

The IKEA® Mini Play Guide



Introduction

Let's play.

Why is it so vital for all of us?

“We're all born with a playful spirit, and all people should play. From the youngest child to the oldest grandparent, playing keeps you free.”

Qian C.

China

Play makes the world bigger for children and for us grown-ups, too, and when we do it, we contribute to a better everyday life at home. It sparks infinite possibilities. It's about much more than toys and games. It's a state of mind – of finding fun and joy in everything we do.

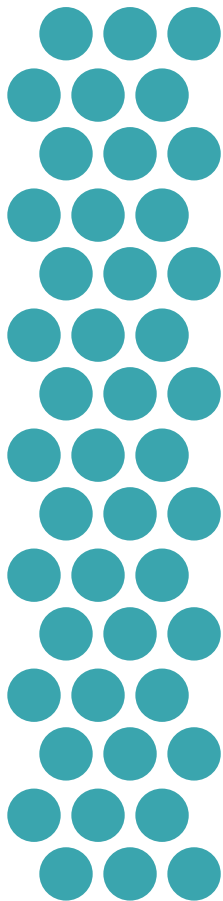
And it's vital, because it's learning for life. Almost as soon as we're born, we start to do it – it shapes who we are, and makes us stronger, more creative and more active. Through it, we also understand the importance of failure in order to develop.

At IKEA, we discovered all this and more during our research – some of the largest on the role of play – for this, our third IKEA Play Report.

We spent eight months really getting to know play – how vital it is for children; how vital it is for adults. To explore it, we went in deep, with both desk research and literature reviews and with a qualitative approach, where we talked to 352 people aged two to 90 in China, Germany and the US.

We looked at our emotional responses to play in different situations – at what inspires it, and what gets in its way. And we looked at its future. Play visits, a consumer workshop and consultations with professionals including a magician and a tea ceremony expert... We wanted our Play Report to be truly people-generated. Because play is, after all, about people: you, us, all of us.

All this told us that to create a better everyday life at home, IKEA has a responsibility to spark more playfulness in people's lives. So that's why this Mini Play Report is sitting in your hands – because we want to spark more playfulness in yours.



What is play?

'Drumroll...'

Introducing our very own definition of play!

“Play, or being playful, is engaging in a lighthearted activity that’s satisfying and spontaneous.”

But how did we get to this?

Well, by adopting an approach that explains something by taking a backwards look at it – by looking at what it’s not.*

By doing this, our online community helped us understand when an activity stops being playful. And with their help we understood that play is:

- Lighthearted (the polar opposite of serious)
- Active (so basically, not frustrating)
- Satisfying (by which we mean not passive)
- Spontaneous (as in, not obligatory)

**For you nerdy types, the theological term for this is 'via negativa'.*



Why do we play?

It sets us free, puts roses in our cheeks and pokes a pin in stress balloons. It pulls the corners of our mouths up, it acts like friendship glue and it whisks us away to other worlds. All these things and more happen naturally when we play – and they happen to everyone all around the world, whatever their age or culture.



Play feeds our emotions and does us so much good. Because it is vital for all of us – an essential rather than a luxury – we've summed up the five ways it does this as 'Play Needs'.

Here's a get-to-know-you snippet on each of them.



