

## Active Lifestyles

### 5 Fun Ways To

# Enjoy Free Play With Children

Going Green:  
Simple Steps for  
N.C. Families

Child experts all agree on at least one thing. Play is very important for children. Free play (as opposed to structured sports or video games) is an important way for kids to learn and develop. Here are some ideas to help your children enjoy the real benefits of child's play.

### Turn off the television

- ▶ Too much TV leads to bodies that don't move and minds that don't think. The answer is simple. Turn it off. You can turn off your TV on certain days of the week or during certain times. For example, there is no TV on Tuesday or Thursday. Or, there is no TV from 3 to 7 PM. Once TVs - as well as DVD players, video games and computers - are off, kids can get up and get active.

### Go outside with your children

- ▶ The choices for what to do when you turn off the TV are endless. This is really true when you open the door and head outside. Give children some time every day for unstructured play. Let them interact with nature daily. It will improve their physical health. It will also enhance their emotional well-being at the same time. Learn more at [www.greenhour.org](http://www.greenhour.org).

### Save money with reused stuff

- ▶ Many families spend tons of money on fancy toys. But, young children are often just as happy with reused household items. Before you recycle or throw things away, ask yourself: *How could a child play with this?* Paper towel tubes become bowling pins. Cereal boxes and margarine tubs become blocks. A round oatmeal container becomes a drum. Old (clean) socks can become puppets.

### Let imaginations run wild

- ▶ Imagination is one of the most amazing gifts of childhood. Children need time to practice their imaginations. It helps cultivate the creativity and innovation that lead to school and work success later in life. Adults can encourage imagination with simple **what if** questions (*What if lions squeaked and mice roared?*). Try pretend play with simple props and family storytelling times.

### Teach skills during playtime

- ▶ Playtime doesn't have to be all dragons, fairy princesses and super heroes. Playtime is a great time for young children to learn basic social skills. This includes taking turns and following directions. Indoor and outdoor obstacle courses are great for large motor skills. Scavenger hunts are perfect for language skills as children follow clues. For ideas on scavenger hunts, go to [www.hud/kids/scavhunt.html](http://www.hud/kids/scavhunt.html).