

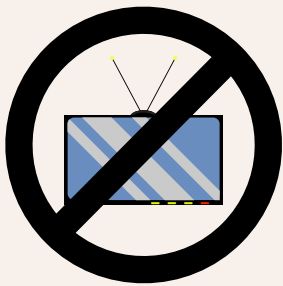
PLAYING WITH A PURPOSE

How to Build Play Skills without Screens

When I first decided to cut back on screen time, it wasn't because I read a parenting book or followed a trend. It was because I saw it with my **own eyes** — the difference in my kids when the TV was off.



After I broke my leg and leaned a little too hard on the TV to survive the storm, I eventually pulled the plug and went completely screen-free for a season. Within days, I noticed the change:



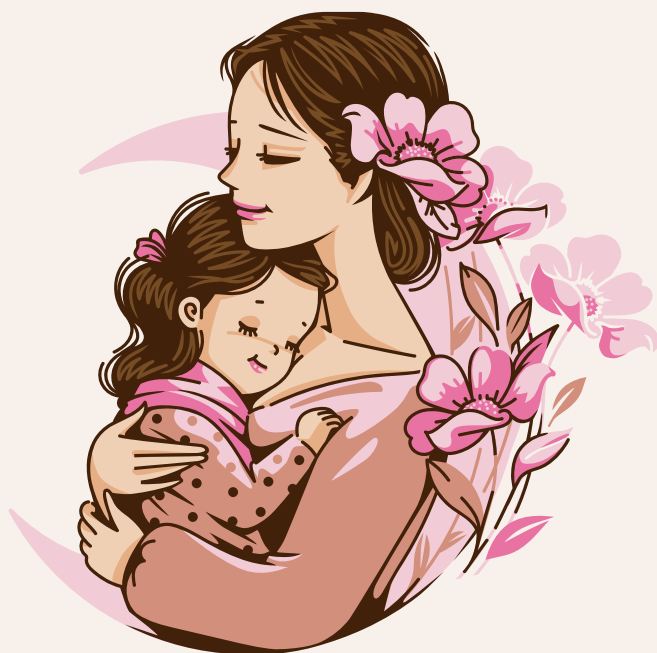
- less overstimulation
- more imagination
- fewer meltdowns,
- play that actually looked like... play. The kind that builds skills, stretches the mind, and brings real joy.

This guide isn't about guilt or perfection. It's about reclaiming what your child already knows how to do — play.

It's about giving you the *tools* to encourage **attention span**, **creativity**, **social-emotional growth**, and **motor development** — all without relying on screens to fill the time.

Here you'll find:

- A breakdown of play types (and why they matter)
- Age-appropriate play skill checklists
- A screen-free play starter kit....[click here](#)
- Realistic daily routines that actually support independent play



Whether you're starting fresh or just need a few new ideas, this guide is for moms who want more peace, more connection, and more purpose in their play.


You don't need fancy toys or a perfect home.

You just need a little intention and a lot of *grace*



Types of Play

OT Perspective

 Unoccupied Play <i>Looks like:</i> Random movements without a clear purpose 0-3 mo OT Early Body Awareness and sensory exploration	 Solitary Play <i>Looks like:</i> playing alone 0-2 yr OT Builds attention span, self-regulation, motor skills. Vital for independent play
 Onlooker Play <i>Looks like:</i> watching others play, not joining. 2 yr OT Supports social learning and observation skills	 Parallel Play <i>Looks like:</i> Playing side-by-side. 2-3 yr OT Encourages tolerance of proximity and shared space
 Associative Play <i>Looks like:</i> interacting, borrowing toys, talking 3-4 yr OT Develops communication, impulse control, collaborative problem solving	 Cooperative Play <i>Looks like:</i> working together towards a common goal 4+ yr OT Strengthens executive functioning, teamwork, social emotional regulation
 Constructive Play <i>Looks like:</i> using materials 3-6 yr OT Builds visual-motor integration, planning, sequencing	 imaginative Play <i>Looks like:</i> Pretending 5-7 yr OT Critical for language development, emotional expression, abstract think
 Rough-and-Tumble <i>Looks like:</i> running, wrestling, tag 3-7yr OT Great for proprioceptive input	 Games with Rules <i>Looks like:</i> Board games, sports, turn-taking games 5-6+ OT Frustration tolerance

PLAY SKILLS

CHECKLIST BY AGE

0-12 Months



- tracks moving objects
- explores toys with mouth and hands
- responds to peek-a-boo
- bangs, shakes & throws objects
- begins cause-and-effect play

12-24 months



- Engages in simple pretend play
- Stacks blocks or rings
- Pushes and pulls toys while walking
- explores toys with increased curiosity
- begins parallel play

2-3 years



- Imitates adult activities
- Engages in symbolic play (using blocks as a phone)
- Begins associative play
- Matches and sorts simple objects
- enjoys messy sensory play

3-4 years



- Engages in more elaborate pretend play
- Builds with blocks
- Takes turns in games with support
- Begins cooperative play with peers
- Improved hand-eye coordination

4-5 years



- Follows multi-step directions
- Creates detailed pretend scenarios
- Engages in group play with shared goals
- Begins playing board games
- Improves fine motor control in crafts, drawing, and puzzles

6+ years



- Abstract thinking
- Improved executive functioning and frustration tolerance
- Improved visual-motor and planning skills
- Able to understand social boundaries

REALISTIC ROUTINES



Morning Routine

(30-60 min before leaving)

- Wake + Snuggle (5-10 min) - Connect before Correct
- Get dressed together - offer 2 clothing choices
- Brush teeth/hair - use visual checklist/chart
- Simple breakfast - same 2-3 options on rotation
- Pack bag + shoes by door - minimize last min searches

OT Tip: Kids thrive on predictability. Use a picture chart and let them check off tasks

After-School/Late Afternoon

(4-6 PM)

Purpose: Transition from overstimulated to regulated

1. **Snack**- use this moment for connection
2. **Outside or rough play**- Bounce, swing, dig, climb
3. **Chores/help in kitchen**- Kids love jobs: Stirring, setting table
4. **Free play**- Rotate a bin of toys, join in for first 10 minutes

OT Tip: This is often “witching hour” - use physical play before dinner to prevent crashes.

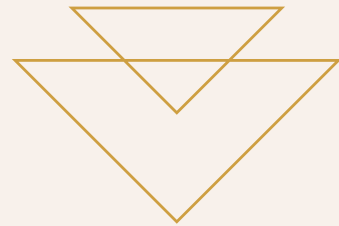
Midday Reset

(12-2 PM)



Purpose: Reduce meltdowns with a sensory and regulation break.

1. **Lunch- offer familiar** + 1 “Learning” food
2. **Movement time** - 10 in of heavy work
3. **Quiet play or book time** (Dim lights, soft music)
4. **Nap or quiet time**- same space, same cue (book, song blanket)



Evening Wind-Down

(6-8 PM)

Purpose: Signal the nervous system to shift into calm mode.

Routine Flow:

1. **Dinner** — Familiar foods + talk about “roses and thorns” of the day
2. **Bath or warm washcloth** — Tactile calming input
3. **Pajamas + story time** — Visual book rotation, 1:1 time
4. **Bedtime routine** — Same order, same lullaby, dim lighting

OT Tip: You don’t need “perfect” — you need predictable.

Thank you for being here!



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