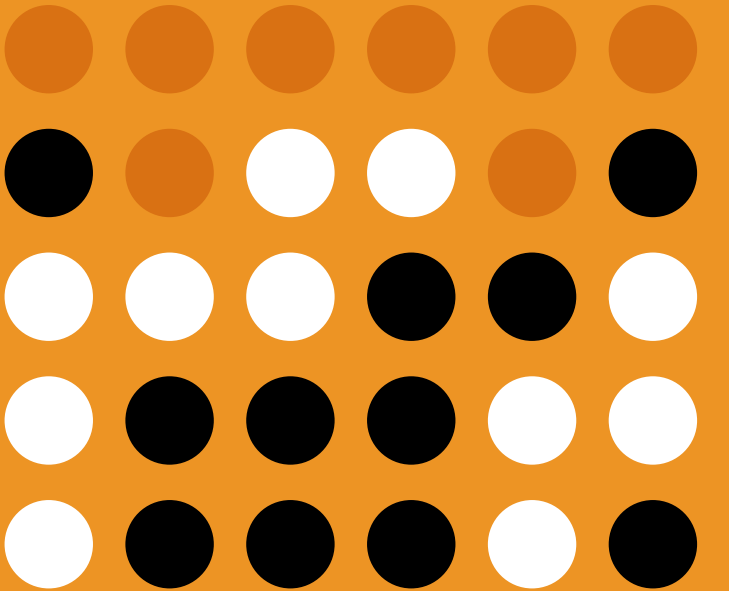


Play to recharge

Like a fast track to rest, play rebalances and repairs us physically and mentally. Familiar activities and being in nature are what recharge us.

“Playing outside, whether I’m going for a run or having a picnic in the park, helps bring me back to my more original, childlike self. Nature has the power to make people feel more centred.”

Lorena R.
Germany





Play to connect

When we play together with friends, family and loved ones, our bonds to them get stronger. Stimulating play is what connects us.

“Playing for me is interaction with human beings. Facial expressions and gestures are part of it. Having a good time together. I can remember the evenings with my card game buddies, and the emotions involved.”

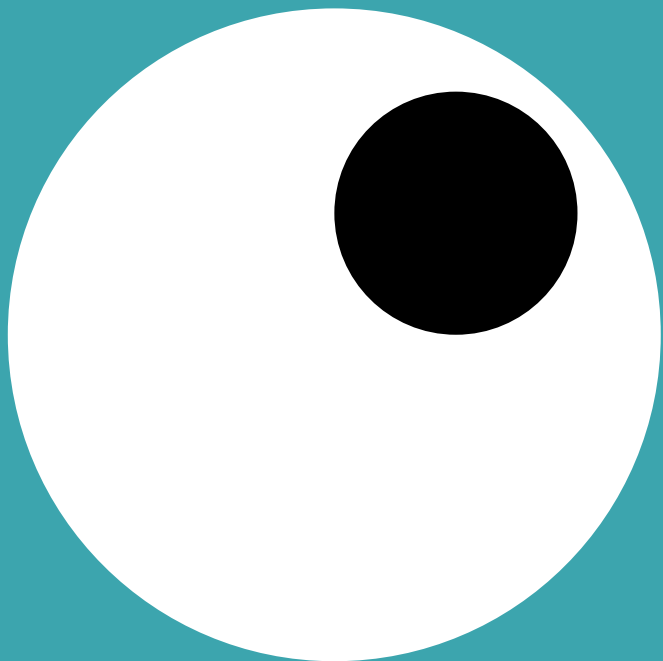
Jana P.
Germany

Play to escape

Moments of freedom that carry us blissfully away from everyday obligations, rules and routines, the transformation in and distraction of play help us to escape.

“I like to go places and do things I wouldn't typically do, and that gives me a chance to escape... I use play as a way to have fun and give myself some much needed relaxation time.”

Eve K.
USA



Play to explore

Play is a brilliant learning tool because when we do it, we develop outside the usual frames of reference. Journeys of discovery and becoming immersed are the ways we play to explore.

“Travel is my favourite playful activity. It broadens my horizons and enables me to have different experiences. I can see different sceneries, try different food, meet different people or even learn a new language. Yet somehow it’s all really playful.”

