

Playtime, Downtime, and Family Time: PDF for Teens

Common-sense strategies for promoting teen health and well-being

The research is clear: adolescents need **playtime, downtime, and family time (PDF)** every day for healthy development.

PLAYTIME

Play is not just for younger children. Research suggests that play — especially when it is freely chosen, unstructured, and personally-directed — is linked to increased cognitive skills, physical health, self-regulation, language abilities, social skills, and empathy.

PLAYTIME TIPS

- Help your teen avoid overscheduling so that they have unstructured time to hang out with friends in person, and pursue hobbies and interests just for fun.
- Encourage your teen to spend time outdoors (taking a walk, shooting hoops).

DOWNTIME

Downtime is time set aside beyond structured activities or academics to relax, reflect, or just be. Research suggests that kids need downtime throughout the day — and enough sleep at night — for their physical and emotional health.

DOWNTIME TIPS

- Ensure that your teen has breaks during the day. Even 30 minutes after school to listen to music, read, or play a video game can help teens to “reset” for the next part of their day.
- Make sure your teen gets enough sleep (8–10 hours a night). *Not* getting enough sleep has serious consequences for learning, health, safety, emotional regulation, and driving.
- Turn off media 30–60 minutes before bedtime, and keep screens out of bedrooms at night. Screen light affects sleep.

FAMILY TIME

Family time creates a sense of connection and belonging. Research shows that when kids are part of a family unit that spends time together, they are more likely to feel supported, safe, and loved unconditionally, as well as have increased self-esteem and better academic outcomes.

FAMILY TIME TIPS

- Strive to gather the family for 20–25 minutes at least 5 times per week (family meals, outings, and game/movie nights all count).
- Unplug during meals, before bedtime, and during family activities.
- Commit to simple family traditions and rituals.
- Involve teens in selecting, organizing, and doing family service projects or activities.

Challenge Success is a non-profit organization affiliated with the Stanford University Graduate School of Education. We partner with schools, families, and communities to embrace a broad definition of success and to implement research-based strategies that promote student well-being and engagement with learning.

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