The Play Deficit

The Play Deficit is the very real decline in play in our society. Children are playing less than any previous generation. Only one out of five children in the United States lives within a half-mile of a park or playground, and the availability of places to play is far worse in low-income neighborhoods.

Signs of the Play Deficit include a general decrease in or elimination of recess time, a frequent consequence of intense focus on school testing; an increase in children’s media usage; an over-scheduling of children’s time; the existence of Play Deserts or areas where few if any places to play exist within walking distance; and a critical lack of awareness about the benefits of play.

Consequences of the Play Deficit
Play is the primary means by which children develop, and lack of play is causing them profound physical, intellectual, social, and emotional harm.

Physical Harm
Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. There is a twenty-nine percent increase of childhood obesity in neighborhoods without a park or playground. In fact, children with a park or playground within a half mile are almost five times more likely to be a healthy weight than children without playgrounds or parks nearby.

Intellectual Harm
If play is not made a priority, we will continue to see a decrease in creativity and imagination, as well as vital skills including curiosity, social skills, resiliency, and the ability to assess risk.

Social Harm
During play, children learn to work in groups, share, negotiate, resolve conflicts, and act for themselves. Children who do not play are at an increased risk for displaying problems during more formalized social interactions.

Emotional Harm
One study found that ninety percent of felons reported that “play features” had been lacking in their childhood. Schools without recess face increased incidences of classroom behavioral problems, including emotional outbursts and problems when interacting with peers and authority figures.

The KaBOOM! Vision
KaBOOM! is dedicated to eradicating the Play Deficit and to ensuring that every child in America has a great place to play within walking distance. We are doing this by building playgrounds through the participation and leadership of communities, mapping the state of play in the nation, and championing local policies and advocates who are increasing opportunities to play.
Mapping the State of Play, including Play Deserts
Visit the KaBOOM! Map of Play at kaboom.org/playspacefinder, and download the Playgrounds! iPhone app, available free on iTunes. These tools help you find, upload photos, rate, and become a fan of local playgrounds, fields, courts, and parks. The map exposes areas without adequate places to play, called Play Deserts. With your help, policymakers, advocates, and non-profits can use the map to bring play to every community.

Building and Improving Engaging Playspaces
KaBOOM! engages communities all over the country to fundraise, plan, and build playgrounds in a single day. Community-builds forge new relationships and bring communities together. Thousands of playspaces have been created with the help of resources on the KaBOOM! website, which guide you through the process of planning, funding, and building playgrounds. Create or join a project online in the KaBOOM! Project Planner at kaboom.org/projects.

Advocating for Local Policies that Increase Opportunities to Play
Take action by rallying your city to become a Playful City USA. Lead your community through the process of assessing local play needs and developing, implementing, and evaluating an agenda on play.

Recognizing Your Contribution
Join the movement to save play! KaBOOM! recognizes the achievements of playmakers all over the world by awarding badges. Badges show your support for the cause of play and identify you as a changemaker with whom other advocates might connect. If you tweet for play or build a side project in your community, we want to recognize you! Visit hello.kaboom.org/badges for instructions on how to start or add to your badge collection, and let us know how you are saving play in your community!

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