Yun Q.
China



Play to create

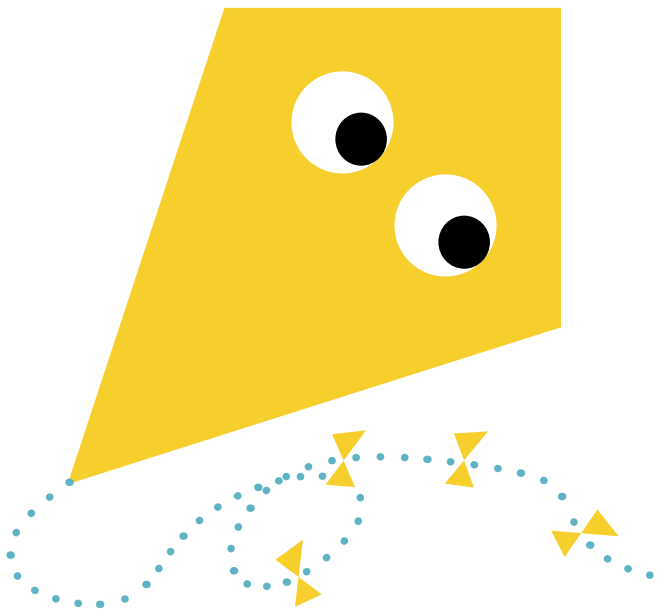
Play is a glorious imagination booster and with it, we can be different versions of ourselves. Experimenting and expression are how we play to create.

“My 27-year-old daughter likes to dress up with her friends and go to anime conventions. I also like to dress up for Halloween and make my costumes myself. It’s dressing up but it’s creative, playful and personal.”

Victoria H.
US

How to play

Everyone has known play, but as we grow up it can come less easily to us. Here is a scattering of seeds with which to grow new play ideas and opportunities.



Free-Style Play

All about: Spontaneity and lack of structure, where we become immersed in the world children naturally create as they play.

Some ideas:

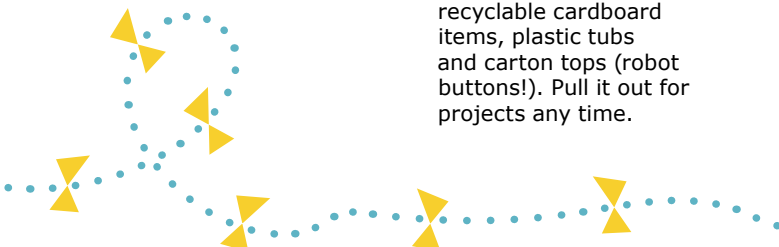
- Have a silly walks race
- Embark on fantasy role-play, letting the children assign the characters and costumes
- Kitchen band – grab pots and pans, and set them up to be ‘played’ with kitchen utensils. Remember, loud is good!
- Ignite an after-dinner disco – no song is off limits, and no move is either!

Build-It Play

All about: Creating something new together by exploring, experimenting and problem solving. Then celebrating it together.

Some ideas:

- Construct a sandcastle – but take it beyond the traditional, with moats, bridges, and gravity-defying towers
- Create a living room fort – no blankets or chairs are off limits!
- Make a fantastical construction-toy town – don’t fret about the mess
- Compile a model-making kit – buy glue, scissors, sellotape, a stapler, coloured papers, tin foil. Then collect junk – recyclable cardboard items, plastic tubs and carton tops (robot buttons!). Pull it out for projects any time.



Mirror-Me Play

All about: Inspiring imaginative, light-hearted ways for adults and kids to complete chores by turning it into a game.

Some ideas:

- Cooking and baking simple recipes where the child can lead. Try using American cups instead of weighing scales to prevent disruptive pauses
- Fill the sink with soapy water, lay towels on the floor and drop plastic items (whether food storage or toy animals) in for the child to 'wash up'
- Get the kids doing the laundry, challenging them to sort loads into white, dark and mixed colours to a timer. Then there's measuring soap and button-pressing...
- Give your child a damp cloth and a spray bottle of water. Let them loose in a bathroom and kitchen and... Clean surfaces, entertained toddler!

Muddy-Boots Play

All about: Physical activities are the best for letting go, running around and shaking off social constraints. Plus, energy is boosted, endorphins are released, high-dose happiness is delivered.

