

Develop your children's skills with free play

JENNY BOKOBZA

Play occupies a central place in childhood and is crucial to children's early learning and development. Young children enhance their cognitive, language as well as their emotional and social skills through the power of play. There are lots of different types of play opportunities for your child, and today I would like to focus on free play.

Free play is spontaneous, unstructured and child-led. In other words, children have the freedom to guide the game and make changes along the way while exploring and experiencing the world around them. Free play allows toddlers and primary school kids to nurture their curiosity and develop their imagination. That's why I invite all Suburb parents to use free play to boost their young children's creativity.

We parents sometimes forget that too much technology tends to squeeze out other forms of play. That's why it's crucial to set a limit to screen-time and to encourage your children's creativity through free play. Let their curious mind be captivated by their environment.

Surprisingly enough, an interesting environment that encourages free play is not necessarily a room full of the best toys. In fact, simpler items lead children to plan better scenarios as they allow their imagination to make up stories and games based on these few items. To encourage creativity, give your child a small collection of open-

ended fun objects such as empty cardboard boxes, old clothes, kitchen utensils, strings, wool, blocks or plastic lids. Give your child at least 20 minutes to design a game, have fun, and fully experience free play.

If it's not easy for your child to imagine how to play with these objects, you can help them by outlining a story line. For example suggest that they are a witch making a magic potion and then let your child play by themselves. As long as

they're happy and engaged do not interfere in any way, but do keep an eye on them.

It's also essential to allow children to explore the world around them in a multi-sensory way. Let them experience textures and sensations by touching, digging, playing with sand, painting with their hands and doing arts and crafts. It's not always easy to let your child get dirty, but creativity is messy! That's why using different materials will provide your child with as many experiences as possible and maximise their opportunities of creative and imaginative free play.

Unlike screen time, messy activities will build feelings of confidence and self-worth and give them a sense of their own abilities and skills. So why not turn off the screens and let your child explore the Suburb. There is no better way for children to discover the world around them than by getting outdoors. The Suburb offers a fantastic setting for your child to engage in free play. Take advantage of the Suburb's open spaces and let your child explore them; it should fulfil their natural love of discovery and allow them to engage in creative play.

Getting your family together for some fun time outside can bring a real sense of change and novelty. As the weather changes, it offers various backdrops for your child's play. Puddles, mud, snow, sunlight and shadows, can all be essential elements of their games and will vary according to the season.

My children enjoy picking up pebbles, sticks, leaves, acorns and pine cones in Big Wood. They make patterns and shapes with them to use as characters for their story. Then with branches and logs they will make a pirate ship or a den. I'm always surprised to find them inviting bugs, insects, snails and even birds to their story. The opportunities for having some real-life fun in the Suburb are endless! We're all so lucky to live in Hampstead Garden Suburb, let's make the most of it!

Jenny is a teacher and parent coach. She runs webinars, parenting courses and publishes a blog. Feel free to contact her at: jennybokobza@gmail.com.



Photos: Jenny Bokobza

HAMPSTEAD - GARDEN - SUBURB - TRUST

The Trust was established by residents in 1968 to "do all things possible in order to maintain and preserve the present character and amenities of... Hampstead Garden Suburb". The Trust acts as the estate management company for the Suburb, regulates development and maintains the Suburb's common facilities, including tennis courts, allotments and communal open spaces.

Public roads, pavements and street lighting are the responsibility of London Borough of Barnet, together with the larger public spaces.

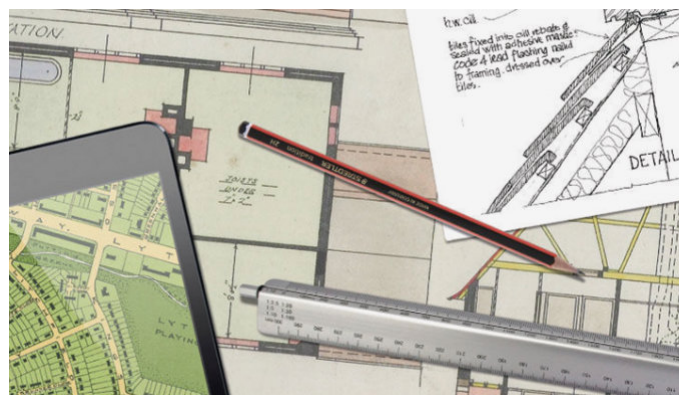
Freeholders are subject to the Scheme of Management passed by the High Court in 1974, while in the case of most leaseholders the Trust is the ground landlord.

Residents are required to obtain the consent of the Trust before altering the external appearance of their properties; leaseholders will also need consent for internal works. In addition, consent is required for significant changes to gardens, conversion of garages, and erection of garden sheds, felling or pruning of trees or removal of any hedge.

The Architectural Advisers will be pleased to advise you on any alterations you may wish to undertake and the Trust employs an arboricultural consultant, Tony George, to help residents with trees, hedges, and gardens. For a free site visit, call to make an appointment. Consent from the London Borough of Barnet is also necessary for external alterations and for any works to Listed Buildings. Around 500 properties have been Listed and many more have been locally listed.

The Trust is a registered charity. There are eight unpaid Trustees, four elected and four appointed by professional bodies. Membership is open to residents who have lived on the Suburb for three years or more. Associate Membership is available for new residents. The Trust maintains a list of builders and specialist contractors recommended by residents and welcomes additions to the list.

The Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust Design Guidance, which advises residents on any changes to their property, can be found on our website. A paper copy is also available from the Trust on request.



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Our normal working hours are 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Please refer to the website hgstrust.org for details of Trust Committees.