

# The Play Deficit

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

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.<sup>iv</sup> There is a twenty-nine percent increase of childhood obesity in neighborhoods without a park or playground.<sup>v</sup> 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.<sup>vi</sup>

### 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.<sup>vii viii</sup>

### 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.<sup>ix x</sup>

### 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 incidents of classroom behavioral problems, including emotional outbursts and problems when interacting with peers and authority figures.<sup>xi xii</sup>

## 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.



it starts with a  
playground.





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## Mapping the State of Play, including Play Deserts

Visit the KaBOOM! Map of Play at [kaboom.org/playspacefinder](http://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](http://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](http://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!

<sup>i</sup> "Building 'generation play': Addressing the crisis of inactivity among America's children." Stanford University, School of Medicine. (2007)

<sup>ii</sup> "State Indicator Report on Physical Activity 2010." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2010)

<sup>iii</sup> "Do All Children Have Places to Be Active? Disparities in Access to Physical Activity Environments in Racial and Ethnic Minority and Lower-Income Communities." Active Living Research. (2011)

<sup>iv</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/obesity/facts.htm>

<sup>v</sup> Singh, Gopal, Siahpush, Mohammed, and Kogan, Michael. "Neighborhood Socioeconomic Conditions, Built Environments, and Childhood Obesity." *Health Affairs* 29: 3. (2010)

<sup>vi</sup> Potwarka, Luke R., Kaczynski, Andrew T., and Flack, Andrea L. "Places to Play: Association of Park Space and Facilities with Healthy Weight Status Among Children." *Journal of Community Health*. Volume 33, Number 5. (2008)

<sup>vii</sup> Singer, D., Golinkoff, R. M., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (Eds.). *Play=Learning: How play motivates and enhances children's cognitive and social-emotional growth*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. (August 2006)

<sup>viii</sup> "Play: Essential for All Children." *A Position Paper of the Association for Childhood Education International*. Isenberg, Joan Packer and Quisenberry, Nancy (2002). In Bodrova and Leong, "The Importance of Being Playful," *Educational Leadership*, 60: 7, pp. 50-53. (April 2003)

<sup>ix</sup> Kenneth R. Ginsburg, et al. "The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds." *Pediatrics*, Vol. 119, No. 1. (January 2007)

<sup>x</sup> Burdette, Hillary L. & Whitaker, Robert C. "Resurrecting free play in young children: Looking beyond fitness and fatness to attention, affiliation, and affect." *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine*, Volume 159, Number 1, Pages 46-50. (2005)

<sup>xi</sup> Stuart Brown. "Play as an Organizing Principal: Clinical Evidence and Personal Observations." Chapter 12 in *Animal Play*, edited by Bekoff and Byers, Cambridge University Press. (1998) Also see Stuart Brown's *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination and invigorates the soul*. New York: Penguin Press. (2009)

<sup>xii</sup> Barros, Romina M., Silver, Ellen J., & Stein, Ruth E.K. "School recess and group classroom behavior." *Pediatrics*, The American Academy of Pediatrics, Volume 123, Number 2, Pages 431-436. (2009)