '*Most importantly, parents lose the opportunity for perhaps the highest quality time with their children. Some of the best interactions occur during down time – just talking, preparing meals together and working on a hobby or art project, playing sports together, or being fully immersed in child-centred play.*'

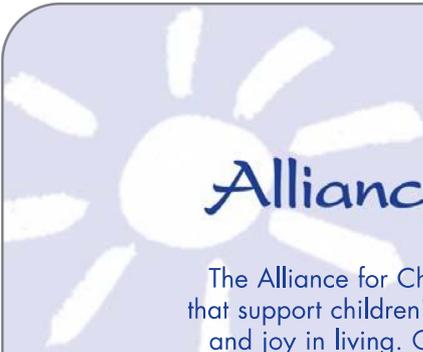
www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2006-2697



Let us dance in the sun, wearing wildflowers in our hair...

Susan Polis Schutz





Alliance for Childhood

The Alliance for Childhood promotes policies and practices that support children's healthy development, love of learning, and joy in living. Our public education campaigns bring to light both the promise and the vulnerability of childhood. We act for the sake of the children themselves and for a more just, democratic, and ecologically responsible future. For more information visit our web site: www.allianceforchildhood.org.



Photograph by Dody Riggs

Time for Play, Every Day: It's Fun — and Fundamental

There was a time when children played from morning till night.

They ran, jumped, played dress-up, and created endless stories out of their active imaginations.

Now, many scarcely play this way at all. What happened?

- Over four and a half hours per day watching TV, video game, and computer screens;¹
- Academic pressure and testing, beginning with three-year-olds;
- Overscheduled lives full of adult-organized activities;
- Loss of school recess and safe green space for outdoor play.

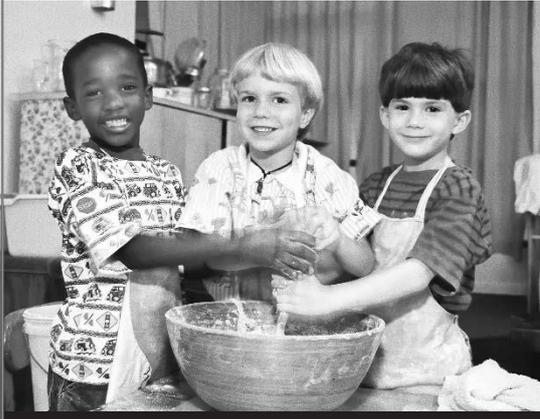
Decades of research clearly demonstrate that play—active and full of imagination—is more than just fun and games. It boosts healthy development across a broad spectrum of critical areas: intellectual, social, emotional, and physical. The benefits are so impressive that every day of childhood should be a day for play.

What's the smartest thing a young child can do with a computer or TV? Play with the box it came in! Computers tend to insist on being just computers, programmed by adults. But an empty box becomes a cave, a canoe, a cabin, a candy shop—whatever and whenever the child's magic wand of imagination decrees.

THE BENEFITS OF PLAY

Child-initiated play lays a foundation for learning and academic success. Through play, children learn to interact with others, develop language skills, recognize and solve problems, and discover their human potential. In short, play helps children make sense of and find their place in the world.

- **Physical development:** The rough and tumble of active play facilitates children's sensorimotor development. It is a natural preventive for the current epidemic of childhood obesity. Research suggests that recess also boosts schoolchildren's academic performance.²
- **Academics:** There is a close link between play and healthy cognitive growth. It lays the foundation for later academic success in reading and writing. It provides hands-on experiences with real-life materials that help children develop abstract scientific and mathematical concepts. Play is critical for the development of imagination and creative problem-solving skills.³
- **Social and emotional learning:** Research suggests that social make-believe play is related to increases in cooperation, empathy, and impulse control, reduced aggression, and better overall emotional and social health.⁴
- **Sheer joy:** The evidence is clear—healthy children of all ages love to play. Experts in child development say that plenty of time for childhood play is one of the key factors leading to happiness in adulthood.⁵



Photograph by Larry Canner

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR CHILD PLAY

- Reduce or eliminate screen time: Give your children a chance to flex their own imaginative muscles. They may be bored at first. Be prepared with simple playthings and suggestions for make-believe play to inspire their inner creativity.
- Curtail time spent in adult-organized activities: Children need time for self-initiated play. Overscheduled lives leave little time for play.
- Choose simple toys: A good toy is 10 percent toy and 90 percent child. The child's imagination is the engine of healthy play. Simple toys and natural materials, like wood, boxes, balls, dolls, sand, and clay invite children to create their own scenes—and then knock them down and start over.
- Encourage outdoor adventures: Reserve time every day for outdoor play where children can run, climb, find secret hiding places, and dream up dramas. Natural materials—sticks, mud, water, rocks—are the raw materials of play.
- Bring back the art of real work: Believe it or not, adult activity—cooking, raking, cleaning, washing the car—actually inspires children to play. Children like to help for short periods and then engage in their own play.

BECOME AN ADVOCATE FOR PLAY

- Spread the word: Share the evidence about the importance of imaginative play in preschool and kindergarten, and of recess for older children, with parents, teachers, school officials, and policymakers.
- Lobby for safe, well-maintained parks and play areas in your community. If safety is a concern, organize with other parents to monitor play areas.
- Start an annual local Play Day. For tips on how to do this in your neighborhood or town, see www.ipausa.org.

OTHER RESOURCES FOR REVIVING PLAY:

International Association for the Child's Right to Play (Play Day kits): 914-323-5327; www.ipausa.org

Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (Annual Toy Guide): 617-879-2167; www.truceteachers.org

TV Turnoff Network (Take Action page for limiting TV time): 202-333-9220; www.tvturnoff.org

Playing for Keeps (Play ideas and resources for parents and educators): 877-755-5347; www.playingforkeeps.org

All Work and No Play: How Educational Reforms are Harming Our Preschoolers, Sharna Olfman, Ph.D., ed.

Children at Play: Using Waldorf Principles to Foster Child Development by Heidi Britz-Crecelius

Earthways: Simple Environmental Activities for Young Children by Carol Petrash

Reclaiming Childhood: Letting Children Be Children in Our Achievement-Oriented Society by William Crain, Ph.D.

The House of Make Believe by Dorothy G. Singer, Ph.D. and Jerome L. Singer, Ph.D.

Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood, by Susan Linn

Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder, by Richard Louv

Footnotes

¹ Emory Woodard, "Media in the Home 2000," Annenberg Public Policy Center, U. of Penn., 2000.

² Anthony D. Pellegrini and P.K. Smith, "Physical Activity Play: The Nature and Function of a Neglected Aspect of Play," *Child Development* 69(3), June 1998; Susan J. Oliver and Edgar Klugman, "What We Know About Play," Child Care Information Exchange, Sept. 2002.

³ Doris Bergen, "The Role of Pretend Play in Children's Cognitive Development," *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 4(1), Spring 2002; Jerome L. Singer, "Cognitive and Affective Implications of Imaginative Play in Childhood," in *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: A Comprehensive Textbook*, Melvin Lewis, ed., 2002; Oliver and Klugman, op. cit.; Edgar Klugman and Sara Smilansky, *Children's Play and Learning: Perspectives and Policy Implications*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1990; Pellegrini and Smith, op. cit.

⁴ Robert J. Coplan and K.H. Rubin, "Social Play," *Play from Birth to Twelve and Beyond*, Garland Press, 1998; Klugman and Smilansky, op.cit.; Singer, op. cit.

⁵ Edward Hallowell, *The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness*, New York: Ballantine, 2002.



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