



What is free and active play?

Free and active play is a self-directed activity that campers carry out individually, but with the supervision of the counselor. This type of play is spontaneous, and there are no official rules. Campers draw on their imagination and curiosity to create the play, based on their individual preferences, and they can vary the intensity of the movement.

The following tricks and tips are meant to facilitate the practice of free and active play:

- ★ Play in different environments in order to stimulate the camper's imagination and creativity.
- ★ Give the campers enough time to initiate their play and to appropriate and practice it. This should not be considered a transitional activity, but free time to create.
- ★ Play outdoors! It's been shown that when campers are in a space where they have freedom of movement, they are more active and expend more energy.
- ★ **It's all about having fun** by creating an accessible environment for everyone.
- ★ Give your campers access to a bin of materials specifically intended for free and active play. You can even get the campers to help create the bin so that they feel involved in the activity.



- ★ Add free and active play time to your program so that it becomes a habit for your campers. **Pssst!** It's not always easy, at the outset, for the campers to know "what to do" without direction, but give them a chance to discover what they want to do.



How to lead free and active play periods

- ★ Establish the guidelines at the start of the activity; it is important that campers stick to the guidelines.
- ★ Help the campers develop their play activity.
- ★ In the planning stage, change the accessories you provide at the different sessions. For example, take inspiration from the weather by providing kites on a windy day or umbrellas on a rainy day.
- ★ Watch for signs and listen to the campers to spark their imagination.
- ★ **Before** starting the activity, ask the campers who seem inactive or don't seem to know what to do if you can help them initiate an action or specify a scenario for their play.

Examples of questions:

What materials would you like to use?

Will you be inventing a character?

- ★ Question the campers about their play **during** the active phase and during pauses in order to help them better understand their activity.

Examples of questions:

How are you making out with your play activity?

What have you done so far?

- ★ Ask the campers questions about their play **after** the activity in order to review it.

Examples of questions:

What was the best part about your activity?

What would you do differently next time?

Some campers may have more difficulty the first time around. Support them in order to make the play activity fun, given that some campers may be more resistant.

Pssst! You can also join the camper's play activity as a participant, but be careful not to take over. Let the camper tell you what to do.

How to distinguish play from conflict

During free play, you may observe horseplay or battle games being played by the campers.

This kind of play is normal and allows them to:

- ★ Learn to compromise and respect others.
- ★ Put their abilities to the test.

During horseplay, you will see campers laughing and smiling, as their only goal is to have fun. This is not, for example, a disagreement over an object.

Your role as counselor is to make sure the activity is safe, non-violent and inclusive. In situations involving horseplay, you must ensure that the campers are playing and not in conflict.

Here is how to distinguish between the two:

Play	vs	Conflict
Long-lasting		Short-lasting
Game of pursuit	vs	Absence of pursuit
Movement not involving force	vs	Use of force
Reversal of roles between the campers	vs	A dominant camper versus a dominated camper
Roles between the campers are balanced	vs	Imbalance between the campers' roles
Initiated for fun	vs	Initiated following a disagreement
Laughing, smiling, mimicking	vs	Yelling, insulting, crying
Unifying	vs	Socially disruptive

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