

## Re-creation: The Power of Play

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We all do it... birds and animals do it, they even say that tiny ants do it!

Our eyes shine, cheeks flush, skin warms, smiles appear. Children are the masters of this activity and partake many times a day. Thank goodness! Play is not wasted time. Play is important to the development of youngsters and to the continued well-being of teens and adults. Friendships form and are maintained, muscles strengthen, agility, dexterity and flexibility develop. Creativity is enhanced. There are so many benefits to play. And there are so many ways to play, whether through sports and games, a round of cards, jacks, a favorite board game, or a creative session of imaginative play indoors or outside. Just as play is important for us, so it is for animals.



Anyone with a dog or cat will be aware of their want and need to play. Often our pets even invite us to play with them! A play bow starts off dog play and they keep to rules of play. Can you name the four rules? Watch this 4-minute [BBC Earth video](#) on Facebook to see play bows in action and learn the rules. Want to learn more? Read *Canine Confidential* by Marc Bekoff.

But do wild animals really play? Yes, and biologists note that it must be important because playtime takes away from time that they could be spending looking for food, sleeping, or watching out for predators. Play can also lead to accidents and injuries. (Who of us has never skinned a knee or twisted an ankle during an active game?) Given these risks, play must be very important to all animals. They, like us, reap the benefits of play. Recreation is the way we re-create or renew ourselves to

be ready for all that life sends our way.

### Interesting Facts

- Play, once thought of by many as rather unnecessary for animals, is now a respected area of study.
- Sometimes animals of different species will play with each other.

### Activities for Children & the Young at Heart

1. Make a list of your favorite five games. Fold in half to keep list secret. Have others in your household make a list of their favorites too, then play charades. Takes turns selecting a game from your lists and acting it out for others to guess. Do you share favorite games with others? If so, were they acted out the same way?
2. Make up our own game and teach it to at least one other person.
3. Can you find examples of different species playing together? (Hint: do you have a pet?) How many different examples can you find? Do you find any examples of play between animals that would normally have a predator-prey relationship? How do they know their play will be safe?

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