

Let The Fun Begin

Cast your mind back to when you were a small child. The world was all about maximising your opportunity to play, whenever, where ever. Then one day you started school and there was a little less time for play. In high school, life became even more structured with daily classes complimented by hours of homework at night, your part time job, the piano classes your mother insisted on, and of course pulling your weight with the chores around the house. By the time you were at the end of your senior school years, you were lucky to have time for spontaneous or selected play even once a week. As you grew into young adulthood, responsibility may have felt like a drag. Then, as time passed by, you undoubtedly adjusted to the responsibilities of life. And each of us may have begun that transition by associating the act of play with being a child, having little use in our busy and responsible adult lives.

We know play is vital for personal development in children. You might be surprised to know that play is also vital for personal development in adults. The importance of adult play for even the most serious grown-up cannot be underestimated.


Now, before your mind heads off down a completely different track, let's qualify what we mean by adult play. "Play" in an adult sense refers to socialising, partaking in hobbies and leisure activities and playing or competing in sports or other chosen pursuits. Play gives us the opportunity to take part in an activity that we consider fun, providing enjoyment at the same time as it utilises our mental and/or physical skills and our imagination.

Why do adults need play? Play is an opportunity to release stress, embrace enjoyment and slow your pace for a little while, to live in the moment. Play is also an opportunity to learn, sharpen skills and utilise essential parts of the brain, like your imagination. As well as being essential to mental well-being, active forms of play are also critical for physical well-being, having an impact on fitness as well as immune function.

For most adults, play will be a combination of a pursuit they enjoy coupled with a safe challenge. Naturally, the safe part is in the eye of the beholder. For some people it can be anything from scrapbooking to a game of tennis, a chess competition

or a day out with friends. For others it could be deep sea diving, touch football, bungy-jumping or jet-skiing.

A good measure of whether your activity can be classified as play is to ask yourself why you are participating. Are you going for a run because you made a New Year's resolution to get fit? Or are you running because you really enjoy it? Are you in dancing classes because your wife makes you go with her or is it for fun? If the primary reason for your run is fitness, it may not qualify as play. If your activity is something you are being told to do, by you or someone else, it is unlikely to provide the full benefits of play. Those extensive benefits of play are only experienced through the activities in which you feel you want to participate, not those in which you have to participate.

No more excuses. Make 2010 a year for more play for you. Some of us will know straight away what type of play we love to pursue. For those who aren't sure what their options are, the following exercise will help you identify the type of play you enjoy as well as identifying the opportunities to play more often. 

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Fun for me in 2010

1. Construct a list of all the activities that you consider to be play – what hobbies, sports, challenges, social activities and leisure pursuits most appeal to you?
2. From this list, highlight the play activities you would like to participate in more frequently.
3. Make it happen. What three actions will you take to bring more play to your life for 2010 and beyond?
4. Enjoy.

Action One

Action Two

Action Three