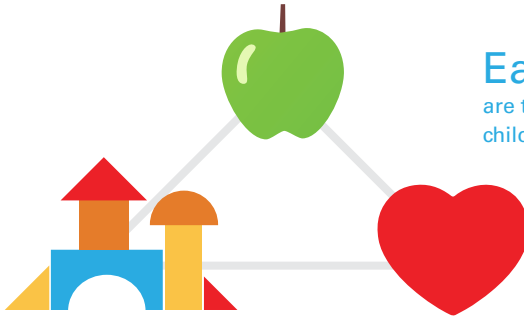


# BUILDING BRAINS BUILDING FUTURE

unicef   
for every child

A child's brain is built, not born. As such, early moments (0-8 years) matter. If they grow up in a safe and inspirational environment with love and nurturing care, they will then grow up healthy and enjoy a comprehensive development.

The first **\*1,000 days**  
of life shape a child's future.



**Eat, Play and Love**  
are the three major elements in early  
childhood development (ECD).

\*During this period, children's brains can form 1,000 neural connections every second – a once in a lifetime pace never matched again – and these connections are the building blocks of every child's future.

## UNICEF and ECD

UNICEF is committed to working for the rights and well-being of every child. Globally, it promotes ECD programmes and provides support to parents, caregivers and communities, so that every child can enjoy a good start in life. Locally, the Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF (UNICEF HK) plays an active role in advancing various advocacy and educational projects.

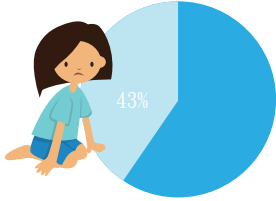
To understand more  
about UNICEF



# GLOBAL STATUS



## EAT



Nearly **250 million** (43%) children under 5 years in low & middle income countries are denied the right to adequate nutrition, stimulation and protection that comes from talk, play and responsive attention from caregivers.<sup>1</sup>

Some 155 million children under the age of 5 are stunted (too short for their age),<sup>2</sup>



**52 million** suffer from wasting; meaning their weight is too low for their height.



On the other hand, an estimated **41 million** children are now overweight.

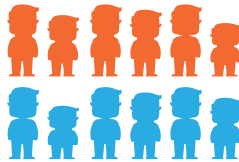


## PLAY

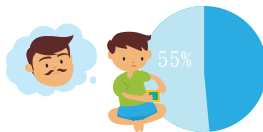
According to a study by University of Michigan, children have lost an average of 1.7 hours of free play time per day since the late 1970s.



During the same period, the number of obese children aged 2 to 11 years, has doubled.



The American Academy of Pediatrics has also found that children who have lost free play time are more prone to having depression and anxiety disorder.



More than half (55%) of the children aged between 3 and 4 years old in 74 countries – approximately 4 million – have fathers who do not play or engage in early learning activities with them.



## LOVE

Estimates suggest that **300 million** children younger than 5 have been exposed to social violence.



Violent discipline is widespread with nearly 70 % of children aged 2 to 4 were shouted, yelled or screamed at in recent months.



**75 million** of children aged under 5 years old live in areas of conflict.<sup>3</sup> Growing up in a long-term unstable environment will hinder neural connections and development in children's brains.

Sources:

1. The Lancet, 2016

2. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017

3. UNICEF Information

# FREE PLAY UNLEASHES CHILDREN'S POTENTIAL

Adults do not need to teach children how to play, whom to play with, or to set goals and rewards for games. Children are natural experts when it comes to play. Parents can stay on the side and provide support. The most important thing is to assure children that they can play safely and without worries. Only through this can children benefit from play.

## Free play is defined as...

spontaneous, child-directed activities. They are interesting, multifaceted, flexible and without preset learning goals. Ideally, it includes outdoor activities.

The following key points help children benefit from free play. Can you do it?



During free play time, I do my best not to interfere with how the kids play, and I won't blame or laugh at them.



When children are unhappy or face difficulties, I let them release their emotions and pressure through free play.



During free play time, I facilitate, encourage and support from the side to assure that the kids can play safely and without worries.



I let my kids enjoy a one-hour free play every day.



I can provide different materials and environments to enrich children's play experience. For example, household items, waste or cardboards to create games or they can play outdoors in natural environment such as sand or water.



Under feasible and safe conditions, I try to facilitate whenever children want to play. Accommodations can also be made at the dining table, where children can engage in appropriate and relatively quiet activities, such as finger puppet storytelling.



I let my kids play outdoors every day.

If all of these apply to you, you are providing a free play environment for your child.

# LOVE PROMOTES BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

An eye contact, a hug and a loving message might be simple things, but all these can make a big difference when it comes to children's brain development.

## Research suggests:

- When children at age 2 listen to their caregivers' positive communication, they will be more attentive and have a better ability to manage their emotions when they turn 6 years old.
- Violence, as well as living in an unsafe and unstable environment, will create pressure for the children. This in turn will affect their brain development as pressure can lead to the generation of nerve toxins.
- Negative memories will reside in children's subconscious minds, and cast a psychological shadow. This is detrimental to their development in the future.

The following key points enhance the quality of child-parent interactions. Can you do it?



I always let my kids express themselves and help inspire their imaginations.



I always hug my kids, or have close physical contact with them.



I always communicate with my kids with love, and encouragement, and in a friendly and positive manner.



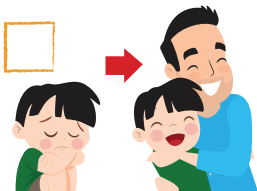
I have the ability to protect my kids from all forms of violence, unstable or neglected situations, pollution or environmental crises.



I am always attentive and responsive to my kids.



I will teach my kids in a positive manner, and refrain from scolding or shouting at them.



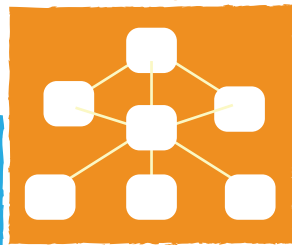
I help lessen my kids' pressure and soothen their anxiety and disturbed emotions.

If all of these apply to you, then you have an excellent child-parent interaction, by providing a safe and stable environment that is full of love and care. Please continue to work hard and give every child a good start in life.

# INNOVATIVE GAMES AT HOME

It is easy to turn household items into games for children. All you need to do is to be creative with your kids, so that their brains get stimulated while having fun playing games at home. Here are a few examples:

## 17 toothpicks



### Materials:

- 17 toothpicks
- Rubber bands or self-made dough

### Details:

- Create anything with the 17 toothpicks
- Help to develop your child's imagination

## Self-made bowling pins



### Materials:

- 10 paper cones or plastic bottles
- Use A4 papers to roll into a ball

### Details:

- Line up the 10 pins and roll the paper ball towards the pins until it hits down all the pins.
- Help to improve your child's hand-eye coordination

## Self-made lacrosse



### Materials:

- At least 5 air balloons
- 1 to 2 laundry baskets
- 1 stick

### Details:

- Use the stick to hit the balloons into the basket
- Suitable for playing in an open space
- Help to train your child's muscular movements and improve his or her hand-eye coordination.


- To ensure safety, all games at home have to be supervised by adults.
- Parents have to be aware whether the materials for the games are safe for your kids. We advise you to select age appropriate and non-processed materials.

## Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF

7th Floor, SUP Tower, 75-83 King's Road, Hong Kong

 (852) 2338 5151

 [www.unicef.org.hk](http://www.unicef.org.hk)

 (852) 2338 5521

 [edu@unicef.org.hk](mailto:edu@unicef.org.hk)

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