Some ideas:

- Park games like piggy-in-the-middle or a football kickabout are easy to set up, as are sports day sprints like the Three-Legged or Sack race
- Hide and Seek or Sardines never get old! And everyone can join in.
- Play Torch Tag in a dark garden with three or more kids. They must hide while you count to 20 – and then stay in the game by running to avoid your torch's beam
- Stamp and splash in muddy puddles (and not worrying about the spray!)



Out-of-the-Box Play

All about: This is creative play, but not necessarily with a defined output. Instead it's about gaining pride and joy from being expressive, through which our imaginations are tapped into and a wonderful world beyond rules and obligations opens up.

Some ideas:

- Collage with piles of magazines and coloured papers
- Freely scribble swirls and curls – don't let your pencil leave the paper – then colour the shapes between the lines
- Make decorations – for seasonal celebrations or just for the everyday
- Forest Forage – teams get a list of things to spot or collect on a walk in either city or countryside

Formal Play

All about: A little less spontaneity and a little more structure makes this focused yet enjoyable, with all players finding respite from everyday life. Children and adults play with or against each other, solving specific challenges while bonding.

Some ideas:

- Board games such as chess, Monopoly, Chinese chequers or Ludo.
- Card games like Go Fish or Snap, which are quick yet involve simple rules (and a winner!)
- Stacking games like LATTJO, the ultimate test of steady hands – and steely nerves
- Assault courses – find them in playgrounds, or create them at home or outdoors



What in our world enables play?

We've found that play is unanimously seen to be a power for good. So it's lucky that so much encourages us to do it: playful designs and décor; sharing special occasions; knowing that play is a stress reliever and that it zaps boredom. Then there's behaviour – parents whose kids trigger it in them; people feeling a need to connect; and those nostalgic for childhood. Even things that are boring or uncomfortable can inspire play, because it helps us navigate new or tricky situations, and makes chores more bearable.

There's also plenty that gets in its way: stress; work; rigid daily routines; the mindset that it's only for kids, or that it's a luxury; and, of course, modern life, which is so quick to steer us away from play, whether through the expectation of adults, our fear of making mistakes or education systems.

But knowledge is power! So just knowing about and noting these barriers makes you equipped to rebel against them.

The future of play

Play is in our past and in our present – and it's going to be more important than ever in our future. While the needs for it won't change, what our research tells us is that people believe that, over the next 10 years, where and how we play will. And, as all the good things we get from play are talked about more and more, society will respond by encouraging us to do it more and more.



Here are some of the ways:

Back to retro – we'll kick back against rapidly advancing tech and lean towards nostalgia-driven play.

Blurring of boundaries

As time becomes an increasingly precious commodity, play will creep into every part of our lives, from workplace to gym.

Multi-sensory

New dimensions in tech will only make play more exciting, immersive and consuming. Artificial environments will be designed to engage the senses.

Digital connections

More than ever, tech will allow people to find their place within like-minded play communities across the world.

Playful chores

Products and services that inject a little Mary Poppins into everyday life are well on their way. Meaning? Everyday jobs will still be everyday jobs, but they'll be fun.

Personalised play

As science doffs its cap to the importance of play, it will become more personalised. Kind of like bespoke nutrition plans – but all about prioritising fun stuff.

Crafting

Brands and organisations are busy creating play platforms, meaning more opportunities for us to go back to basics and express ourselves creatively. Oh, and the crafting trend? It's not going anywhere.

And so to conclude...

We already knew that to play is to live. But we see more than ever now, what an essential ingredient to a better everyday life at home it is – which means that at IKEA, we have to keep designing it for this wonderful, ever-changing world.

So now it's over to you. What will you play today? Where and how soon will you do it? And most importantly, who with? Do it every day, do it every way and take those you care about along with you for the ride. Because it's not a luxury it's a need, so no excuses – remember, it's vital for all of us.

Because play is vital for all of us, get ready, set and GO with one of these:

The full Play Report online:

The IKEA Foundation website, where you can read about the partners we're funding to bring play into the lives of vulnerable children:

www.ikeafoundation.org/campaigns

Children's IKEA, where all the toys, games and creative materials we've designed to bring playfulness into every day can be found:



