
AOTA's Societal Statement on Play

Every child has the right to play (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989). Childhood play is the context for children's development and is fundamental to their growth and learning from infancy through adolescence, contributing to their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002). The right of every child to play is challenged worldwide by child labor, commercial exploitation, war, exposure to violence in homes and communities, changes in family structure, and living in poverty (American Association for the Child's Right to Play [AACRP], 2007; Ginsburg, 2007). Time and spaces for play in children's lives have been reduced by pressured lifestyles that rush children into adult roles; emphasis on academic preparation, organized activities, and sports; elimination of recess in the school day; proliferation of electronic media and passive entertainment; and inadequate and unsafe outdoor play environments due to urban growth, neighborhood violence, high levels of traffic, and lack of green spaces and access to nature (AACRP, 2007; Ginsburg, 2007; National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, 2007).

The absence of childhood play, or reduced opportunities for it, deprives children of an essential context for their optimal development and learning. The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) recognizes play as a domain of occupational therapy practice applicable to people throughout the life span (AOTA, 2002). Occupational therapy practitioners support, enhance, and defend children's right to play as individuals and as members of their families, peer groups, and communities by promoting recognition of play's crucial role in children's development, health, and well-being; establishing and restoring children's skills needed to engage in play; adapting play materials, objects, and environments to facilitate optimal play experiences; and advocating for safe, inclusive play environments that are accessible to all.

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Author

Loree A. Primeau, PhD, OTR, FAOTA

for

The Representative Assembly Coordinating Council (RACC)

Deborah Murphy-Fischer, MBA, OTR, BCP, IMT, *Chairperson*

Brent Braveman, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

Janet V. Delany, DEd, OTR/L, FAOTA

Coralie Glantz, OTR/L, BCG, FAOTA

René Padilla, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

Kathlyn L. Reed, PhD, OTR, FAOTA, MLIS

Barbara Schell, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

Susanne Smith Roley, MS, OTR/L, FAOTA

Carol H. Gwin, OT/L, *Staff Liaison*

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