

Playtime, Downtime, and Family Time: PDF for Elementary-Aged Kids

Common-sense strategies for promoting children's health and well-being

The research is clear: children need **playtime, downtime, and family time (PDF)** every day for healthy development.

PLAYTIME

Play is so much more than simply having fun. Research suggests that play — especially when it is freely chosen, unstructured, and personally-directed — is linked to increases in children's cognitive skills, physical health, self-regulation, language abilities, social skills, and empathy.

Playtime Tips

- Protect *unstructured* playtime and allow children's play to be self-directed.
- Make sure kids have regular (tech-free) playtime with other children.
- Encourage outdoor play and imaginary play.
- Allow children to solve challenges without adult interference.

DOWNTIME

Downtime is time set aside beyond structured activities or academics to relax, daydream, read, or just be. Research suggests that kids need downtime throughout the day for their physical and emotional health. Sleep is also an essential component of downtime.

Downtime Tips

- Build in time between school and any after school activities for snack and rest.
- Make sure kids get enough sleep (9–11 hours for K-5 children). Naps count!
- Avoid media 30–60 minutes before bedtime. Screen light affects sleep.
- Help children wind down with calm activities before bed (taking a bath or reading a story together).

FAMILY TIME

Family time creates a sense of connection and belonging. Research shows that when kids are part of a family unit that spends time together, they are more likely to feel supported, safe, and loved unconditionally, as well as have increased self-esteem and better academic outcomes.

Family Time Tips

- Strive to gather the family for 20–25 minutes at least 5 times per week (family meals, outings, and game/movie nights all count).
- Unplug during meals, before bedtime, and during family activities.
- Build in time for family traditions and rituals.
- Involve kids in selecting, organizing, and doing family service projects or activities.

Challenge Success is a non-profit organization affiliated with the Stanford University Graduate School of Education. We partner with schools, families, and communities to promote a broad definition of success and to implement research-based strategies so that all kids are healthy and engaged with learning. Join our growing community:

Visit challengesuccess.org  /ChallengeSuccess  /chalsuccess